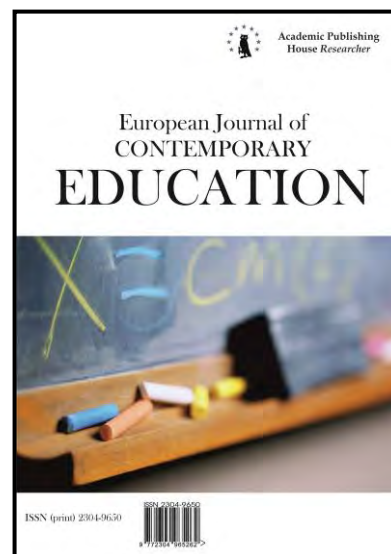




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The Use of Practice-Based Assessments in Preparing Humanities and Social Sciences Specialists: The Case of Sumy State University (Ukraine)

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Abstract

This paper explores the potential for using practice-based assessments in higher education in preparing humanities and social sciences specialists. The authors tested a set of innovative methodologies for practice-based summative assessment of the progress made in learning certain disciplines by students majoring in Law, International Law, and History and Archaeology at Sumy State University (Ukraine). To assess the effectiveness of practice-based assessments, the authors **employed anonymous surveying, tested students' level of mastery of key theoretical concepts, and carried out a comparative analysis of the performance of students who took part in practice-based assessments and those who took exams in a traditional way.** The conducted pedagogical experiment indicates the advisability of employing practice-based assessments as part of teaching humanities and social sciences disciplines. It revealed a significant increase in the level of preparation of students on subjects summative assessment around which was based on practical assignments. Having students train their practical skills can help them assimilate theoretical knowledge better and for a longer time and become more confident in their preparedness for their future profession. Practice-based assessments can also serve as a yardstick for gauging the **effectiveness of instructors' teaching methods and stimulate the quest for new ways of teaching and learning that can help meet the needs of the labor market and the interests of students pursuing a higher education as much as possible.**

Keywords: learning through practice, learning by doing, work-based learning, practice-based assessment, case study, source study, debate, higher education, social science, arts and humanities, practical skills

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1. Introduction

Practice-based learning is one of the most popular trends in higher education in recent years. Researchers have identified “learning through practice” (Reese, 2011; Robinson, 2017; Strudwick, 2019) and “learning from practice” (Wortham et al., 2016; Brownell, 1948; Harvey, 2003; Little, 2000) as key areas for development in terms of preparing future specialists in both the technical and natural sciences and humanities and social sciences domains.

Researchers have been joined in advocating the use of a practice-based approach to learning by developers of regulatory documents and strategies for reforming the education system. For instance, Ukraine’s law On Higher Education defines higher education as “a collection of systematized knowledge, *abilities and practical skills* [italicized by the authors], ways of thinking, professional, worldview, and civil qualities, moral and ethical values, and other competences acquired at an institution of higher learning (an academic institution) in a particular field of knowledge and in pursuit of a particular qualification at a level that surpasses the complete general secondary education level” (Law on Higher Education, 2014).

This approach fully aligns with the 2018 Paris Communiqué of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which encourages educational institutions “to provide interdisciplinary programmes as well as to combine academic and work-based learning” (Paris Communiqué, 2018). Note that Article 51 of the above-mentioned Ukrainian law provides the basic principles for the conduct of practical training, which, it says, must be conducted “at a company or organization based on an agreement entered into by a higher education institution” (Law on Higher Education, 2014).

Similar provisions are also found in the legislation of many other countries. For instance, Paragraph 3 of Article 39 of Lithuania’s law On Higher Education and Research states that “the unity of higher education and research at colleges must be ensured through close contact with practice” (Law on Higher Education and Research, 2009). Elsewhere, Article 62 of Poland’s law on Higher Education and Science empowers institutions of higher learning to “implement dual degree programmes which are practical programmes conducted with the participation of the employer” (Ustawa, 2018). Article 38 of Kazakhstan’s law On Education states that “vocational practical training for students must be an integral part of higher education curricula” (On Education, 2007). These provisions stand as testimony to the reflection in educational policy in different countries of the significant role played by practical skills in the development of the essential competencies of future employees and their ability to perform competently the tasks associated with the occupation.

As noted by various researchers, requirements associated with learning through practice have long been in place in certain professional spheres. Graduates will be permitted to work in certain occupations only after completing lengthy practical training – and, normally, doing so in an actual work setting (e.g., hospitals, accounting firms, etc.). Preparatory practical training, which normally is conducted under the guidance of qualified professionals, provides the student with an opportunity to try out their competencies in the actual work environment. There is a growing contemporary interest in using practice-based learning in more extensive contexts (Billett, 2010). Whereas in the past practice-based learning was a mandatory component in the preparation of employees whose activity requires a set of practical skills (e.g., doctors), many educational institutions now try to see to it that the curriculum envisages that students will involve themselves with certain tasks outside the school setting (Kennedy et al., 2015: 1-13). This trend is governed by the following two intercomplementary factors: (1) the influence of the government in regulating employment and unemployment and (2) the wishes of graduates, for whom the transition from the educational process to work becomes smoother if they undertake practice-based learning.

