



## GUIDELINES ON ASSESSMENT

(in accordance with Academic Council R158/95, 278/95, 72/04)

These Guidelines deal with the formal assessment of work contributing to the final marks achieved by candidates for undergraduate and master's coursework degrees, for undergraduate diplomas, and for postgraduate certificates and diplomas, in the units in which they are enrolled, including assessments for coursework and examinations. Inevitably they also touch on matters which contribute to sound assessment practice including: identification of clear outcomes for courses and units; good communication between students and their teachers; commitment to regular critical review of existing practices; and acceptance of the imperative of open and transparent processes.

### 1. Relevant Legislation and Rules

- 1.1 The University is committed by policy and legislation to ensuring that no student is discriminated against because of their race, sex, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, marital status, pregnancy, religious or political conviction, family responsibility or family status. To achieve this aim the University recognises that it must dismantle any remaining barriers, including attitudinal barriers, that limit students' opportunities to gain access to, and achieve success in their studies.
- 1.2 Under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 1992 (Western Australia), students may seek access to their own examination scripts and to any examiners' comments written on or about their scripts, as well as to any correspondence or other material relating specifically to the assessment of those scripts. In those circumstances, schools would normally be expected to provide students with access to these materials on request.
- 1.3 University General Rules for Academic Courses, available:  
<http://handbooks.uwa.edu.au/rules/GeneralRules>

### 2. Relevant AVCC and HERDSA Documents

The University has endorsed the AVCC *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities* (2002) (available [http://www.avcc.edu.au/documents/publications/Principles\\_final\\_Dec02.pdf](http://www.avcc.edu.au/documents/publications/Principles_final_Dec02.pdf)) which contain material relevant to assessment practice.

### 3. Relevance of University Mission Statement

(available <http://www.admin.uwa.edu.au/reg/stratplan.html>)

- 3.1 The following are extracts from the "Values" section of the Mission Statement:
  - The University is committed to the general principle that it should strive for excellence in all its activities, judged against the highest international standards.
  - ... the University must not only be responsive to a changing environment, it has a creative and leadership role to play in exploring and appraising new possibilities.
  - The University fosters the values of openness, honesty, tolerance,... fairness and responsibility in social and moral, as well as academic, ... matters.
  - The University is committed to the regular evaluation of its activities and processes ...
  - Decisions within the University are made explicitly, openly and consistently on the basis of relevant information, and as an integral part of the University's accountability to its staff and students ...

3.2 The following are extracts from the "Goals" section of the Mission Statement:

- The University aims to provide courses of study and a learning environment at the highest possible quality to meet individual ...needs ...
- The University is committed to providing an environment of equal opportunity, free from discrimination, for existing ... students ... in the pursuit of their academic goals and the realisation of their potential to contribute to the achievement of the University's mission.

#### **4. Relevance of Charter of Student Rights**

The following are extracts from the Charter of Student Rights (available <http://www.secretariat.uwa.edu.au/home/policies/charter>):

- 4.3 Every student has the right of access to accurate, timely and sufficient information concerning each unit in which they might enrol, including timetabling, assessment details, fees and attendance requirements.
- 4.4 Every student has the right to assessment that is valid, educative, explicit, reliable and fair.
- 6.1 Every student has the right to appeal or register a complaint or grievance against any academic assessment, academic procedure, administrative procedure, perceived discrimination or harassment, or the abrogation of any right stated in this Charter.

#### **5. Need for Guidelines on Assessment**

- 5.1. It is clear that if the University is to abide by its stated values and meet its goals, as set out in 3 above, it must have in place Guidelines on Assessment which are designed to encourage best practice on the part of all those involved in the assessment of student coursework and examinations, as well as on the part of the students whose work is subject to assessment. Sound assessment practices are in the best interests of all concerned and should ensure that few students have cause to resort to formal appeals against assessment.
- 5.2. The University recognises that "best practice" can legitimately vary between areas of study and does not therefore wish to be excessively prescriptive. The emphasis of these guidelines is therefore on creating an expectation that all parties involved in assessment are aware of their responsibilities, on suggesting a range of good practices to be considered in relation to assessment, and on encouraging the adoption of these practices.

