Identifying students at risk: strategies used for a large class

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Problems

• Large first year biology classes
  – 1700 students
  – lecture classes of 500; lab size 60
• Varied academic background
  – very heterogeneous; some without biology
  – some with little interest in biology
• Student approaches to learning
  – tendency to employ rote learning and to like spoon feeding – particularly with respect to exams

First Year on Campus
National review of Australian Universities

• Status of teaching in first year
• Unpack the curriculum
• Build a sense of student identity
• Monitor student attitudes and experiences
• **Give early systematic feedback**
• Engineer opportunities for collaborative study

Identification of ‘at risk’

• Quiz marks
• WebCT
• Report writing
• Staff feedback to unit coordinator
• What else? ---
• Mock exam

Practice Exam

• Hard copy given to students
• Delivery procedure as an exam
• Marking of paper online

example

Directions for those “at risk”

• Students identify their risk level
• Originally a set of face-to-face tutorials (not sustainable)
• Now provision of a set of revision modules for students to access for help
  – sustainable
  – multifunctional
Use and perceptions of usefulness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did not use/ Did not do (%)</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Extremely useful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking mid course practice exam</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking mid course practice exam</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived usefulness of mid course exam for supporting learning and understanding

Reflections

- Student access problems & solutions
  - Internet/software conflicts with picking up the answers
  - From 2004, exam marking template will be on the CD complete with software etc
  - Answers will be available for uploading at appropriate time
- Transferability of the mock exam concept

Have we made a difference?

- Hard to know who is at risk in Semester 1
- We know those who use the marking scheme find it supportive of learning
- We do not know if the poorer students gain appreciably from using the marking scheme
  However:
  - The process does raise awareness about exams
  - The exam generates much discussion about questions and their answers