Rich, timely feedback on student assignments strengthens learning. Students who are engaged in their studies and succeed in individual courses continue to complete their degrees. Yet the ever increasing, world-wide demand for higher education coupled with the growing lack of availability of qualified faculty makes it ever harder for institutions to provide individualized attention. To meet the needs of higher education, EduMetry’s Virtual-TA™ service offers robust feedback to students and faculty on every key assignment.

Our expert staff provides rich feedback and scores assignments, such as term papers, essays, case studies and other higher-order thinking type work. Faculty can focus on teaching and overall learning management to help more students achieve their academic goals.

visit our website | www.Virtual-TA.com
contact us | (800) 984-8465
schedule a webinar | webinar@EduMetry.com
request a free proposal | proposal@EduMetry.com
Virtual Teaching Assistants (Virtual-TA™)

Virtual-TA™ is a powerful, new way to improve student learning. It takes the idea of Teaching Assistants in universities (who grade papers and provide feedback, so as to free up professors to teach large classes or conduct research) and adds a web-mediated dimension. The result is a Virtual Teaching Assistant, or a Virtual-TA™. Like an on-campus TA, our Virtual-TAs take their instructions from your faculty, familiarize themselves with the course, the textbook, and supplementary readings and assignments.

We carefully select Masters- or PhD-qualified professionals in a wide array of academic disciplines, train them in the art of providing rich feedback and the use of rubrics and assign them to work with your teaching faculty. Of course, there is a lot more to the service, such as standardized processes to ensure we meet academic standard, pedagogical integrity and instructor preferences. We've developed a tech platform that uniquely allows our TAs to electronically embed rich commentary directly into student assignments – and much more! Be sure to check out the section on Benefits that highlights the many benefits that flow from using the Virtual-TA™ service.

So if your institution is struggling with finding qualified faculty to keep up with the demand for higher education, then the Virtual-TA™ service is ideal for you. We have the TAs: only you can decide if your institution’s most prized and expensive resources are being utilized in line with what they were trained for: to create and disseminate knowledge.
How the Virtual-TA™ service works.

- **Free Up Faculty Time!**
  Our Virtual-TA™ service provides on-demand teaching-assistant services. We have assembled a large pool of Masters- or PhD-qualified experts in a wide array of academic disciplines. We also developed a technology platform that allows our TAs to electronically insert detailed, actionable feedback directly into student assignments.

- **The Preliminaries for a Responsive Service**
  Once your institution signs up for the service, we work with your department chairs or faculty members directly, often weeks ahead of the semester. Knowledge Managers, who supervise our TAs, start liaising directly with your faculty, familiarizing themselves with textbooks, supplementary readings and assignments.

- **Clockwork Schedule to Ensure Timely Feedback**
  Your instructors give us the schedule of assignments, when student assignments are due, when we might expect to receive them electronically, when the scored assignments will be returned, the learning outcomes on which to score the assignments, the rubrics to be used and the weights to be applied to different learning outcomes. We can use your rubrics to score assignments or design rubrics for sign-off by your faculty members.

- **Instructors Have Anytime, Anywhere Access**
  Next, we will guide your faculty through a few simple steps on how to upload raw assignments and download graded assignments. Student assignments can be in MS-Word, Excel or PowerPoint.

- **Feedback Tied to Learning Outcomes**
  Next, our Virtual-TAs access the assignments, review and embed feedback using color-coded pushpins directly into the electronic assignments. Color-coded pushpins provide a powerful visual diagnostic.

- **Comments that Engage, Motivate**
  The feedback is specific, detailed, constructive and actionable. It points out strengths and weaknesses in the student's work, all the while choosing supportive language that keeps students engaged and wanting to learn more about how they did.

- **Instructor Controls the Whole Process**
  Know that we do not have any contact with your students. Instructors retain full control of the process, designing the assignments in the first place, specifying learning outcomes and wanting to learn more about how they did.

- **Double-Blind Process Ensures Confidentiality**
  Our Virtual-TA™ process fully ensures student confidentiality. The instructor logs into our system, uploads the assignments and then scrambles the files before leaving the system. This ensures that our work takes place in a double-blind process, so ensuring the confidentiality of student work. Likewise, once the assignments are embedded with feedback, an e-mail to the instructor signals that he/she can log back into the system to unscramble the files, download the scored assignments.