It is also worth noting the fact that currently the primary focus both in government strategies and in research is specifically on either having students undergo practical training on the employer’s premises or on implementing the dual learning system, which combines theoretical learning at the university with practical training in a company-based setting.

Using practical training and dual learning formats has a number of proven benefits. It helps boost the preparedness of future employees for their professional activity by helping develop their social and communication competencies (Lebid, Shevchenko, 2020a: 577) and reduce the time it takes them to adapt to a new workplace. As a result, the employer gets a more competent employee, and the employee has the ability to do their job more efficiently. However, it may be argued that learning through practice alone cannot be regarded as the ultimate way to go – at least not in certain fields. For instance, the spectrum of professions with which we could associate the activity

of a person with a legal education is quite broad (e.g., attorneys, notaries, prosecutors, employees of judicial institutions, etc.). Practical training for one single type of activity cannot give one a comprehensive idea of the legal profession as a whole. For instance, undergoing practical training **in a lawyer's office will hardly add to one's knowledge of the job of private bailiffs, while doing so** with a court secretary will hardly provide one with additional skills required to practice the notarial profession. Students typically acquire at particular companies and organizations a core set of skills and abilities that will enable them to perform properly the tasks associated with the occupation. Yet, considering the dynamic nature of the labor market, there is no guarantee that graduates will stay in a particular field in the future after getting into it.

Therefore, it make sense to have students not only acquire a set of practical skills specific to their chosen occupation (e.g., working with the Inheritance Register, used by notaries, or adding cases to and searching the Unified Register of Pretrial Investigations, used by law enforcement officers and attorneys) but also develop a set of general competencies needed in the legal profession (e.g., argumentation, critical thinking, and the skills of determining the nature of legal relationships). The same can be said for other professions too.

Fostering in students a set of practical skills that are universal to a particular specialty is a priority objective for all institutions of higher learning today. It is to be achieved across various aspects of the educational process and various forms and methods of learning. It goes without saying that virtually all disciplines, even those of an inherently theoretical nature, ought to prepare students for carrying out practical tasks in the future and can serve to foster the above-mentioned general skills and abilities. The present work is focused on a particular area of practice-based training – assessments that conclude a module or a course offered by an institution of higher learning.

Based on the findings from an analysis of the experience of universities in Ukraine and other former Soviet states, assessments tend to be conducted in those countries in the form of tests or just open-ended questions to be answered in written or oral form, depending on the university and specialty. Both tests and open-ended **questions are primarily aimed at assessing the student's level** of mastery of theoretical knowledge. Even if in the course of learning a discipline students do work on practical cases or practical projects, what remains a priority in the consciousness of most students who seek to achieve a good grade in the course is just memorizing most of the material as opposed to applying some of that knowledge in actual practice. Consequently, a paradoxical situation arises: working on a case serves to help the student master the theoretical material, but the theoretical material does not serve to help them acquire the skills and abilities needed to perform real-life professional work.

Although methodologies for conducting practice-based examinations (assessments) have long and successfully been tested in the area of training engineers, health professionals, chemists, biologists, and other specialists focused on the exact and life sciences (Amida et al., 2020; Boulet, Murray, 2010; Kristinayanti et al., 2018; Stephanchick, Karim, 1999), the humanities and social sciences education sector continues to lag behind significantly in this respect. In conjunction with the above, the aim of the present work was to explore the potential for transforming traditional forms of assessing the academic performance of humanities and social sciences students into practice-based ones and assess the effectiveness of such forms via a pedagogical experiment.

2. Materials and methods

The authors tested several summative assessment methodologies designed to help achieve the following two key objectives: (1) reinforce the skills and abilities acquired through learning in college and (2) properly measure the level of mastery of those skills and abilities in terms of achievement of the prescribed curriculum objectives. For law students, use was made of case study (classic legal cases, i.e. those with an unequivocally right resolution to them, and value cases, i.e. those founded on the need to balance competing values and interests and permissive of varying decisions depending on how well-founded a particular position is) and mootings. For students majoring in History and Archaeology, use was made of an assessment method focused on having one describe a real historical artifact and determine its scientific and historical-cultural value.

Focusing the conducted pedagogical experiment on the above two areas was based on the objective to assess the potential of practice-based assessments for the humanities and social science domain as a whole, taking into account modifications made to the methodologies based on the characteristics of a particular specialty.

To gauge the effectiveness of practice-based assessments, the authors employed anonymous **surveying, tested students' level of mastery of key** theoretical concepts, and carried out a comparative analysis of the performance of students who took part in practice-based assessments and those who took exams in a traditional way.

The survey and test results (the performance of students who took part in practice-based assessments and those who did not) were processed using StatPlus Pro. The significance of differences was established using the Chi-square test ($p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$).