#### **6. Purposes of Assessment**

- 6.1. Formal assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and as such should enhance effective learning and contribute, both short and long-term, to improved teaching.
- 6.2. In terms of the Educational Principles of the University (available <http://www.catl.osds.uwa.edu.au/obe/principles>), as set out in the Strategic Plan, "students at the University of Western Australia are encouraged and facilitated to develop the ability and desire:
  - to master the subject matter, concepts and techniques of their chosen discipline(s) at internationally-recognised levels and standards;
  - to acquire the skills required to learn, and to continue through life to learn, from a variety of sources and experiences;
  - to adapt acquired knowledge to new situations;
  - to communicate in English clearly, concisely and logically;

- to acquire the skills needed to embrace rapidly-changing technologies in a global environment;
- to think and reason logically and creatively;
- to undertake problem identification, analysis and solution;
- to question accepted wisdom and be open to new ideas and possibilities;
- to acquire mature judgement and responsibility in ethical, moral, social, and practical, as well as academic matters;
- to work independently and in a team;
- to acquire cross-cultural and other competencies to take a citizenship and leadership role in the local, national or international community.”

Assessment practices should take these principles into account and wherever possible provide a measure of the success of the University's students in achieving the skills listed. Clearly, however the level and kind of course in which a student is involved will dictate greater or lesser emphasis in each of the skills, and this is a matter for judgement by those involved in determining the curriculum and the assessment methods for each course.

6.3. More specifically, formal assessment serves the following purposes, among others:

- Contributing to the student learning process.
- Providing students with feedback on their level of achievement, and providing the opportunity for them to understand and benefit from understanding the reasons for the assessment given.
- Providing students with an understanding of the standards of work expected for assessment at specific levels.
- Providing staff with information about the effectiveness of their teaching.
- Providing a fair judgement of a student's level of achievement.
- Providing an indicator of likely future academic attainment.

## 7. Responsibilities

- 7.1. The responsibility for best practice in assessment is shared by many groups and individuals within the University community. If the institution is to achieve best practice across its various schools and disciplines, it is essential that all participants in the process recognise and are willing to accept, their responsibilities.

The paragraphs which follow set out the University's expectations of the various roles to be played by the Academic Board, the Academic Council, the Teaching and Learning Committee, faculties, boards of examiners, schools, staff and students in relation to assessment.

- 7.2. The Academic Board and/or its Executive Committee, the Academic Council - is responsible for the formulation of University-wide policy in areas related to academic assessment.

The following University-wide policies have been established by the Board/Council:

### 7.2.1. Timing of Deferred and Supplementary Examinations

R56/94                    *that for all faculties other than the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, the supplementary and deferred examinations from 1995 onwards be held in the*

*week commencing four weeks before the start of first semester and in week two of second semester.*

### 7.2.2. Duration of Examinations administered by Examinations Office

- R16/94 (1) *that from Semester 2 of 1994, all examinations administered **by the Examinations Office** be of a "standard" duration of either two hours (+ ten minutes) or three hours (+ ten minutes);*
- (2) *that such standard examination periods provide, where appropriate and practicable, for consecutive examinations in sub-sets or components of a unit (i.e. two consecutive one-hour examinations or two consecutive 1.5 hour examinations);*
- (3) *that examinations of standard duration have a **minimum** reading time of 10 minutes, but that students may be advised to extend that time for specific examinations;*
- (4) *that a school offering an examination of **standard** duration not be required to administer the examination itself, regardless of the number of candidates;*
- (5) *that any school offering an examination of **non-standard** duration be required to administer the examination itself, at a time scheduled by the Examinations Office, in a venue or venues not used by the Examinations Office for standard duration examinations, and in accordance with the general principles governing the conduct of all University examinations.*

### 7.2.3. Release of Final Unit Results to Students

- R17/94 *that with effect from the examination period in Semester 2 of 1994, final results for all units in courses at all levels be produced as both percentage marks and letter grades, and that both results appear in notifications of examination results and on academic records.*

**(Note:** This resolution excludes results in supplementary examinations which are recorded as Pass or Fail.)

### 7.2.4. Procedure for Appeals Against Academic Assessment

If a student wishes to appeal they should follow the Procedure for Appeals against Academic Assessment, available at <http://www.secretariat.uwa.edu.au/home/policies>

### 7.2.5. Return of Work to Undergraduate Students

- (R278/95) The Academic Council supports the following statements in relation to the return of work to undergraduate students, excluding honours students:
- (1) For each unit offered in an undergraduate degree (excluding honours), each school sets a deadline by which marked assessments other than formal examinations will be available for collection and feedback.
- (2) The deadline referred to in (1) shall in all but exceptional circumstances not be later than 4 weeks after the required date of submission or, in the case of a late submission, 4 weeks after the date of the late submission.
- (3) The exceptional circumstances referred to in (2) may include an agreement between a unit co-ordinator and all students in the unit that the deadline shall exceed 4 weeks.

