Review of Assessment

Subcommittee of the School of Mechanical and Mining Engineering’s Teaching and Learning Committee

22 February 2012
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1. Executive Summary

Assessment policy at the University of Queensland is set out in the University’s Policy and Procedures Library (PPL) as policy number 3.10.2 – Assessment. The policy statement reads “Assessment provides a key method for giving feedback on a student’s learning and progression within a course. The University of Queensland provides a compulsory framework within which assessment activities are to be managed. Assessment at The University of Queensland serves a range of purposes including (i) formative, (ii) summative, and (iii) evaluation.”

The policy’s underpinning procedures include statements on the implementation of the policy.

The School of Mechanical and Mining Engineering’s Operational Plan (2011-2013) lists a number of goals and strategies under the Learning section of the Plan. The School’s Teaching and Learning Committee is responsible for the implementation of most of these goals and strategies. Goals include to renew accreditation for the School’s plans within the Bachelor of Engineering and to prepare for the 2012 Engineers Australia accreditation visit.

2. Establishment of the Assessment Review Subcommittee

At its meeting on 15 June 2011, the School’s Teaching and Learning Committee endorsed the formation of an Assessment Review Subcommittee. The aim of the Subcommittee is to review the courses offered by the School around the items listed below in the Terms of Reference.

2.1 Terms of Reference

The Subcommittee’s Terms of Reference are to:

1. Identify the -
   a. amount of assessment in each course offered through the school;
   b. form and requirements for the assessment;
   c. weight, spread and timing over each semester in each plan;

2. Analyse links between assessment and learning outcomes; and

3. Report findings to the School’s Teaching and Learning Committee.

2.2 Membership

The membership of the Assessment Review Subcommittee is Dr Matt Cleary, A/Professor Mingxing Zhang, Professor Richard Morgan and Dr Mehmet Kizil. Kim Lamb, the School Manager, provided secretarial support.

2.3 Meetings

The Subcommittee met three times (11 August, 8 September and 24 November 2011) and forwarded the report to the Teaching and Learning Committee on 1 December 2011. The report was endorsed by the School’s Teaching and Learning Committee at its meeting on 22 February 2012.
3. **Term of Reference 1: Identify the amount, form and spread of assessment**

3.1 **University policy and procedures**

While all assessment is “formative” in nature (assisting students in their learning), University policy (PPL 3.10.2 – *Assessment*) requires each course must have more than one form of “summative assessment” (assessment that counts towards the final result). A thesis or other large forms of assessment are regarded as including multiple forms of assessment. The policy also specifies that no one piece of summative assessment can contribute more than 70% toward the final result.

As required in PPL 3.10.03 – *The Course Profile*, the Electronic Course Profile for a course contains, *inter alia*, the summary of assessment items, their weightings, due dates and criteria and standards to be applied to each assessment item.

3.2 **Analysis of courses**

All courses offered by the School contain at least two types of assessment. However, the amount of assessment varied between courses with a number of courses having two items of assessment (minimum UQ requirements) while one course listed 11 items of assessment.

An analysis of the deadlines for assessment required a significant amount of manual intervention as there are no explicit procedures to ensure that the information is displayed in a similar fashion across the School’s course profiles. There are also no standardised guidelines for penalties for the submission for late assessment across courses offered within the School.

Further, in preparation for the 2012 Engineers Australia accreditation visit, the School was required to develop guidelines on the use of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ). The subcommittee noted Recommendation 9 of the Engineers Australia accreditation visit (2007) read "*Discourage the use of multiple choice examination questions at third and final year level*".

3.2.1 **Amount of assessment**

The amount of assessment in a course should be the minimum needed to assess the learning outcomes for the course; this may require a number of pieces of assessment. Setting an absolute maximum on the amount of assessment in a course is not acceptable. However, setting a large number of assessment items in a course is discouraged as this may result in a number of unintended consequences (e.g. students having less time for other courses which could lead to poorer results or students copying other student’s work).

The School’s administrative team is preparing a spreadsheet to assist course coordinators and plan leaders to view the amount, spread and timing of assessment (2011 data) which can assist for the planning for due dates in 2012 (example attached).

*Recommendation 1:*

*It is recommended that, prior to Semester 1 2012, plan leaders and course coordinators review the amount, weighting and due dates of assessment prior to each semester to better ensure a more even spread of assessment within the plan.*
3.2.2 Multiple Choice Examinations (MCQ)

Recommendation 9 of the Engineers Australia accreditation visit (2007) read “Discourage the use of multiple choice examination questions at third and final year level”. The next accreditation visit by Engineers Australia is 3-5 September 2012. In preparation for the visit, the Head of School asked that the use of MCQ be reviewed and guidelines developed for its use in examinations.

There was anecdotal evidence that MCQ were not widely used as the sole method of questions in examinations and did not form the bulk of summative assessment in year 3 and year 4 courses.