The study's theoretical basis was a set of publications sharing the findings from research on practice-based learning in higher education (Billett, 2010; Brownell, 1948; Harvey, 2003; Kennedy et al., 2015; Lebid, Shevchenko, 2020a; Little, 2000; Reese, 2011; Robinson, 2017; Strudwick, 2019; Wortham et al., 2016; Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009). Due to the use of practice-based assessments in preparing humanities and social sciences specialists being an underresearched subject, the authors relied to a significant degree on works by researchers focused on the exact and life sciences (Amida et al., 2020; Boulet, Murray, 2010; Kristinayanti et al., 2018; Stephanchick, Karim, 1999).

3. Discussion

While the advisability of implementing practice-based learning in the educational process has been the subject of extensive discussion, there is, as yet, no consensus on the issue, not even across Europe, testimony to which is the development of national strategies for higher education by various nations. For instance, one of the main results expected from the implementation of **Ukraine's National Strategy for Education to 2021 was "improvements in the effectiveness of the education of graduates from all levels of education and boosts in the competitiveness of domestic education, to be achieved by ensuring the fundamentality and practical orientation of curricula"** (Natsional'na stratehiya, 2013). **Item 2.2.3 of Ukraine's Draft Strategy for Higher Education for 2021–2031 lists among the key strategic and operational objectives "improving the level of practical training of learners"** (Stratehiya rozvytku, 2020).

Similar objectives have been set by the government of Ireland, with the need for more collaboration between business and colleges stressed in the National Strategy for Higher Education **to 2030: "Employer-academic partnership could also facilitate high-quality internships and work-placements for students and could be particularly useful as a way of enabling employer feedback on graduate employability and in facilitating employer input into curriculum design and development as well as course supply"** (National Strategy, 2011).

On the other hand, the authors of Estonia's Strategy for Higher Education for 2006–2015 suggest drawing a line between educational institutions that provide theoretical knowledge and those that provide practice-based education. Specifically, the Strategy states the following: "the university education and higher vocational education systems will be oriented differently – education in universities will be theory-based, and applied skills will be acquired based on theoretical principles. Higher vocational education curricula will be focused on practical training, and theoretical knowledge will be acquired mainly based on practical need" (Estonia Higher Education, 2006). While there is little wrong with this conceptual approach, it is hard to deny the advisability of any type of educational institution implementing practice-based learning as a whole and employing practice-based assessment in particular.

There has mostly been a consensus among researchers on the issue. Implementing practice-based learning in higher education has been recognized as a necessary measure, with discussions mainly centered around how to implement it. Given that one of the key objectives in higher education is to help students develop as professionals who are capable of solving problems in real life (Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009), the use of elements of practice in the learning process is something there can be hardly any objection to. In this context, researchers have noted that people tend to learn better when they rely on immediate experience combined with critical reflection and analysis. This means that experience (immediate practice) alone is not enough to learn. Experience ought to be accompanied by reflection and inner fine tuning, which connect experience to previous learning, **altering in a certain way the student's preliminary understanding of course content** (Hornyak et al., 2007). Many researchers focused on the analysis of the effectiveness of teaching methodologies have stressed the need to alter traditional approaches to learning and synchronize general and

special competencies in alignment with the needs of the economy and the labor market (Lebid, Shevchenko, 2020b: 61).

All the above statements hold true for practice-based assessments as well. A number of researchers have noted the critical importance of assessment in higher education as a factor that helps shape the experience of learners and influences their behavior to an even greater degree than actual teaching (Boyd, Bloxham, 2007: 3; Parker et al., 2021). It is during the processes of preparing for assessments and doing assessment assignments that most students tend to become seriously immersed in the learning material, systematizing and assimilating it via the thinking and/or activity process. A tenet that confirms the experience of the authors of this work is that it is quite hard to convince learners to engage in a particular activity that has no direct impact on their grade (Boyd, Bloxham, 2007: 3). Therefore, the success of the entire educational process and the ability to achieve the prescribed curriculum objectives will largely depend on the degree to which assessment assignments are close to real-life professional tasks.

With that said, as already noted above, current approaches to summative assessment in universities appear to be heavily misaligned with the needs of practice, especially in the area of training humanities and social sciences specialists. This issue has been observed not only in the post-Soviet space, where higher education remains fairly conservative and overly theorized. Researchers have pointed out the predominant use of traditional, tried and trusted, methods (tests or written closed-book exams) in Western universities too, which by any means is not always effective (especially in the current climate of having to distance learn due to the COVID-19 pandemic) (Johanns et al. 2017; Parker et al., 2021). It can be argued that the quality of humanities and social sciences education can be improved significantly via the implementation of practice-based assessments specifically. Methodologies for and forms of such assessments can be highly diverse and can both be applied to particular areas of training (particular academic disciplines) and be universal to the humanities and social sciences sphere, with allowance for relevant subject adaptations.

