

## Assessment & Feedback Processes – Helen Cameron HRISS - UniSA

### Introduction

- This paper examines some of the challenges related to managing assessment and feedback in larger courses under current conditions within universities. Students' backgrounds prior to beginning university study have changed and as academics we now struggle to achieve conditions that render learning accessible, relevant and engaging for our students.
- I briefly discuss some ways improve feedback processes and to support tutors in achieving assessment consistency.

## General trends in uni students' commitment & engagement

- Diversity in students' educational backgrounds is now the norm – in reference to both skills for and attitudes towards learning
- Competing demands on student's time leads to 'zero tolerance for delay', with many students' minds 'on their next part-time job rather than on the pleasures of learning' (Ramsden 2003 p.4) .
- Many students need help in developing effective learning patterns, including how to understand, value and seek feedback

## Assessment Consistency Issues

- A key challenge with multiple assessors as in large courses with multiple tutors, is that of providing consistent guidelines in grading students' work. James, McInnis and Devlin (2002) suggest there is currently *some lack of precision* in assessment in Australian university degrees.
- The assess/assist dilemma may mean tutors' feelings (positive or negative) about students may impact on consistency and impartiality in assessment standards.
- Transparency in monitoring marking standards and grade spread is needed without imposing bell-shaped curves that can compromise *criterion based* assessment.

## Some Strategies to Support Consistency in Assessment

- **Clarify assessment criteria and grading standards** at the course onset –with students and tutors
- Have **early course meetings** to discuss & monitor tutors' assessment expectations - and tutors' assessment **work loads**
- Design **clear and simple** assessment criteria
- Provide **examples of criterion based feedback phrases** for tutors
- **Meet with tutors** on several occasions to discuss assessment and grading in reference to agreed assignment criteria

### Tutorials as important but contested sites for 'learning about learning'

- **Students' first experience** of learning, assessment and feedback is through tutorials and **their tutors**
- Sessional tutors as well as **assessing students' work with consistency and fairness and offering constructive feedback**, need to **build students' individual commitment** and to actively nurture their **engagement in learning**
- **Class sizes and time pressure** means that students' individual needs, quality feedback and assessment consistency **all compete for time and space**
- **Because tutorial space (and tutor's space) for such discussion is at a premium**, I run 1.5 hrs tuts in rooms **booked for 2 hours** - to provide space for feedback between tutors and students

### Contextualising consequential feedback

- **Consequential feedback (Orrell 2006) is contextualised** into well-timed and formative assessment activities so students can work on improving their later work **based on targeted feedback**.
- **Feedback on assessment at the end of or after courses, is usually a waste of tutors' efforts and is of little benefit to students**
- Contextualising this feedback process as **a regular part of the tutor/student relationship** establishes 'dialogue'

### Strategies for making feedback 'consequential' in learning

- **Course assessment timetables** are structured so early feedback is **consequentially related to assessment tasks (Orrell, 2006)**
- **Expectations** about **how much feedback** should occur on student's work is made clear - with tutors and students - **before, during and after** assessment
- **Models of useful feedback phrases** are provided **for tutors-** to accompany assessment tasks
- All effective feedback focuses on what students **did well**, what they **can improve** and provides guidance for **how students can go about this**

### Other benefits of consequential feedback

- Courses with their **assessment timetables organised** so students **learn from feedback** on assessments are more supportive than **sudden-death** assessment processes
- Students are encouraged to discuss **learning styles and processes, grade standards, and how to use feedback** - so **learning about learning becomes part of the class content**
- **Students' engagement in their own**

## Summary & conclusion

- I believe current circumstances mean we need to direct personal, professional and material resources towards **positive and engaged assessment and learning experiences** for all students.
- Ramsden says we cannot wait for additional material resources. 'It is up to us as teachers to take control of improving university teaching, especially by listening respectfully to our students about how we can help them to learn' (Ramsden 2003, p.253).
- As a start then, let's work at **ensuring assessment in our courses is consistent & formative and that feedback is consequential.**

*Thanks for listening*

## References for PPT

- Brown G, Bull J & Pendlebury M (1997) *Assessing Student Learning in Higher Education*, Routledge, London.
- James, R, McInnis, C & Devlin, M (2002) *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities*, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.
- Orrell, J (2006) 'Feedback on learning achievement: rhetoric & reality' *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol.11, No.4 pp.441-456
- Ramsden, P (2003) *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, Routledge Falmer, London