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Restructuring the Assessment System for the Course “Practical Administrative Law and Administrative Litigation Law” Based on the OBE Approach

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Abstract

Currently, assessment for the course “Practical Administrative Law and Administrative Litigation Law” primarily consists of a closed-book final exam, which emphasizes memorization of legal provisions and struggles to measure students’ practical analytical abilities in real-world scenarios. Formative assessments often become mere formalities, lacking diagnostic and improvement functions. The root cause is that the assessment system lacks systematic, outcomes-based design. This paper introduces the concept of OBE (Outcomes-Based Education) and reconstructs the course’s assessment and evaluation system based on the principles governing the development of practical administrative legal skills. Building upon an explanation of the core principles of OBE—student-centeredness, learning outcomes, and continuous improvement—this paper proposes that the evaluation logic must shift from “teaching what is tested” to “what outcomes should be achieved—what evidence is required—what tasks should be designed.” The function of evaluation should transition from mere grading and classification to diagnosis and promotion, and evaluation methods should move from single-exam assessments to diverse forms of evidence. Accordingly, a four-dimensional framework is constructed, comprising “outcome decomposition—task vehicles—multiple evaluators—feedback loop”: expected learning outcomes are broken down into measurable indicators such as knowledge application, practical operations, critical thinking development, and professional literacy; diverse task vehicles covering the entire learning process—including regular assessments, interim outcomes, and summative assessments (such as open-case analysis)—are designed; a multi-stakeholder evaluation system is introduced, led by faculty assessment and supplemented by student self- and peer-assessment; and a closed-loop system of immediate feedback and instructional improvement is established for both students and faculty. The paper also proposes implementation safeguards regarding faculty assessment literacy, the

integrated design of teaching and assessment, and a differentiated, phased implementation approach. This framework aims to transform assessment from a “terminator” of learning into a “booster” for competency development, driving a fundamental transformation in the assessment logic of legal education.

Keywords

OBE (Outcomes-Based Education), Course assessment system, Diverse assessment methods

1. Introduction

With the deepening of national rule of law construction, society has an increasingly urgent demand for applied and interdisciplinary legal talents. Practical Administrative Law and Administrative Litigation Law is an important course for law-related majors, which should cultivate students' thinking on administrative rule of law and improve their practical ability in administrative rule of law. However, the long-standing assessment and evaluation system of this course has not really fulfilled this task. The dominant closed-book final examination mainly tests the memorization of legal provisions and repetition of concepts, and it is difficult to reflect whether students can identify administrative law issues in real situations, analyze them with standardized methods, and draw reasonable conclusions. The phenomenon that students get high scores but lack practical ability is common and worrying in teaching.

In recent years, some colleges and universities have carried out diversified reforms of the course assessment. Some have adopted the “divided classroom” and tried “diversified assessment, formative assessment, and practical assessment”; others have adopted a dual mode of “student peer assessment + teacher comment” based on prominent problems in basic theory, law enforcement, and remedies of administrative law. These practices have achieved effects in enriching assessment forms, but most reforms only add several process-based links to the original assessment framework and fail to fundamentally change the inherent logical defects of the assessment system.

A careful look at the assessment and evaluation of this course reveals at least the following deep-seated problems:

- (1) There is no clear correspondence between assessment objectives and learning outcomes. Courses usually set multi-dimensional goals of knowledge, ability, and literacy, but the final examination can only measure the level of knowledge memorization at most, and there is no effective way to measure the achievement of practical analysis ability and legal professional literacy.
- (2) Formative assessment often becomes “having process but no evaluation”. Records such as class attendance and assignment submission can show what students have done, but cannot reflect how well they have done, lacking real judgment on students' thinking quality and ability growth.
- (3) Assessment results fail to promote teaching improvement. After scores are given, teachers and students rarely analyze these data systematically, so it is impossible to diagnose learning weaknesses and adjust teaching methods accordingly. The evaluation function and improvement function of

assessment are disconnected.