4. Results

The authors' employed practice-based assessments in their pedagogical experiment for the following two purposes: (1) having law students (those majoring in Law and in International Law) and history students (those majoring in History and Archaeology) reinforce their general and professional skills and abilities; (2) carrying out an objective assessment of their prior learning. For law students, the authors used simplified mooted and solving practical cases. For history students, who were taking the Source Studies and Archival Studies discipline, the assessment assignment consisted in preparing as comprehensive a characterization of an artifact as a historical source as possible. The assessment was conducted on the premises of the Sumy Regional Local Studies Museum (the city of Sumy, Ukraine), with relevant pieces from the museum collection used for the purpose.

The authors' specific methodology for assessing students' practical skills was adopted with several important considerations in mind and pretty much regardless of the fact that they had already worked with certain kinds of practical assignments as part of their core curriculum.

Firstly, as the final stage in students' mastering of the discipline, assessment makes it possible to ensure as much variation as possible in terms of both the subject matter and types of practice-based problems. Assessment assignments must fully reflect course content and encompass as many aspects covered as possible. The degree of complexity and problematicity of these assignments depends, above all, on the level of anonymity of higher education seekers in the **educational process. A learner's anonymity level is determined by their education level (bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees)** and year of study. Specifically, with first-year students pursuing a bachelor's degree, it makes sense to use assignments that are similar to those given to them during the term. It, for instance, will suffice to change a few facts in a legal case whose model has already **been studied as part of their regular classes. When it comes to senior bachelor's, master's, or PhD** degree students, assessment must envisage a number of challenges that require making decisions in complicated situations characterized by novelty and uncertainty.

Secondly, questions and problems used in assessments are perceived by students as more important, which helps ensure a special emphasis on practical skills and abilities. Specifying in the syllabus for an academic discipline from the beginning that the exam will be in the format of a

practical case (for lawyers) or a source-studies experiment (for historians) helps tune the student into a certain approach for working on the learning material, including asking relevant questions when consulting with the instructor.

Thirdly, it can be possible to achieve as effective a practice-based assessment as possible via using individualized assignments for a student or a small group of students (if the focus is on teamwork).

Finally, fourthly, practice-based problems can be combined with measuring theoretical knowledge. The use of this approach is critical for a number of humanities and social sciences disciplines that, apart from being important from theoretical and practical perspectives, can serve **to shape one's worldview as well.**

Specifically, as part of the European Union Law discipline (taught to second-year students majoring in International Law and fourth-year students majoring in Law), an exam was offered consisting of the following two stages: (1) taking an online test designed to determine the level of **students' general theoretical knowledge and (2) solving a practical case. Whereas the exam's first part involved closed-book testing and assignments with strict time limits, the second part, on the contrary, permitted consulting pertinent legal materials and case law.** However, students were to look for such materials on their own and within the time limits established by the examiner.

Below are a few examples of cases tested by the authors in conducting the assessments.

Case 1 (offered to second-year students). In the spring of 2018, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, acting through legislative procedure, introduced via a special document dealing with the protection of consumers of financial services a set of mandatory rules regulating the activity of certain types of financial institutions (e.g., being obligated to fully inform consumers and be transparent about their assets). Given the freedom of movement of capital in the EU, activities at the level of particular countries in this area ended up failing. Specifically, the government of Slovakia refused to follow the above rules based on the argument that, in adopting them, the EU institutions were not respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Provide a legal assessment of the situation.

Case 2 (offered to fourth-year students). Some time ago, the French government established a set of special rules for the sale of beer and related beverages. In particular, a requirement was introduced for retailers to have a special quality certificate for beer they sell and a special license for the sale of beer. The authorities explained this move as an effort to protect public health, pointing to the latest research indicating that beer alcoholism, which is considered incurable, develops faster and is developed 35% more frequently than alcoholism caused by the consumption of hard liquor. Conduct a legal analysis of the situation. Will the government change its decision if it turns out that they do not produce beer and related beverages in France and that it has a robust wine industry? What are the criteria to use to determine the similarity between the two items? Are the two items interchangeable?

In addition, the exam sheet contained brief instructions on how to work with the cases:

1. Carefully read the text and determine the factual circumstances of the case. Determine the key participants in the case. Analyze the time and place of the situation and the status of the parties involved.

2. Give a preliminary assessment of whether or not the law has been violated. Determine and carefully inspect the regulation that may have been violated. [Note that second-year students were provided with the specific sources on EU law (e.g., Treaty on European Union, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, etc.). Fourth-year students, who expectedly tend to exhibit a higher degree of autonomy when it comes to solving practical problems, were to find relevant sources on law on their own.]

3. Provide a detailed answer (approx. 500 words) using the following template:

– State the factual circumstances of the case (time and place of the incident; parties involved).

– Describe what happened.

– State the specific law violated in the situation (cite relevant regulatory documents).

