

STAFF AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT VALUE AND WORKLOAD

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BACKGROUND AND AIM

As teachers, we aim to design valuable and authentic assessment which engages students purposefully enabling them to demonstrate learning outcomes appropriately. However, the style of assessment and extent of engagement required by the student may differ between subjects and is dependent upon factors such as year level and discipline. Engagement with and design of assessment is further impacted by workload of students and staff respectively. This project explored staff and student perceptions of assessment in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Technology at the University of Adelaide, allowing the co-creation of guidelines for assessment design/practice.

DESIGN AND METHODS

Students completed surveys in-class (n=98) or online (n=51) with students also participating in 4 focus groups (n=25). Academics completed an online survey (n=34) with n=25 being interviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regardless of discipline, students prefer to have multiple, and different types, of assessments with low weightings over a semester to enable formative feedback and to demonstrate their learning more easily. They acknowledged the impact on academic workload with most academics indicating that 4-5 assessments per subject were ideal over the semester. Students usually equated the weighting of tasks with the expected workload whereas many academics tended to weight assessment based on the importance of the learning outcomes. Most academics (56%) did not provide guidance to students about their expectations for required workload for individual assignments (at different grade levels).

Final exams were seen by students as the least valuable type of assessment to demonstrate their attainment of learning outcomes. Interestingly, students acknowledged the academics' viewpoint that final invigilated exams are essential (*'to stop cheating or plagiarism'*) and suggested that there should be a hurdle on the final exam but that it be weighted less than 50%. Group assignments were also ranked as less valuable by students and academics. Students did not always see the relevance of working in a group (*'other than to reduce the workload of the academic'*) and were often stressed about equal distribution of workload and/or the impact of relying on others for their grade. Academics acknowledged the need to improve how we teach groupwork skills and manage peer assessment.

Students thought the most valuable assessments were low-weighting, online, open-book, weekly quizzes/tests with multiple choice questions (MCQs) because they were *'for learning'*, did not require as much time and were often designed by academics to require higher order learning (such as application and synthesis). Academics indicated that quizzes and mid-semester exams were valuable for reducing pressure of the final exam on students. However, the design and development of appropriate MCQs increased workloads because *'you have to be clever'* and it *'just takes too much time'*. Practical reports and practical-based activities were also ranked as extremely valuable in the surveys by students and academics. However, focus group discussions with students suggested this was contingent on the relevance of the report or activity to a future role/career.

In conclusion, students are often most concerned about fairness and consistency in assessment but also had a limited understanding of the rationale for assessment design and required input. Therefore, the co-created guidelines include a suggestion that academics provide detailed expectations (especially relating to workload) and information about the purpose of the assessment and its design.