The root of the above problems lies in the lack of a systematic concept of “begin with the end in mind” in the design of the assessment system. Assessment must first answer a fundamental question, not “what to test” or “how to test”, but “what practical abilities should students have after taking this course”—which is exactly what the OBE approach has been asking. OBE emphasizes that curriculum design should start from expected learning outcomes, reversely design teaching activities and assessment methods, and make all teaching links serve students to achieve those outcomes. Applying this idea to the assessment reconstruction of Practical Administrative Law and Administrative Litigation Law means that assessment should not only be a finishing work at the end of teaching, but a driving and feedback mechanism running through the whole teaching process. Based on the OBE approach as the theoretical framework, this paper will systematically reform the assessment and evaluation system of this course starting from the principles governing the development of practical administrative legal skills.

2. The Core Essence of the OBE Approach and Its Implications for Reforming the Curriculum Assessment System

2.1 The Core Essence of the OBE Approach

OBE, also known as Outcomes-Based Education, is based on a simple logic: curriculum design and implementation should focus on the learning outcomes that students achieve after completing the educational process. This concept has the following key features:

(1) Student-centeredness. Traditional teaching revolves around teachers’ knowledge impartation, focusing on “what has been taught”; OBE shifts the focus to “what students have learned and what they can do”. In this way, the focus of curriculum design and evaluation must be shifted from teachers’ teaching input to students’ learning output.

(2) Outcome orientation. OBE requires reverse curriculum design: first clarify the ability standards that students should reach after completing the course, and then reversely deduce how to organize teaching content, arrange teaching activities, and design assessment. These outcomes must be clear, specific, and measurable. Instead of vague statements such as “understand the principles of administrative law”, they should be specific to the level of “being able to conduct procedural legality review of law enforcement acts in accordance with the Administrative Penalty Law”.

(3) Continuous improvement. OBE regards teaching as a continuously optimized closed loop. It observes the achievement degree of learning outcomes through evaluation data feedback, finds weak links in teaching, and then makes targeted improvements, forming an upward cycle of “evaluation—feedback—improvement—re-evaluation”.

2.2 Requirements for Reforming the Course Assessment and Evaluation System Under the OBE Approach

Implementing the OBE approach into curriculum assessment and evaluation will bring changes in at

least the following aspects:

(1) The evaluation logic must be fundamentally adjusted. The logic of traditional assessment is “what is taught → what to test”, with teaching content guiding examination content; the logic of OBE is “what outcomes should be achieved—what evidence is needed to prove the achievement of outcomes—what assessment tasks are designed to collect this evidence”. In this way, evaluation changes from a spot check of “knowledge possession” to a comprehensive judgment of “ability achievement degree”.

(2) The evaluation function must be repositioned. Traditional assessment is mainly for screening and grading, ranking students with scores; from the perspective of OBE, assessment should first play the role of diagnosis and promotion, that is, let both teachers and students clearly see how far students are from the expected outcomes, where the bottlenecks are, and where to work hard next. Summative evaluation is still necessary, but its status should not be higher than formative assessment, and the two should cooperate to serve ability diagnosis.

(3) The evaluation method also needs to be diversified. The OBE approach requires moving from “one pen and one paper” to “multiple kinds of evidence”, including case analysis reports, mock court performances, legal document writing, legal research results, learning reflection logs, etc. Different evaluation carriers can measure different abilities, and the comprehensiveness of evaluation depends on the diversity of carriers carrying evidence.

3. A Four-Dimensional Framework for Reconstructing the Course Assessment System

Based on the OBE approach, this paper intends to build a four-in-one assessment and evaluation framework for Practical Administrative Law and Administrative Litigation Law. The basic idea is: take expected learning outcomes as the starting point, reversely decompose evaluation indicators; use various task carriers as means to collect students’ full learning performance; let multiple subjects participate in evaluation together to improve validity; ensure continuous improvement through immediate feedback and data analysis.