- 7.3. The Teaching and Learning Committee - is expected to consider a broad range of matters relating to the improvement of assessment practices University-wide. Among other things, it is expected to:
- identify vacuums in relation to University policy on assessment and recommend to the Academic Council action to be taken to remedy these.
  - commission the Institutional Research Unit (IRU) to undertake research relevant to investigations of assessment practice in the University.
  - consider innovative approaches to assessment used in other universities in Australia and overseas, and their possible relevance to this University.
  - monitor faculty policies on assessment.
  - disseminate examples of best practice to faculties.
  - provide advice to faculties on assessment practice.
- 7.4. Faculties/Faculty Boards - are responsible for the formulation of faculty-wide policy in areas related to academic assessment undertaken by schools offering units in their degrees. Such policy should cover:
- deferred, supplementary, and qualifying examinations, passes in "lesser" units, passes by year, and satisfactory progress.
  - progress status (eg. good standing, on probation, suspended, excluded) to be applied on the basis of progress in terms of academic assessment outcomes.
  - academic misconduct, including cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication and falsification of data.

Faculties might also consider such issues as:

- the establishment of course outcomes for all courses offered by the faculty (to enable unit outcomes to mirror course outcomes where possible).
- requirements for a minimum examination component in final assessment in units in one or more years of a course.
- requirements for minimum essay or maximum multiple choice component in examinations.
- a faculty-wide approach to the late submission of work by students and the penalties to be applied (eg. loss of marks etc.).

Faculties are also normally expected to:

- take responsibility for reminding schools about their responsibilities in relation to assessment practices.
- foster a climate in which innovative and flexible approaches to assessment are encouraged.
- urge schools to develop assessment strategies which encourage students to engage deeply with the content material of the course rather than learn by rote.
- consider the assessment procedures proposed for all units offered by their schools, before introduction of the units.
- encourage schools to review regularly the appropriateness/effectiveness of their assessment processes including benchmarking against other comparable universities.

- encourage schools to incorporate assessment methods which are consistent with degree course outcomes (where these have been agreed) as well as unit outcomes.
- monitor whether the amount of work required for assessment in each unit is broadly comparable to other units within the course.
- ensure that, as far as possible, the timing of assessment across units within the same course/program is appropriately spaced and does not place an undue burden on students.
- take responsibility for ensuring reasonable consistency in assessment standards for their constituent schools.

Faculties involved in combined courses for two degrees should monitor the policies of their "partner" faculties in these courses, and ensure that their assessment policies are compatible.

- 7.5. Deans - have a significant role to play in stimulating faculties to address the matters listed in Clause 7.4 and in educating and encouraging schools in their faculties to address the matters listed in 7.6.
- 7.6. Schools - are responsible for determining, within University policy and faculty policy, assessment methods for the units they teach.

In accordance with Rule 2.1.19 concerning assessment mechanism statements, schools are required to provide to students clear statements about the assessment methods for the units they offer within the first two weeks of semester in which they are offered.

They are also normally expected to:

- provide clear statements about the learning outcomes for the units they offer in school handouts on those units. Learning outcomes clearly and explicitly identify what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do as a result of a learning process.
- ensure that assessment requirements and marking criteria for units are transparent and defensibly align with the specified unit outcomes and are consistent with the discipline, level and points values of those units.
- ensure that in each unit careful consideration be given to the number of assessment components, to guard against the possibility of under or over-assessing.
- ensure that the time allowed for completion of assessed work is adequate.
- ensure that, as far as possible, the timing of assessment across units within the same course/program is appropriately spaced and does not place an undue burden on students.
- as far as possible, provide a range of means of demonstrating mastery of the subject.
- design assessment systems to ensure that opportunities to plagiarise are minimised and other forms of cheating are likely to be detected.
- periodically review assessment practices in light of best practice and relevant research.
- mark consistently using explicit criteria that has been made available to students prior to the assessment with clear articulation of what constitutes the essential difference between the expectations of scripts awarded different grades.
- provide for cross-marking of scripts where at all possible, particularly where marks are on the borderline between pass/fail or on the borderlines between grades.
- establish and promulgate school expectations on timely marking of assessed course components.