– Provide conclusions as to whether or not an infraction of the law has occurred, and, if yes, state what the infraction is and what the consequences may be.

As can be seen, the exam sheets included fairly typical and simple cases solving which requires just a few logical operations. Note that the assessment problems given to participating undergraduate

students were intentionally made simpler compared with those posed to them as part of their regular classroom learning, which was done considering the high levels of stress experienced by students during exams. With that said, it is to be kept in mind that the degree to which assignments are simplified must **be based directly on the level of learners' autonomy. This kind of simplification is** hardly advisable when it comes to assessing postgraduate and doctoral students.

As part of the Values of the European Union discipline, the authors tested another assessment methodology, designed not for summative but interim assessment – it is to be used at the conclusion of a module covering 50 % of the learning material. The interim assessment was conducted in the form of simplified mootings. The authors utilized a modified Karl Popper format*, whereby two opposing teams take turns presenting their positions in a value case, exchange questions and answers, and deliver concluding statements. A distinctive characteristic of the chosen format is that it is designed to help **both reinforce students' individual practical skills and foster in** them a set of competencies associated with teamwork, leadership, and effective communication. **Since the final student grade for each discipline must, above all, embody students' individually** achieved results, the authors suggest using this form of assessment exclusively as an interim one or as a component of the overall assessment used in combination with other forms of assessment.

Below is an example of a value debate case for students.

Case 1. Upon learning of her pregnancy, Ms V registers with a healthcare institution and wishes to find out the sex of her future child. After having an ultrasound scan in the 13th week of gestation, she is told that she is going to have a girl. Ms V asks the general practitioner for a repeat scan, as it is a matter of great significance to her. The thing is that her father had Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a genetic incurable lethal disease. While Ms V does carry the gene responsible for a recessive form of the disorder, the disease primarily affects males. Ms V is referred for an ultrasound, but when she visits the clinic, she finds out that the ultrasound machine is out of order. That is the only ultrasound machine in town. She ends up waiting for 10 weeks for the machine to get fixed.

In the 23rd week of gestation, Ms V has an ultrasound and finds out that it definitely is a boy. Ms V considers an artificial termination of pregnancy, but she is refused it, as the timeframe for doing it has already expired.

Ms V goes to court demanding that an accredited healthcare institution carry out an artificial termination of her pregnancy despite the missed deadline. On top of that, Ms V demands that the clinic compensate her for the moral damage she has suffered due to the poor medical service she received there. **The clinic objects to the plaintiff's demands, claiming that the timeframe to carry out** an artificial termination of her pregnancy has expired and that Ms V is discriminating against her unborn child based on sex. In addition, the clinic is of the view that it has yet to be proven that her unborn child will have Duchenne muscular dystrophy, although there is some probability of that.

A distinctive characteristic of interim assessments in the form of debate is that students are provided upfront with a list of cases that they will have to work on. With that said, it makes sense to include in this list at least twice as many situational assignments as there will be used as part of the actual activity. The case, team lineup (three students), and side (the applicant or the respondent) for the proceedings will be determined at the start of the activity by draw. Thus, while students know at the stage of preparing for the assessment activity what practical situations can potentially be offered to them and what materials (legislation and case law) they need to study, up until the start of the activity it remains unclear what the case (one case will be selected out of around 20 possible ones), their team lineup, and their side in the debate (the applicant or the respondent) will be. In addition, each team will need to assign roles to each of its members and decide on the **order in which they will be presenting the team's position in the debate.**

* Under the Karl Popper Debate Format, a debate involves two teams of three speakers each. The teams know the topic but do not know which role will be assigned to them: the role of the affirmative party (herein referred to as 'Applicant') or that of the negative one ('Respondent'). Therefore, both teams get to prepare arguments for both sides of the debate. Each debater is given some time to prove the validity of their own **team's position or challenge the opposing team's one. The affirmative party starts the** debate. The speech of the first speaker from each team lasts 6 minutes. The second and third speakers each gets 5 minutes. The **first and second speakers also each gets 3 minutes to answer the opposing team's questions. The third** speaker just gets to summarize their own team's presentation and does not get to answer questions.

Table 1 lists the parameters used to assess the performance of the teams in the debate.

Table 1. Protocol for Evaluating the Debate Teams

Criterion	Team 1	Team 2
	("The Applicant")	("The Respondent")
Quality of argumentation (maximum 50 points)		
Discussion (maximum 30 points)		
Rhetorical means (maximum 10 points)		
Adherence to the rules (maximum 10 points)		
Total (maximum 100 points*)		

To conduct a final assessment on the same discipline, the authors employed a methodology that combines elements of the two described above. The students are offered upfront a list of cases, and there are as many cases as there are students in the groups. Unlike situational problems offered as part of the assessment around the European Union Law discipline (a few examples are provided above), these are value cases without an unequivocally right resolution to them. This sets up the potential for two sides clashing and for legal determination being performed based on a variety of regulations, which is conducive to a variety of legal consequences and suggests a need to balance the interests of the applicant and the respondent based on legal values and principles.