3.1 Decomposition of Outcomes: From Vague Goals to Measurable Indicators

The first step of reconstruction is to decompose the expected learning outcomes at the curriculum level into specific and measurable indicators. This is the starting point of the entire assessment system design logic and also the most difficult part—if the outcomes themselves are unclear, subsequent evaluation and teaching will deviate.

The expected learning outcomes of this course can be positioned from the following dimensions:

(1) Knowledge application dimension. Students should be able to accurately identify the administrative law issues involved in real administrative law enforcement cases (such as administrative penalty, administrative license, administrative compulsion, administrative agreement, administrative reconsideration or litigation), find relevant legal provisions, and explain how the norms are applied. This dimension focuses on examining students’ transformation ability from “finding legal provisions” to “applying legal provisions”.

(2) Practical operation dimension. Students should be able to complete typical administrative legal practical work, such as drafting administrative penalty decisions, writing administrative reconsideration applications, administrative litigation complaints, etc. This dimension directly corresponds to the core requirements of employers such as courts, procuratorates, and law enforcement agencies for law students.

(3) Thinking cultivation dimension. Students should learn to analyze administrative law cases with the framework of legality review of administrative acts, review administrative acts step by step from five links: subject authority, fact finding, legal application, statutory procedures, and legality of the decision outcome, and form logical arguments based on norms. The evaluation focus of this dimension is not on the right or wrong of the conclusion, but on the clarity and standardization of the argumentation path.

(4) Professional literacy dimension. Students should show respect for procedural justice, sensitivity to the protection of the rights of administrative counterparts, and conscious recognition of the principle of administration by law in the learning process. Although this dimension seems “virtual”, it can be objectively reflected in the value orientation in case discussions and behavior choices in simulated situations.

The weight distribution of these dimensions should be determined according to the positioning of the course in the professional training program. For higher vocational colleges aiming at cultivating applied talents, the weights of practical operation and thinking cultivation should be higher than knowledge application; the professional literacy dimension can be integrated into other dimensions for evaluation without setting a separate assessment item.

3.2 Assessment Formats: From Single-Paper Exams to Diverse Formats

After determining the evaluation indicators, the key question is: what assessment tasks should be designed to collect students' learning performance? Assessment under the OBE approach is particularly task-oriented, that is, every evaluation conclusion must be supported by sufficient and matching learning task records. This requires that assessment tasks should no longer focus on the sole form of a final examination, but be matched with a diversified task system covering the whole cycle of the course:

(1) Regular learning tasks. Mainly collect students' performance in pre-class preparation and class participation. Specific forms can include: pre-class case reading notes and preliminary analysis (observing students' thinking starting point before teaching intervention), speech quality in class case discussions (recorded from two dimensions of argumentation logic and normative accuracy), and role contribution in group collaboration (collected through intra-group peer assessment). Records of regular learning tasks should be “retraceable”. Teachers had better keep representative samples of learning achievements at key time points, so as to support the process judgment of students' ability growth.

(2) Phased achievement tasks. Set phased assessment tasks at several key teaching nodes to match the advanced development of course ability training. For example, at the end of the administrative legislation module, ask students to write a legality review opinion on administrative normative

documents; at the end of the administrative penalty module, ask students to submit a complete administrative penalty file review report; at the end of the administrative remedy module, ask students to write a plaintiff's complaint and a defendant's reply for a specific case respectively. The design of these phased tasks should follow the principle of "ability progression": early tasks can only examine the application of a single knowledge point, while middle and later tasks require students to integrate several knowledge modules for comprehensive analysis and practical handling.

(3) Summative achievement tasks. The final examination can be retained, but the form should be changed from a closed-book examination dominated by multiple choice and short answer questions to an open assessment dominated by case analysis. The examination paper can center on a comprehensive administrative law case, set several progressive questions, and examine links such as administrative act type identification, review standard determination, legality itemized analysis, conclusion and basis elaboration. No unique standard answer is set for scoring, but grades are given according to the quality of argumentation. The function of summative achievement tasks is not to provide another learning opportunity, but to verify whether students have really achieved the core expected outcomes of the course, so its design must have a clear corresponding relationship with course outcome indicators.