- **Composite Scores**
  Finally, upon the request of the instructor, the weights he/she specified to the learning outcomes will be rubric-based scores which are used to generate a composite score for each student assignment.

- **Summative Report to the Instructor**
  As an added bonus, our Virtual-TAs provide a detailed, summative report for the instructor on the overall class performance on the given assignment, which includes a look at how the class fared on each outcome, where the students “got it,” where they stumbled and what concepts, if any, need reinforcing in class the following week. We can also, upon request, generate reports by Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). This report can be used by the instructor to immediately address gaps in learning at the individual or classroom level.

- **Immediate Closing-of-the-loop**
  Think of this as a micro closing-of-the-loop that happens each week. Contrast this with the broader, macro closing-of-the-loop that accompanies program-level assessment of learning, at the end of a whole academic year or later!

- **Longitudinal Learning-Outcomes Data**
  Continue using our Virtual-TA™ for all core (and electives, if you wish) and receive cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses as well as reports by learning-outcome, cohort, program, campus, demographics, etc. Administrators will find such data and reports a compelling empirical foundation on which to make improvements.

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**Summative Feedback to Instructor**

**Range of Scores**
80 to 100 points, with an average of 78.9.

**Format of feedback:** The usual format was used for all questions, as appears below:

1. **Focus**
2. **Feedback** (which can be in a correction or complimentary praise)
3. **Performance** (which would be a timely, pertinent feedback)

**Overall Student Performance on This Week’s Assignment:** This was a relatively difficult essay, and our students gave it a try. Many do not answer all the questions, but many also write long answers. Only about 8-10 percent of the papers were good, and did well on all questions, in writing a complete and well-organized essay. We are gratified to see that these students who get the most marks are not the ones who are having a lot of fun.

**Question 1:** This was a difficult requirement and many students had no idea of how to do it. The expectation was for them to write a paragraph about what they think the issue is and how it relates to the reading material. Many students cited that they did not understand the readings and so could not write about it. This was a difficult question and many students did not really know much about the topic.

**Question 2:** This was also a difficult question and many students did not really know much about the topic. It should have been a very difficult question, but it appeared that some students were simply not interested. Of course, it is quite important for the students to come up with a good, well-organized essay, but it is also important for them to come up with a good, well-organized essay.

**Question 3:** This was a very straightforward requirement and was answered by all students, however, not all gave due attention and just did a rush job. Among the better answers were those of Xzz, Hhh, Coo Jkk, and Coo Hhh.

**Question 4:** This was a very straightforward requirement and was answered by all students, however, not all gave due attention and just did a rush job. Among the better answers were those of Xzz, Hhh, Coo Jkk, and Coo Hhh.
Benefits of Virtual-TA™

Whether you head a large university, a college, campus or an online program, student learning, retention and success mean a lot to you. EduMetry’s Virtual Teaching Assistants can help your faculty provide students with rich, timely feedback on their assignments. Called Virtual-TA™, the service can free faculty up for more mission-critical duties. Your faculty members retain complete control over the grading process because they design the assignment and the learning outcomes, approve our rubrics, sign-off on an interim check of a sample of scored papers and ultimately assign a letter grade.

Students get...
- detailed feedback on assignments within 2-5 days
- to learn the strengths & weaknesses of their work
- actionable pointers, suggestions and references
- to improve their higher-order thinking skills

Faculty get
- to do what they do best: research, teach, mentor!
- to assume more of the role of Learning Architect!
- to assign more written work, improving writing skills
- to focus on fostering higher-order thinking skills
- to easily provide individual attention to students
- Reports on learning gaps and areas to reinforce

Administrators get
- to make high-quality TAs available to faculty
- to improve student learning, retention, persistence
- consistency of grading; reverse grade inflation
- to reduce instructional costs for the institution
- to attract external experts to teach (deterred by grading)
- to differentiate their institution to future students
- data on learning outcomes as part of the service

A New Paradigm for Higher Education

It’s time to rethink our traditional notions of how teaching and learning are structured, who should do what. Let faculty do what they do best: create and impart knowledge. Improve the quality of teaching, and lower your instructional costs!
1. Analyze the market potential of the Audubon Zoo.