During the assessment, the student learns which case to work on and which side (the applicant versus the respondent) to represent, which is determined in a random manner. The **students draw up a written memorandum (a document that presents a team's position in the debate)**, in which they provide all their logical and legal arguments in support of the side they represent. Table 2 displays the criteria for evaluating the memorandum.

Table 2. Criteria for Evaluating the Memorandum

	Criterion	Points
1.	The quality of the arguments presented in the memorandum, the availability and appropriateness of references to national legislation and acts of international law, materials of law enforcement practice of national courts, and jurisprudence of international courts	0–50
2.	The position presentation (precise statements, rationality, logic and consistent position)	0–20
3.	The interpretation of the circumstances of the case, legal qualification, lack of factual errors and manipulation of the circumstances of the case	0–20
4.	Correctness of presentation, absence of spelling, grammatical, lexical, punctuation errors	0–10
Total		100

* '100 points' hereinafter will mean the overall maximum grade that students can obtain on a particular type of assessment assignments.

The practice-based assessment engaged the entire student body to whom the European Union Law and Source Studies and Archival Studies disciplines were taught in the 2020–2021 school year. The Values of the European Union discipline was simultaneously taught to two groups of students, with only one of the groups taking part in a practice-based assessment as part of the pedagogical experiment. The second group took part in an interim assessment in the form of computer-based testing and in a summative assessment in the form of a written exam with open-ended theoretical questions. On all the other aspects (lectures, practical classes, and individual assignments for independent work), the same teaching methodology was used. Based on these conditions, the effectiveness of practice-based assessments was measured using several different methods.

To assess the results of the pedagogical experiment around the Values of the European Union course, the authors conducted entrance testing (before the course started) and subsequent testing (in the next term), both aimed at measuring student ability to legally interpret key axiological-legal concepts, like equality, nondiscrimination, honor, dignity, fairness, freedom, and pluralism, i.e. categories already familiar to law students from the disciplines they had studied earlier (Theory of the State and Law, Constitutional Law, and Civil Law), which in this course were examined in a broader European legal context using an axiological approach (Zavhorodnia et al., 2019).

Table 3 displays the results of the entrance testing on the discipline and the testing conducted in the next term, subsequent to the completion of the Values of the European Union course.

Table 3. Results of the Entrance and Subsequent Testing on the Values of the European Union Discipline

Grades	Testing before taking 'Values of the EU'		Testing after taking 'Values of the EU'		χ^2 (for 3 & 4) $p > 0.05$
	The group with practice-oriented assessments	The group without practice-oriented assessments	The group with practice-oriented assessments	The group without practice-oriented assessments	
	1	2	3	4	
A (90–100)	2 (7.4 %)	1 (4 %)	4 (14.8 %)	2 (8 %)	4.934 $p > 0.05$
B (82–89)	8 (29.6 %)	7 (28 %)	9 (33.3 %)	8 (32 %)	
C (74–81)	7 (25.9 %)	7 (28 %)	8 (25.9 %)	7 (28 %)	
D (64–73)	4 (14.8 %)	3 (12 %)	4 (14.8 %)	3 (12 %)	
E (60–63)	3 (11.1 %)	4 (16 %)	2 (7.4 %)	3 (12 %)	
F (59 –0)	3 (11.1 %)	3 (12 %)	0	2 (8 %)	
Total	27	25	27	25	

As can be seen, after completing the course, students who took part in practice-based assessments exhibited an overall better level of mastery of course material and a higher level of progress than those who did not.

Another important objective that may be resolved thanks to practice-based assessments is preparing law students for the unified state entrance exam for entry into **the master's program**

(the GELCT (General Educational Legal Competence Tests) block*). Based on the results from **occasional drills conducted using the material from the previous year's tests (publicly available on the official website of the Ukrainian Center for Education Quality Assessment (<https://testportal.gov.ua/materialy-yevi-yefvv/>))**, students who took part in practice-based assessments have posted overall higher results than those who did not. Table 4 displays the results from one such activity, which was conducted using a group of 20 students who took part in practice-based assessments and a group of 17 students who did not. The table only lists the numbers of students who scored over 60 %.

Table 4. Mock GELCT Exam Results

Test Unit	The group with practice-oriented assessments	The group without practice-oriented assessments	χ^2
Analytical Thinking	16 (80 %)	11 (64.7 %)	6.227 $p < 0.05$
Critical Thinking	15 (75 %)	10 (58.8 %)	
Logical Thinking	15 (75 %)	11 (64.7 %)	
Average, %	76.6 %	62.7 %	

Suppose the null hypothesis is that **practice-based assessments have no effect on students' capacity for analytical, logical, and critical thinking**. In this case, the control group is those of the student body who did not take part in the practice-based assessment. **With that said, the χ^2 value for the group of students who took part in the practice-based assessment is 6.227, which indicates that practice-based assessments *can* have a positive effect on student preparedness for the GELCT.**

Practice-based assessments are quite a relevant method for enhancing the quality of training of humanities and social sciences students, which is also confirmed by the experience of employing **them as part of a bachelor's degree program in History and Archaeology. One of the program's key objectives is "to prepare students for educational, methodological, and organizational work in general education institutions, practical and auxiliary activity in museums, archives, civil society organizations, and local studies organizations"** (Profil' prohramy). It goes without saying that it is hardly possible to achieve this goal without using practice-based teaching and assessment methods.