3.3 Multiple Evaluators: From Sole Faculty Evaluation to Collaborative Assessment

Curriculum assessment and evaluation under the OBE approach should introduce multiple evaluation subjects, move beyond teacher-dominated assessment, collect evidence from multiple angles, and cross-check the achievement degree of learning outcomes.

Teacher evaluation still plays a leading role among multiple subjects, but the role changes from "sole referee" to "chief evaluator". Teachers' evaluation responsibilities include: formulating specific standards and scoring rules for various evaluation tasks, giving professional judgments on students' written tasks and classroom performance, providing personalized diagnosis and guidance for students in the evaluation process, coordinating and balancing the weights of each evaluation subject, and calibrating the consistency of evaluation results.

Student self-assessment allows students to regularly review their learning status and ability achievement according to the standards given by teachers. For example, after completing phased case analysis tasks, students judge whether they have achieved "complete evidence chain", "sufficient normative basis", and "clear logical reasoning" against the evaluation dimensions of argumentation quality, and then talk about their strengths and weaknesses. The value of self-assessment does not lie in the scores given by students, but in forcing them to form the ability to reflect on and monitor their own learning process—this "metacognitive" ability is an important part of legal professional literacy.

Student peer assessment plays a unique role in group collaboration and classroom discussion. For example, when organizing a mock administrative reconsideration hearing, students in the observation group can conduct structured evaluation on the participating groups from the aspects of procedural standardization, fact induction accuracy, legal application appropriateness, etc., according to the evaluation scale provided by teachers. Peer assessment not only allows students to look at problems

from another angle, but also broadens the information sources of evaluation, enabling teachers to obtain information that is not easy to fully observe by individuals in class. However, peer assessment results must be reviewed and calibrated by teachers before use, otherwise deviations are easy to occur due to personal feelings or insufficient evaluation ability.

3.4 The Feedback Loop: From Assessment to Continuous Improvement

The OBE approach regards evaluation as the starting point rather than the end of improvement, and especially emphasizes the establishment of a complete “evaluation—feedback—improvement” closed loop. This closed loop can be carried out from the following levels:

(1) Feedback to students. Feedback should be timely and instructive. When teachers grade students’ usual case analysis assignments and phased achievements, they should give specific and operable feedback opinions instead of just giving a score or grade. The focus of feedback is to tell students “what’s wrong with your argumentation” and “how to improve it”. For example, if a student omits the procedural review part in an administrative penalty legality review report, the teacher should not only comment “incomplete”, but say: “You have analyzed the legality of the penalty decision from the perspective of substantive elements, but the legality review of administrative acts also needs to check whether the procedures comply with statutory requirements. Please refer to the provisions on penalty procedures in the Administrative Penalty Law and supplement the procedural review part.”

(2) Feedback to teachers. Assessment data not only reflect students’ learning status, but also reflect the effectiveness of teaching. By systematically analyzing the class assessment results, teachers can find out the weak links in teaching: which knowledge module has a low overall achievement degree? In which ability dimension do students have the most concentrated shortcomings? Does the distribution of assessment data match the expected ability progression logic? For example, if most students are obviously weaker in administrative procedure review than in substantive element analysis, it reminds teachers that they may need to increase the teaching depth and case training intensity of procedural law knowledge in the teaching process and make adjustments in the next round of teaching. This kind of teaching reflection and improvement based on evaluation data is the implementation of the OBE continuous improvement mechanism at the curriculum level.

4. Ensuring the Implementation of the Assessment System

A complete set of assessment and evaluation plans is far from enough, and several implementation guarantees are needed to implement it.

