MAPPING ASSESSMENT TASKS AS AN INDEX OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT WORKLOAD

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BACKGROUND

Modern assessment practices frequently embrace continuous assessment rather than single point end-of-semester summative assessment. Indeed, studies suggest pedagogical advantages with providing ongoing low stakes summative e-assessments (Holmes, 2015) with a recent systematic review suggesting that while limited, studies on formative quizzes are mostly positive (Morris, Perry, & Wardle, 2021). However, these studies tend to be completed in isolation without examining overall student workload and the possibility of over-assessment. Increased stress, anxiety and time management issues in undergraduate students led me to examine the workload of students engaged in full-time study in either the Bachelor of Agricultural Science or Biomedicine at La Trobe University.

AIMS

The objective of this study was to map the assessment requirements of students completing degrees in Agricultural Science or Biomedicine at La Trobe University as an index of full-time study workload.

DESIGN AND METHODS

The number, type, weighting, and due dates for assessments were obtained from subject coordinators and mapped across the 12-week semester plus end-of-semester assessment period. Subjects were combined based on degree structure with several possible combinations of electives mapped based on enrolment data. The number and weighting of tasks was then calculated for each of the twelve semester weeks plus end of semester based on a full-time (4 subject) load.

RESULTS

The number of assessment tasks for a fulltime student was greater in first year with an average of 55 tasks compared with 30 tasks for second and third year. Weighting of individual assessment tasks ranged from 0.83% to 30% during semester and 10 to 50% after semester, with students completing from 0-6 assessment tasks in any given week. Clear peak assessment times were notable at weeks 4, 6 and 12 coinciding with policy of early assessment by week 4, the mid-semester and end-of-semester periods.

CONCLUSIONS

Ongoing small stakes assessments coupled with larger summative assessments, when considered across multiple subjects lead to increases in student workload, potentially resulting in over-assessment that impedes rather than supports student learning.

REFERENCES

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