The market potential for Audubon Zoo is wide open and being taken advantage of. From the early ‘70’s until the early ‘90’s, Audubon’s current market share rose dramatically, due to the turning point in the zoo’s structure. Now that the demand for the zoo has supported the renovation-expansion, and Audubon has been successful in fundraising, employment, profits and creating their own membership group “Friends of the Zoo”, their potential for market share has no limits. More currently, after plans for Riverfront 2000 were proposed, ideas to further expand or create minizoos around the city will most likely increase the number of visitors and repeat visitors, thus increasing market share.

2. Based on your financial analysis, what recommendations would you make to improve their Finances?

One recommendation I would make for Audubon is to decrease the amount of expense allocated towards visitor services. It has a higher expense than income. Perhaps there are better ways to still satisfy guests without spending a lot. One way could be to offer booths throughout the zoo that have water fountains, paper towels, bandages and maps showing guests where they are. Also, since Audubon has had great success with fundraising, they could set up several more black-tie dinner/banquets, or do the most successful fundraisers one to two more times a year. Finally, if Audubon expands to have mini-zoos around the city, they could offer regular visitors a pass to purchase allowing them entrance into all locations. They could also offer a weekend pass for tourists, to increase the number of visitors and awareness the new locations.

3. As mentioned in Chapter 2 of the text, a SWOT analysis is a helpful basis for planning. Prepare an analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats.

Internal strengths for Audubon include the new direction the zoo has taken on. This includes the membership groups that have been incorporated, the success in fundraising, education programs, concessions, and the services they offer, such as health care centers and rehabilitation. Weaknesses include difficulty in spreading the word through advertising to capture the attention of non-natives. Guides to New Orleans mentioned the zoo very little, and studies found only 36% of visitors to be tourists. This leaves room for improvement for attracting non-native and making them repeat customers. External opportunities are the potential for market growth and city-wide expansion. Riverfront 2000 is giving Audubon a new obstacle to turn its attention towards, once again expanding the zoo in attempt to increase attraction and the number of visitors. Threats are that the city of New Orleans is suffering from high unemployment rates and a depressed economy resulting in a slump in the oil industry. One other factor is that Audubon has to compete with many other city attractions, including the French Quarter and Mardi Gras.

4. What were the key factors in bringing a successful turnaround of the Zoo?

The first key factor for turning around the zoo’s success was a bond that expanded the run down zoo from 14-58 acres. With all the new room, the zoo could be properly divided into geographic sections, featuring and differentiating their variety of animals. The next key factor was the institution of admission charges, to generate revenue and help fight vandalism. Next, the group Friends of the Zoo was created, which managed guidelines for many different topics concerning the zoo. This group also offered edZOOcators that helped conduct educational programs. The next key factor was the implementation of different forms of fundraising, that proved to be successful. Finally, the potential for continuous expansion, has helped keep the zoo in an ever-changing position. By changing, updating and expanding, there is reason for tourists to make an effort to visit, and for natives to return regularly.
Feedback to Student
(at-a-glance view)

Every piece of feedback embedded in student assignments is color-coded by type of SLO (student learning outcome). SLOs are specified by the instructor at the beginning of the term.

Legend
- Knowledge of Course Content
- Innovative use of Concepts/Theories
- Analytical Development & Clarity
- Deductive Reasoning
- Miscellaneous
- Application of Concepts/Theories
- Logical Development of Arguments
- Inductive Reasoning
- Insightful Conclusions

The SLOs are tailored to the discipline (subject) and course objectives as defined by the instructor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Bookmark ID</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Analysis of Relevant Environmental Competition and Opportunities</td>
<td>You needed to take into consideration the various relevant environmental factors and opportunities and threats into this analysis. For example: What competition does Audubon zoo face? What segments of market can be leveraged by the zoo authorities? What offerings will go down better with the target audience?</td>
<td>Sections on Environmental domain and Environmental uncertainty, chapter 4, pp. 136-151.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Logical development of argument to support successful completion of project</td>
<td>You should present arguments to support your conclusion that the project Riverfront 2000 will be successfully implemented and that the target audience will be attracted in large numbers. Does it have to do with a correct understanding of the market potential or the zoo authorities’ implementation success?</td>
<td>Section on Role of strategic direction in organization design and Exhibit 2.1, chapter 2, pp. 52-55.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our technology platform automatically collates all of the feedback into a convenient table, so that the student and instructor can view all of the feedback at a glance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Score (upon 5)</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Weighted Score (upon 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student assignments are scored using RUBRICS based on SLOs and the overall score computed based on the weights assigned by the faculty member. So, students know how they fared overall, but ALSO how they performed on EACH SLO.

