

# University of Nebraska Medical Center – College of Allied Health Professions

## Key Findings



Data from ExamSoft guides curricular decisions



College-wide category creation system allows programs to decide how to utilize categories



Electronic images and videos for test-taking creates a huge advantage over paper testing in medical professions.

As a fast-growing college with diverse needs across its multiple programs, the University of Nebraska Medical Center's College of Allied Health Professions needed a platform that could streamline assessment and track programmatic performance. After adopting ExamSoft in 2014, the college created categories to identify overlap across programs and has reaped countless unanticipated benefits since. Data from ExamSoft now guides curricular decisions and provides the insights needed to gauge effectiveness toward achieving board, program, college, and university objectives.

## BACKGROUND

The University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) is Nebraska's only public academic health sciences center. As such, UNMC works hard to reach all Nebraskans through a wide variety of programs. It proactively recruits and prepares students to serve Nebraska's underserved communities. UNMC has six colleges that enroll nearly 4,000 students across more than two dozen programs.

Formerly the School of Allied Health Professions housed in the UNMC College of Medicine, the College of Allied Health Professions (CAHP) became its own college in 2015 as it saw incredible growth. CAHP delivers instruction to nearly 700 students in 14 health professions programs on two campuses—the main campus in Omaha, and a second rural campus in Kearney, Nebraska. CAHP’s educational programs vary in length, degree offered, and delivery mode.

**UNMC College ExamSoft Adoption Timeline**



**Current CAHP Programs**

- Cardiovascular Interventional Technology
- Clinical Perfusion
- Computed Tomography
- Cytotechnology
- Diagnostic Medical Sonography
- Genetic Counseling
- Health Professions Teaching & Technology
- Medical Laboratory Science

**Coming Soon**

- Medical Nutrition
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging
- Physical Therapy
- Physician Assistant
- Radiation Therapy
- Radiography
- Healthcare Delivery Science
- Occupational Therapy

**CHALLENGE**

Not only do CAHP’s programs differ in length, ranging from one to three years, they are also offered in various modalities, with some programs entirely online, some hybrid, and some entirely in-person. Additionally, each program managed exam files and administration on its own, creating inconsistencies in assessment modes and methods. With many different approaches to the assessment process across programs, CAHP was unable to reliably track programmatic performance for shared learning objectives.

The UNMC College of Allied Health Professions adopted ExamSoft in 2014, designating an implementation coordinator to identify the variety of needs for each program. A single portal was then organized into program-specific sections, and CAHP provided initial support for creating folders, importing exam items, and structuring categories. Now, each program manages its own designated section of the database, maintaining folder structure, categories, and assessments. User management and other administrative tasks are handled at the college level to ensure, for instance, that faculty and staff users have access to the portions of the database they need, LMS settings are maintained, and student testing accommodations are executed. With a college-wide category creation system in place, programs can decide how to best utilize these categories. Some programs use categories to observe student performance data by learning outcome. Others use them to record data pertaining to licensure examination content or accreditation criteria.

Using the ExamSoft portal to assign program cohorts into exam-taker groups, the College of Allied Health Professions is able to keep track of students that enroll in courses open to all CAHP students. Knowing the program to which each student belongs helps instructors in the day-to-day management of assessments.

The variety of exam formats and question types available to faculty when creating assessments is useful for the CAHP's unique programmatic needs. From short, weekly quizzes that function as formative assessments to summative examinations for course units, midterms and finals, and even board exam practice, programs in the CAHP are able to tailor assessments to the needs of their course. Imaging programs make frequent use of ExamSoft's file upload question feature to show radiographic images and stills from CT, MRI, and ultrasounds, helping familiarize students with scenarios they will encounter in their field.



“The ability to identify content areas where our students overlap in their studies by looking at assessment data in ExamSoft is a powerful opportunity to examine whether students from different programs can come together to engage in interprofessional learning activities. Not only does this reduce redundancy across programs, interprofessional collaboration is an essential skill for health professions students that we can and should support in our curricula.”

— Dr. Sarah McBrien  
CAHP Director of  
Curriculum & Assessment

With more than five years of ExamSoft use under its belt, UNMC's CAHP has operationalized ExamSoft and its resulting data, making both an integral part of the college and decision-making processes.

### **Alignment**

ExamSoft data helps the CAHP see where there is or isn't alignment between program- and college-level objectives. CAHP recently established a set of broad learning objectives, including skills like cultural awareness and interprofessional teamwork. A comprehensive view of program-level learning outcomes helps CAHP leadership identify if and how programs support broader objectives.

### **Improvement**

Before a curriculum transition, CAHP can consult ExamSoft data to look at trends—where students are universally succeeding and obvious areas of struggle. This helps bring opportunities to light that can improve instruction.

### **Collaboration**

A few key users have total access to the database in order to offer support to all departments in the CAHP. Some programs have been able to identify methods for sharing human resources for proctoring synchronous examinations. Though anatomy coursework differs by educational program, CAHP anatomy professors have been able to use the database to better manage which assessment items are relevant for which students.

### **Projections**

UNMC's CAHP is now able to look at trends over time, project board scores, and work to mitigate potential failures by providing very specific feedback to students with respect to areas for additional focus.

## **Creative Use of Categories to Keep Exam Items Secure**

One of the College of Allied Health Professions programs, Medical Laboratory Science (MLS), is using categories in an especially thoughtful and innovative way. The MLS program is unique in that students spend a summer at UNMC, learning essential skills, before being dispatched to different rotations around the country where they spend time focused on varying topics like urinalysis, microbiology, immunology, etc. Unlike most programs, students aren't necessarily working – or tested – on the same thing at the same time.

Faculty needed to be able to give feedback without compromising the integrity of the questions. ExamSoft enabled them to provide necessary feedback on concepts the students weren't fully grasping by using their learning objectives as categories. They are able to provide rich feedback with detailed information on areas in need of further study without compromising the exam for future test-takers.

UNMC’s College of Allied Health Professions is actively working toward mapping content to new institution-level and college-level learning objectives. The goal is to connect the dots all the way from course objective to program objective to institution objectives. CAHP is also striving to improve interprofessional education by finding areas where the curriculum overlaps and determining the best single fit for the content.

Finally, UNMC recently overhauled its admissions processes. In an effort to be more holistic, admissions will go beyond a strong academic background to also placing emphasis on how the prospective student matches the college’s mission and goals. In the earliest stages of admissions, CAHP evaluates candidates against eight non-cognitive attributes that are predictors of success in graduate school. Through ExamSoft, CAHP leadership seeks to better understand the relationship between those traits and program performance by correlating scores from the admissions process with matriculants’ summative assessment scores.

*ExamSoft provided no compensation for these statements, but this individual has previously received compensation for other work performed for ExamSoft.*

## **A final note from UNMC’s Director of Curriculum & Assessment**



Don’t be afraid of change. Yes, adopting new technology takes time and comes with challenges, but you will make up the time quickly in writing, grading, and providing feedback on future exams.



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The benefits of faculty being hands-on and collaborating to develop exams, and the speed with which they can grade and provide feedback to students, cannot be overstated.



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