

Editorial

ON-LINE ASSIGNMENTS AND TESTS ARE COMING

INCREASINGLY student assignments and tests are available on the Internet. One example is the quiz which is part of WebAssign, a program originating from North Carolina State University for use in introductory mathematics and science courses. In addition to automatic feedback to students, the software records every submission, helping professors with detailed analyses of students' performance (<http://www.webassign.net/info/>).

These types of tests could contribute to a revolution in teaching science and engineering courses especially in the junior years. The software, can alert professors and students to gaps in the students' comprehension and learning styles. Students have the facility to test themselves at home and get instant answers and grading. It is a facility already used on CD-ROMs, but now the professors can get an overall view of the progress in class by checking on the submitted on line materials. For professors, the program functions like a gradebook that fills itself in, analysing how individual students and entire classes are handling assignments. Instructors use passwords to tap into WebAssign's logs and call-up charts showing which students are having trouble and which material needs to be better explained in class.

Such computerised grading and feedback systems, which have been common in medical studies for some years, are now becoming an integral part of on-line teaching in science and engineering, whether as part of traditional courses or in distance and open learning. Automatic assessment programs now come with courseware design software like Blackboard, TopClass, or WebCT, and with distance-education systems. Many instructors are now developing customised tests for their special courses which will ease the burden of marking and checking student progress. It is a further step in the revolution now occurring in learning and teaching.

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