4.1 Enhancing Faculty Assessment Competence

Diversified assessment and evaluation puts forward requirements for teachers’ evaluation literacy. Teachers should not only have professional judgment in administrative law, but also know how to design performance assessment, compile evaluation scales, and analyze and feedback evaluation results. In reality, most law teachers lack systematic training in educational evaluation, which is a major bottleneck for the advancement of evaluation reform. It is suggested that departments take curriculum

assessment and evaluation design as a regular topic of teaching and research activities, often organize discussions on assessment plans, and invite experts in the field of educational evaluation to carry out special training if conditions permit, helping teachers gradually establish the awareness and ability of “evaluation designers”.

4.2 Deep Integration with Instructional Design

The reconstruction of the assessment and evaluation system cannot be separated from the design of teaching activities. Evaluation tasks should be embedded in the teaching process instead of becoming additional items outside teaching. For example, classroom case discussion is both a teaching activity and an observation point for formative assessment; phased legal document writing is both ability training and evidence collection of students’ learning achievements. This requires teachers to plan assessment tasks together at the teaching design stage, unify the three links of teaching, learning, and assessment, so that students naturally generate materials needed for evaluation in the process of completing learning tasks, avoiding extra burden on students for assessment.

4.3 Differentiated Implementation and Gradual Progression

There are great differences in course positioning, students’ foundation, and teaching resources among different types of colleges and universities. Therefore, the reconstruction of the assessment and evaluation system should be carried out according to local conditions and not be “one-size-fits-all”. In higher vocational colleges focusing on applied ability training, the assessment weight of the practical operation dimension can be appropriately increased, and the knowledge application dimension can be more integrated into practical tasks for evaluation, without the need to set up a separate knowledge examination. In addition, the reform had better be carried out step by step. Teachers can first conduct a pilot in one teaching module, and then promote it to the whole course after accumulating enough experience; or start with adjusting one assessment method (such as changing the final closed-book examination to open-book case analysis), and gradually introduce more complex multiple evaluation mechanisms after teachers and students adapt.

5. Conclusion

The key to reconstructing the assessment and evaluation system of Practical Administrative Law and Administrative Litigation Law is not how many process-based links are added, but to reverse the entire evaluation logic: from “separation of assessment and teaching” centered on knowledge testing to “integration of evaluation and teaching” focusing on outcome achievement. The OBE approach points out a clear path for this transformation: take the practical ability of administrative rule of law that students should have after completing the course as the logical starting point, reversely design evaluation indicators, collect learning performance through diversified task carriers, introduce multiple evaluation subjects to expand information sources, and ensure continuous improvement of the teaching process through immediate feedback and data analysis.

This paper attempts to build a four-in-one evaluation model of “outcome decomposition—task

carriers—multiple subjects—feedback closed loop”, aiming to provide a systematic thinking framework and operable plan for the assessment reform of this course. The focus of this framework is not the innovation of a specific assessment form, but to truly position assessment and evaluation as a “booster” for students’ ability growth rather than a “terminator”—evaluation is not to draw a full stop for students’ learning, but to point out the direction and motivation for the sustainable development of ability.

Of course, there are still many problems to be further explored in the in-depth promotion of the OBE approach in the assessment and evaluation of law courses: how to ensure the consistency of formative assessment standards under different teaching conditions? How can teachers efficiently complete personalized evaluation and feedback for each student when the class size is large? How to effectively connect curriculum-level evaluation data with professional-level graduation requirement achievement evaluation? How to use information technology to reduce teachers’ evaluation burden and make formative assessment normalized in daily teaching? The solution to these problems depends on the continuous exploration and adjustment of front-line teachers in the reform practice on the one hand, and the stronger guarantee of legal education researchers and teaching management departments in system design and technical support on the other hand.

The reconstruction of the assessment and evaluation system of law courses cannot be completed in one step, but every conscious adjustment of evaluation logic and structural optimization is a solid step towards the fundamental goal of “cultivating talents who can really use law to solve practical problems”.

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