Therefore, most academic disciplines required by the curriculum involve the use of such methods. Specifically, a whole raft of subjects under the History program are concluded with practice-based assessments of student knowledge. Of definite interest in the context of the present study is the experience of assessing students on the Source Studies and Archival Studies discipline, which is taught in the first year.

At the beginning of the course, students were familiarized with general theoretical aspects of source studies, its role in historical research, terminology, typology, methods for searching for, processing, and utilizing historical sources, etc. Separate attention is devoted to source studies criticism (a method for critical study of sources). Next, students were presented with a block of topics devoted to existing types of sources (e.g., material, graphic, oral, linguistic, and written sources) and were provided with an insight into the classification of sources.

Following a relaxation of lockdown restrictions in 2021, certain lecture classes and most practicals were conducted not in the classroom but on the premises of the History Museum and at the Research Center for Historical Local Studies at Sumy State University. This helped immerse students in the environment of historical artifacts. Students could not only receive information

* The GELCT is a part of the Unified Entrance Exam for entry to a master's degree in law in Ukraine that tests **students' general learning competencies. It consists of the following three blocks: critical thinking, logical thinking, and analytical thinking.** Each block contains 9–12 assignments with a time limit of 25 minutes.

about historical sources and share it but also explore the artifacts through visual and tactile contact. The use of this work format was aimed at helping students meaningfully grasp the learning material and helping instructors assess current student knowledge as objectively as possible.

The Source Studies and Archival Studies course was concluded with a summative assessment comprised of two sections. The maximum number of points on each section equaled 50 % of the assessment grade.

Section 1. To test students' theoretical knowledge, the final assessment includes multiple-choice assignments (4–6 answer options to choose from). Students could answer the questions in written form in the classroom in a special class held for the purpose or through their user account on the university's online platform.

Section 2. Assignments in this section are aimed at testing students' practical ability to work with historical sources. This part of the assessment is conducted on the premises of the Sumy Regional Local Studies Museum or of the History Museum of Sumy State University using relevant pieces from the collection ([Zanyattya](#)). Each student is picked an artifact at random. Normally, use is made of whole or fragmented ceramic items, coins, paper money, small metal objects, agricultural implements, old photographs, handwritten and printed documents, books, etc. Students are to provide as comprehensive a characterization of an artifact as a historical source as possible. Essentially, they have to put their current theoretical knowledge to use to generate as much information as possible about the source. The information obtained is to be grouped into three blocks.

Block 1. Describing the source's external characteristics (e.g., depending on what type of artifact it is, the time and place it was created, the material it is made from, its form, structure, authorship, etc.).

Block 2. Critically conceptualizing the source (determining the historical conditions in which the source was produced or acquired its particular external characteristics; determining the possible purpose behind the creation of the source; assessing the completeness, accuracy, and veracity of the information contained in the source; etc.).

Block 3. Making a forecast about the source (identifying the thematic areas of historical science the study of which the source will be most useful for and formulating suppositions on how to enrich the existing body of knowledge on the source (e.g., via isotope analysis or the use of additional sources).

Table 5 displays the assessment criteria used for the Source Studies and Archival Studies discipline.

Table 5. Assessment Criteria Used for the Source Studies and Archival Studies Discipline

Section	Content	Points
Section 1	Theoretical assessment	0–50
Section 2.1	Main formal characteristics of the historical source determination	0–10
Section 2.2	Complex analysis of historical source	0–25
Section 2.3	Reasoned substantiation of the historical value of the source and determination of the areas of its application	0–15
Total		100

At the end of the school year, all the participating students were asked to take part in an anonymous survey on their self-assessment of how they had done on the development of their skills and abilities. The findings found those who took part in practice-based assessments to be more

confident in their knowledge and abilities at the conclusion of the school year. Comparing the results for participating law students who studied the disciplines with practice-based assessments being used (20 respondents) and those who did without such assignments being used (17 respondents) revealed that the former rated their capacity for practical work overall higher and had less fear of their future professional activity.

Table 6 outlines the key findings from the survey.