Recommendation 2:
It is recommended that MCQ should not be the only method of assessment in an end of semester examination in Level 3 and 4 courses and where MCQ are used, they must be of an appropriate standard to enable evaluation of a student’s knowledge of the material.

3.2.3 Late assessment

The Electronic Course Profile (ECP) must contain information about penalties for late assessment. There are times when the submission of late assessment is legitimate and the University has guidelines in place that set out provisions for approval of late submission in appropriate circumstances (Appendix A). These circumstances include illness or other medical condition or other event outside of the student’s control for which independent documentary evidence is produced. The circumstances for which extensions to progressive assessment are approved generally mirror those which apply to students who apply for a special examination.

In accordance with University policy, penalties for late submission of progressive assessment are listed in the Electronic Course Profile.

Across the School, the penalties for late submission of progressive assessment ranged from a few percentage per day to a maximum through to a number of courses (e.g. Mining Engineering) where no late submissions were permitted (in the absence of a medical certificate, etc). Staff in Mining Engineering believed that the number of student requests for late submission of assessment fell to near zero when they adopted the practice of not permitting late submission. Staff also felt this practice encouraged good time management on the part of the students.

The sub-committee believed that the School should have a smaller range of penalties for the submission of late assessment so that there was more consistency across the School.

Recommendation 3:
It is recommended that the School adopt a ‘no late submission’ practice for its courses, exclusive of thesis and design courses which could retain a progressive penalty for late submission.

The following text is suggested for inclusion in the ECP under the late submission heading.

“Late submissions will in most cases receive a zero mark. A late submission will only be allowed when a deferred deadline has been approved by the course coordinator prior to due date because of medical or extenuating circumstances. This will require documented evidence, e.g. Medical Certificate, etc.”
Recommendation 4:
It is recommended that the course coordinators refer to the attached document “Guidelines for late submission of progressive assessment” when deciding whether to allow late submission for students who meet the requirements in the guidelines.

3.2.4 Time of day for submissions

The Faculty of Engineering, Architecture and Information Technology maintained an assignment submission centre. Students could submit assignments at any hour of the day, seven days per week. However, the centre was staffed during business hours only. During peak assessment time, the assignment chute has been clogged and student assessment has been scattered around the floor. While the new submission centre mitigates against these incidents, having a submission deadline outside of business hours is not good practice. For example, deadlines for submission of after 5pm could easily be extended until the following business day or earlier the same day.

Recommendation 5:
It is recommended that assessment be due by 12:00 pm (midday) on Monday - Friday (exclusive of public holidays) and that all hard copy assessment be lodged via the Faculty’s assessment submission centre.

Recommendation 6:
It is recommended that all assessment be accompanied by the Faculty’s standard assignment coversheet.

The University’s policy PPL 3.60.04 - Student Integrity and Misconduct was approved by Senate on 16 June 2011 and implemented within the School. There were a number of plagiarism and collusion cases in Semester 2 2011 where the use of the plagiarism detection software “Turnitin” would have assisted with the identification and determination of alleged academic misconduct.

Recommendation 7:
It is recommended that where practical, an electronic copy of assessment be submitted via Turnitin. Note that this does not preclude the ability of a course coordinator to also specify a hard copy submission via the Faculty’s assessment submission centre.

Recommendation 8:
It is recommended that course coordinators ensure that where individual assignments are due, students are informed via multiple channels of the amount of work, if any, that can be done as a group and what parts must be done individually.

4. Term of Reference 2: Analyse links between assessment and learning outcomes

Each semester all courses were subjected to student evaluation using the new SECaT survey instrument. The scores on Question 6 (feedback on assessment) were low across the School and the SECaT Review Subcommittee was attempting to determine mechanisms to improve scores across the School for this question.

The School has scored consistently poorly in the SECaT questions relating to feedback on assessment and a separate subcommittee was established to make recommendations on how to improve SECaT scores.
However, this Subcommittee’s terms of reference extends to analysing the links between assessment and learning outcomes.

In addition, University policy required the use of Criterion Referenced Assessment (CRA) in determining the marks for a piece of assessment. The Division of Mining Engineering uses a criteria sheet that not only assisted with moderation of marking but also enabled the provision of effective feedback to students. Other criteria sheets, such as those used for Mechanical Engineering theses, allows for the same outcome.

Recommendation 8 of the 2007 Engineers Australia accreditation visit was to improve all assessment practices and their integrity systemically to ensure quality procedures, and that the practices relate to desired learning outcomes. It is therefore important that the links between assessment and learning outcomes be accurate.