The scores shown here can be aggregated to derive class-, cohort- or campus-wide assessment of student learning. This is the basis of EduMetry’s Learning Dashboard.

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3. Application of concepts to improve financial status of the zoo
   
   Some innovative suggestions have been put forward. Do also look at the figures in the exhibits to identify trends, such as falling admissions after opening of the Aquarium, and then relate them to your recommendations to improve the financial status. Think of ways to counter possible downturns.

4. Application of SWOT framework
   
   You have brought out relevant factors and put the analysis together well. These should be discussed so as to open up possible recommendations to the reader.

5. Presentation of analysis
   
   You have brought out important factors in the turnaround of the zoo, but your effort seems to be disjointed and does not come across as very convincing. You could work to improve development of logical arguments and the analysis.

6. Application of suitable strategic framework to the case
   
   You could have seen which of Porter’s competitive strategies or Miles-and-Snow’s strategy typology, or a combination of these, might be applied to this case.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Rubric Score (upon 5)</th>
<th>Weighted Score (upon 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case analysis</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of concepts</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferences and recommendations</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall score</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructors are kept up to date through a summative feedback report. Faculty can also login to our tech-platform and monitor the grading as it is in progress. After 10-15% of the assignments have been graded, the Knowledge Manager e-mails the Instructor to login and check if the grading conforms to his/ her expectation. It is only after this approval that the remaining assignments are worked on.

**Range of Scores**

60 to 95 points, with an average of 75.9.

A few of the overall better answered papers were those of Xxx Xxxx, Yyy Yyy, Zzz Zzz.

Format of feedback: The usual format was used for all questions, as appears below:

1. **Focus**
2. **Feedback** (which can be a correction or compliment/ praise)
3. **Reference** (which could be a theory, concept, framework or simply a reference to a section of the chapter that the student ought to look up)

**Overall Student Performance on This Week’s Assignment:** This was a relatively difficult case, as compared to the earlier ones and it was quite expected that students would possibly grapple to make a sense of the lengthy case requirements. Many students did find it difficult to come up with entirely satisfactory answers. Only about 8-10 percent students came up with good quality case submission, with in-depth analysis and making appropriate use of case data. An overall weakness that was noticed was that many students were not able to structure their answers in some logical sequence in line with the set requirements, so as to make it easy for the reader to make sense of the arguments laid out. The student performance on each of the questions is next briefly discussed below:

**Question 1:** This was a difficult requirement and many students had no clear idea of how to go about analyzing the market potential from Audubon zoo’s perspective. Very few actually related it to the target market segments, the likely clientele and other relevant environmental factors. Most seemed to merely recount what the zoo had been doing in the past to attract and build up a faithful client base. Some, however, were able to classify the different issues and take them into account as such. Among those who answered the question well were Ccc Kkkk and Kkkk

**Question 2:** This was also a difficult question and many students again did not really look up and make use of the financial data in the exhibits given in the case. Most made only random and surface level use of what they could readily interpret of the zoo’s balance sheet. It should not have been a very difficult exercise but it appeared that these students were slightly wary of taking on the figures in the tables. Of course, it’s quite another thing that many students were able to come up with adequate workable solutions to the second part of the requirement in listing out suggestions to improve the financial condition of the zoo. Among the better answers were those of Xxx Hhh, Ccc Kkk, Ssss Bbb, and Qqq Hhh.

**Question 3:** This was a fairly straight-forward requirement and was answered well or at least adequately by most students. Some students, however, did not give it due attention and just did a rush job of answering it, barely adequately.

**Question 4:** This was again a fairly straight-forward question and most students answered it well. The exceptions were those who misunderstood the question to mean what needed to be done at this stage to bring about a turnaround in the fortunes of the zoo. Some of the better answers were those of Xxx Hhh, Dddd Www and Hhh Cccc.