The University of Sydney

UniServe Science at the University of Sydney

First Year Experience Forum: Assessment

Thursday 29 September 2005

8:30 am	Registration	Eastern Avenue Lecture Theatre (EALT) Foyer
9:15 am	Welcome and Introduction	EALT
9:30 am	Invited speakers	EALT
9:30 am	**R. J. Kruhlak, T. G. Mullins, C. Coghill, Heong Kee Ng, University of Auckland** *Online assessment in first year physics* We report on ***O****nline* ***AS****sessment and* ***I****ntegrated* ***S****tudy* (OASIS) software used in first year physics courses at the University of Auckland. OASIS allows us to conduct flexible online practices and assessments in our large first year physics courses. Six online practice questions are released to students one week before an online assessment allowing the students sufficient time to master new concepts through practice. The assessment is conducted online with four similar questions to those in the practice. Some advantages of OASIS assignments over traditional assignments, namely instant feedback, multiple opportunities for students to practice key concepts, follow-on and automatic marking of assessments, and detailed statistics about student results and usage, will be presented. We will discuss student participation rates, feedback and outcomes for advancing physics and life sciences students.	EALT
9:50 am	**Imke Tammen, Rosanne Taylor and Paul Sheehy, The University of Sydney** *Blended learning in Cell Biology - a first year unit of study in Veterinary Science* Over the past three years we have implemented on-line and group learning activities in Cell Biology 1A and 1B, two first year units of study in the BVSs degree in the Faculty of Veterinary Science. The new learning activities provide a more interactive approach engaging the large classes (130 students) in learning and are designed to integrate the units' learning and teaching activities with development of graduate attributes in research and inquiry, professional communication and team work. In Cell Biology 1A face-to-face learning activities are enriched with four compulsory on-line interactive modules, which focus on the preparation for practical classes. Students engage in interactive individual activities, structured group discussions & learning activities, and formative and summative assessment tasks. Time during lectures and tutorials is used to introduce students to *WebCT* and to discuss the aim and the outcomes of the activities. In Cell Biology 1B a group learning activity was designed to support students learning about DNA. Students developed practical skills through a problem solving practical class in DNA diagnostics, they also worked in teams to critique and present current DNA diagnostic research papers in a veterinary context. Students developed skills in professional autonomy through peer feedback and assessment of the group presentations in class. These structured group learning activities are not only addressing a range of graduate attributes but also assist in the year 1 transition phase by stimulating the development of a learning community.	EALT

10:10 am	**Bronwyn O'Brien, University of Technology, Sydney** *Enhancing student learning through formative assessment* There is a need to strategically reposition student assessment to enhance teaching and learning. The greatest improvement to student learning is achieved by providing students with constructive feedback. Students rank formative feedback as the most important but least satisfactory experience they have of teaching and learning. This is because the process of commenting on students' work is often not separated from the grading process. Yet students use formative feedback as the primary tool to guide their understanding of what is valued in the learning goals. A collaborative project is underway to improve the quality of formative feedback across the Australian Technology Network universities. The initial objective was to determine the barriers to the use of formative feedback in different discipline areas. From the academics' perspective, formative feedback is either undervalued or considered to be a formidable, if not impossible, task in large classes. The second stage of the project involved the construction of an online software tool that provides a template of effective comments on students' written work. This software has been designed to minimise academics' workload in providing enhanced and timely feedback. The software is currently being trialled within the life sciences to promote the development of generic skills. This novel electronic prototype allows assessors to annotate students' work with digits, where each number corresponds to a specific feedback comment from an existing bank that can be supplemented with additional comments appropriate to the particular task. Upon completion of marking, a feedback sheet is generated, which can be printed or emailed to students. Statistical analyses of the comments used in assessing students' work will enable identification of common misconceptions. This presentation outlines the strategy being taken to develop the tool, describing the teaching and learning principles that underpin its development and how it differs from existing feedback tools.	EALT
10:40 am	**Morning Tea**	EALT Foyer
11:10 am	Breakout Groups with facilitators - each group to address a series of questions	Rooms 310, 311 & 312
1:00 pm	**Lunch**	EALT Foyer
2:00 pm	Breakout groups report back	EALT
3:00 pm	Current project reports	EALT
3:00 pm	**Pauline M Ross, University of Western Sydney** *Self assessment: a powerful learning tool to improve performance* Encouraging students to reflect on what they know and do not know is perhaps the most powerful way whereby students and tutors understand what they do not understand. Recent studies have found that the quality of students' work can be improved through self assessment practices (Boud 2003), although the level of the learner and the level of the unit can influence the correspondence between the marks the students award themselves and those the teacher awards. Although, there are these discrepancies, insights from studies such as Falchikov and Boud (1989), may provide us with a way forward. This presentation will be an overview of how self assessment has been used to increase student performance and monitor progress of students in a large first year Biology class at the University of Western Sydney. In this unit, at the Hawkesbury campus, self-assessment was used as a strategy to enable students to 'learn how to learn' as a process in itself. Self assessment may be a promising formative assessment strategy to improve performance and encourage students to take responsibility for their learning to progress in economically restraining times. Boud, D. (2003) The impact of self-assessment on achievement: The effects of self-assessment training on performance in external examinations. *Assessment in Education*, **10** (2), 209 Falchikov, N. and Boud, D (1989) Students self-assessment in Higher Education: A meta analysis. *Review of Education Research*, **59**(4), 395-430.	EALT

3:30 pm	**Afternoon tea**	EALT Foyer
4:00 pm	**Valda Miller & Elwyn Oldfield, University of Queensland** *Building bridges and growing branches: designing learning activities to support self- and peer- assessment practices* While assessment requirements define how the curriculum should be developed, formative assessment is the diagnostic tool that provides constructive feedback to teaching staff and students over the course of the semester. By focusing on deriving formative information from the task and not from the student, students can identify areas of inconsistency in their knowledge and amend their learning practices accordingly. Ideally, formative learning tasks, or learning activities, ought to be designed to optimally address the diverse learning styles, abilities, motivations, and academic backgrounds of the students. As well, delivery should be flexible and the learning environment one that encourages the student to explore, apply and assess their new learning non-judgmentally. In keeping with the scenario, interactively based study sessions for students of first level courses have been timetabled in the core curricula for Biology, Chemistry and Statistics based disciplines. Learning activities can be prescribed by teaching staff, or designed by the second and third year undergraduate student learning facilitators in response to student learning requirements. Delivery can be online or, for the most part, paper-based or face-to-face. However, activities are structured so that students are encouraged to work together in groups. Not only can these activities vary in their mode of delivery, context, and procedure but two or three diversely styled tasks may be created for the same session. Hence each session can address a diversity of learning needs. In this small group environment, students studying the course together are able to peer assess each other while simultaneously assessing their own progressive learning development. How these learning activities help students to process and consolidate formative information which is aligned with course learning objectives and progressive summative assessment tasks will be discussed.	EALT
4:30 pm	**Discussion and way forward**	EALT