**Recommendation 9:**
*It is recommended that example criteria sheets be placed on the School’s “Staff Resources” website and course coordinators advised to adapt them for their courses.*

**Recommendation 10:**
*It is recommended that a review of marking time be undertaken and suggestions offered on how to ensure prompt marking of assessment and provision of timely feedback to students. This might include setting deadlines for demonstrator to mark progressive assessment.*

**Recommendation 11:**
*It is recommended that, prior to Semester 1 2012, course coordinators review the assessment and learning objectives in the Electronic Course Profile and ensure they are accurate.*
Appendix A – Guidelines for late submission of progressive assessment

Guidelines for late submission of progressive assessment

Students are advised to refer to the Electronic Course Profile for information regarding whether an extension to progressive assessment is possible for each course, and whether the Application For Extension of Assessment form is to be used for applying for an extension to a piece of progressive assessment.

Introduction

- The submission of progressive assessment material on the due date is the responsibility solely of the student. Students should not leave assignment preparation until the last minute and must plan their workloads so as to be able to meet advertised or notified deadlines.
- The University does recognise, however, that on occasion illness or other medical conditions may impair a student’s ability to complete items of progressive assessment by the due date.
- These guidelines set out the consequences for students of non-completion of items of progressive assessment and the circumstances under which extensions may be sought.
- Extensions will only be considered in respect of illness or other certified medical condition, or exceptional circumstances. See below for information on what constitutes an exceptional circumstance. It is the policy of the University, that under normal circumstances neither pressures of work (whether university studies or external work) nor other events or commitments are a sufficient reason for an extension.
- These guidelines apply only to items of progressive assessment that are other than invigilated examination based assessment (including mid semester examinations).

Extensions to progressive assessment

- **Medical circumstances:**
  Where the failure to submit the item of assessment on the due date is because of an illness or other medical condition impairing the student’s ability to complete the assessment, the student may, on the presentation of an appropriate medical certificate, be granted an extension of the due date for submission without penalty.

Applications for extension must be made either:
  - by the due date for the assessment; or
  - by the application for extension to progressive extension due date as listed in Section 5.3 of the Electronic Course Profile of the course concerned, unless the illness or other medical condition is such that the student cannot reasonably be expected to have applied by the appropriate due date.

Any extension will usually be limited to the number of days (calculated to the nearest business day) the student is suffering from the medical condition as indicated on the medical certificate, provided that no extension may exceed the length of time prescribed in Section 5.3 of the Electronic Course Profile. Students who have been ill or otherwise impaired for more than 14 days in the semester are advised to consider carefully their ability to successfully continue in the course. Students are advised to refer to myAdvisor should withdrawal without academic penalty be an option.
• **Exceptional circumstances:**
  In exceptional circumstances, an extension in respect of an item of progressive assessment may be granted for non-medical reasons. For this purpose, exceptional circumstances may include:
  - a sporting or cultural commitment at state, national or international level (refer to University Policy, HUPP 3.40.15 *Programs and Assessment for Elite Athletes*); or
  - serious personal or emotional trauma; or
  - in very exceptional circumstances, an important planned family or social commitment; or unavoidable and last minute work commitment for which the student could not have reasonably rearranged their academic workload.

• **Non-permissible circumstances**
  Extensions will not be granted where the relevant Course Coordinator/Program Director is not satisfied that the student took reasonable measures to avoid the circumstances that contributed to the student being unable to submit the progressive assessment.

Matters such as those listed below are not grounds for an extension:
  - arrangements (including overseas travel); or
  - misreading a due date; or
  - social and leisure events, including family commitments and sporting or cultural commitments (other than at state, national or international representative level)

**Applications for extensions**

• **Medical grounds:** Applications for extension on medical grounds shall be made by lodging the *Application for Extension of Progressive Assessment* form and supporting documentation at the location outlined in Section 5.3 of the Electronic Course Profile for the course concerned.

• **Exceptional circumstances:** Applications for extension on the grounds of exceptional circumstances shall be made to the relevant Course Coordinator/Program Director by lodging the *Application for Extension of Progressive Assessment* form and a personal statement outlining the grounds for the application at the location and by the due date outlined in Section 5.3 of the Electronic Course Profile for the course in which this application is made. If the exceptional circumstances are such that the student cannot reasonably be expected to have complied with these conditions, a case should be made as to why these conditions could not be met.

• **Outcome of application:** Students will be advised of the outcome of their application via their student email.

**Students with a disability**

Students who have a chronic health condition are recommended to seek assistance from a Disability Advisor, UQ Student Services, and refer to University policy, HUPP 3.40.7 *The Provision of Alternative Academic Arrangements for Students with a Disability*.

**Penalty for overdue progressive assessment**

Where an item of progressive assessment (including essays, assignments, case studies, laboratory reports, take home examinations, etc) is not submitted by the due date and time, a penalty will be levied at the rate specified in Section 5.3 of the Electronic Course Profile of the course concerned. For
example, a penalty may be the loss of 10% of the marks available for the assessment item per day (or part thereof) that the assessment is overdue.

\[\text{http://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/3.10.02-assessment}\]
\[\text{http://www.uq.edu.au/myadvisor/?page=150252&pid=150252&ntemplate=690}\]