Table 6. Results from the Survey of Law Students on Their Preparedness for Practical Activity

Assertion	The group with practice-oriented assessments			The group without practice-oriented assessments			χ^2 (for 1 & 4)
	Yes	No	I don't know / No answer	Yes	No	I don't know / No answer	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I know how to qualify legal relations	15 (75 %)	2 (10 %)	3 (15 %)	11 (64.7 %)	5 (29.4 %)	1 (5.8 %)	9.132 $p < 0.05$
I am ready to work with clients of law firms	13 (65 %)	4 (20 %)	3 (15 %)	10 (58.8 %)	4 (23.5 %)	3 (17.6 %)	
I feel confident in my professional knowledge	14 (70 %)	4 (20 %)	2 (10 %)	9 (52.9 %)	4 (23.5 %)	4 (23.5 %)	
I can work with databases	12 (60 %)	5 (25 %)	3 (15 %)	10 (58.8 %)	5 (29.4 %)	2 (11.7 %)	
I know how to search for legal acts or case law	16 (80 %)	1 (5 %)	3 (15 %)	10 (58.8 %)	5 (29.4 %)	2 (11.7 %)	

Participating history students who were taught the Source Studies and Archival Studies discipline in their first year in 2020 were unable to visit the museum to take part in an assessment due to COVID-19 restrictions. An anonymous survey of this group (11 respondents) was conducted in June 2020. In 2021, it became possible to assess first-year history students at the museum. An anonymous survey of the second group (11 respondents as well) was conducted in June 2021. **The surveys were to gauge students' confidence** in their practical skills and abilities and determine their assessment of their preparedness to carry out professional tasks, including those of a research and source-studies nature.

The key findings from the survey are outlined in Table 7.

Table 7. Results from the Survey of History Students on Their Preparedness for Practical Activity

Assertion	The group with practice-oriented assessments (2021)			The group without practice-oriented assessments (2020)			χ^2 (for 1 & 4)
	Yes	No	I don't know / No answer	Yes	No	I don't know / No answer	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I know how to characterize historical sources	9 (81.8 %)	2 (18.1 %)	–	7 (63.6 %)	2 (18.1 %)	2 (18.1 %)	1.714 $p > 0.05$
I am ready to work with professionals	8 (72.7 %)	1 (9 %)	2 (18.1 %)	8 (72.7 %)	1 (9 %)	2 (18.1 %)	
I feel confident in my professional knowledge	8 (72.7 %)	2 (18.1 %)	1 (9 %)	7 (63.6 %)	3 (27.2 %)	1 (9 %)	

I can work with historical databases	10 (90.9 %)	–	1 (9 %)	8 (72.7 %)	1 (9 %)	2 (18.1 %)
I know how to search for professional literature and other sources	10 (90.9 %)	1 (9%)	–	8 (72.7 %)	1 (9 %)	2 (18.1 %)

5. Conclusion

The authors' experience implementing practice-based assessments indicates a significant increase in the level of preparation of students on subjects summative assessment around which is based on practical assignments. An analysis of the statistical data performed using StatPlus Pro revealed significant changes in at least two areas. Firstly, it is the quality of one's assimilation of the material. Secondly, it is greater confidence in oneself and one's communication potential within a professional environment. Having students train their practical skills helps them assimilate theoretical knowledge better and for a longer time. Based on the findings from the authors' experiment with two groups of students, which involved each group being taught the Values of the European Union discipline, students who took part in practice-based assessments exhibited a higher level of mastery of the course's key concepts and demonstrated some real headway in terms of the development of the skills of critical, analytical, and logical thinking. Specifically, the χ^2 value for students who took part in practice-based assessments as part of a mock GELCT exam was 6.227, which indicated a positive effect with regard to the achievement of the prescribed curriculum objectives and the development of relevant general and professional competencies.

The study also revealed an increase in students' self-concept and confidence in themselves when it comes to solving practical problems characterized by complex and uncertain conditions. Specifically, as evidenced in Table 6, students who underwent preparation for the practical part of the summative assessment and then completed it were found to feel better prepared for practical activity associated with their future profession ($\chi^2 = 9.132$). These learners reported greater confidence in their knowledge and abilities, as well as their skills of communication within a professional environment. Note that, in assessing this parameter, one has to take into account the number of students in the target group. It was quite small in the case of the Source Studies and Archival Studies discipline (the authors compared the performances of two groups, each composed of 11 students (Table 7)), which does not permit one to speak of a statistically significant result – but still suggests positive dynamics in terms of achieving the objectives of the educational process. The authors intend to continue and engage more students in the experiment in order to obtain results that are more valid statistically.

Practice-based assessments ought not to be confined to only the preparation of specialists in the areas of medicine, engineering, etc. They can well be employed in the educational process with allowance for variation in forms of assessment, assessment methodologies, and the characteristics of a particular specialty.

In addition, it is worth noting that the true value of practice-based forms of assessing student learning should be viewed not only through the lens of preparing specialists for solving practical problems in a climate of real-life professional activity. Practice-based assessments can also serve as a yardstick for gauging the effectiveness of instructors' teaching methods and stimulate the quest for new ways of teaching and learning that can help meet the needs of the labor market and the interests of students pursuing a higher education as much as possible.

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