- establish and promulgate school expectations in relation to providing early and constructive feedback to students on assessed course components other than final examinations.
- establish and promulgate school expectations in relation to providing information and explanation to students querying their assessments.
- establish procedures for checking that proposed examination papers for each unit are consistent with the level, outcomes and content of the unit and that the presentation of the questions and any instructions is clear and unambiguous.
- establish procedures for eliminating arithmetical errors in assessment through routine checking.
- ensure new staff are informed on assessment policy, practice and procedures.
- involve students routinely in discussion of assessment practices in the school.
- provide, where possible and with faculty approval, alternative assessment methods for students with disabilities, permanent or temporary, which make the standard methods of assessment inappropriate.

7.7. Unit Co-ordinators - are normally expected to:

- be familiar with University policies and guidelines relating to teaching and learning.
- ensure teaching and learning practices align with the assessment and the desired learning outcomes.
- review regularly the alignment of the existing assessment approach to the outcomes of the unit for which they are responsible.
- ensure that students are made aware by the teaching staff of the range of possible formats in which examination questions for a unit may be posed.
- ensure that all markers of coursework/scripts for the unit are appropriately briefed.
- ensure that faculty/school policies on assessment are adhered to in relation to the unit for which they are responsible.
- be prepared to explain the grade awarded for a piece of work in terms of the learning outcomes and marking criteria set for the unit.
- be prepared to arrange for students to view their marked examination scripts on request, and to discuss them with an appropriate staff member.

7.8. Staff members - are normally expected to:

- employ teaching and learning practices that align with the assessment and the desired learning outcomes.
- be available to students for reasonable levels of feedback.
- accommodate the needs of students with disabilities.
- give students a clear explanation of the grade they have awarded for any piece of work in terms of the learning outcomes and marking criteria set for the unit.
- help students to identify weaknesses apparent in their work and suggest approaches to remedying these.
- contribute to discussions on assessment in their schools.

- accept responsibility for the safe custody of students' scripts on and off the University campus.
- take due care to ensure that the assessment tasks and examination questions they set are clear and unambiguous.
- avail themselves of opportunities to enhance their understanding of assessment processes (e.g. attending relevant teaching and learning professional development workshops and seminars).

It is hoped that staff members on study leave in other tertiary institutions will inform themselves on the assessment practices in use in their disciplines or closely cognate disciplines at those institutions, and report back to their schools on return.

#### 7.9. Examiners

In accordance with Committee of Deans R10/87, approved by the Vice-Chancellor on 27 February 1987:

- Examiners or their delegates must be present in the examination venues at the commencement of the examinations for which they are responsible and must remain in the venues during the required reading time set by them.
- Examiners or their delegates must be available during the examinations for which they are responsible, to readily answer queries from invigilators or examination office staff members.
- Examiners or their delegates will be required to attend examination venues immediately to answer any queries that require alterations to their papers, or when more than one student has requested the same information and the invigilators consider they cannot convey the answer accurately to the student.

7.10. Heads of schools - have a significant role to play in overseeing the implementation of the matters in Clause 7.6, in encouraging their staff to address the matters in Clauses 7.7, and 7.8, and ensuring that they comply with the requirements of Clause 7.9.

7.11 Students - are normally expected to:

- inform themselves of unit outcomes, proposed assessment methods and marking criteria and seek advice on any aspect of these which is not clear.
- seek the advice of the appropriate unit coordinator, course coordinator and head of school if they believe the proposed assessment method for a particular unit to be unfair.
- maximise their chances of success in a unit through regular attendance at all classes, completion of appropriate work, and utilisation of support facilities.
- seek feedback on the assessment of their work and advice on how to remedy evident weaknesses.
- seek early assistance with learning skills and examination technique if necessary.
- seek early resolution, through the unit coordinator, course coordinator and head of school, as appropriate, of any problem in their working relationship with their tutor/supervisor.
- behave with honesty and integrity in relation to assignments and examinations.
- adhere to deadlines set for submission of work.
- make known to unit coordinators any circumstances, either physical or personal, that will impact on their ability to undertake their assessment tasks or examinations at the earliest opportunity.
- inform themselves on examination timetables.

- inform themselves via University Handbooks of the procedures for seeking deferred examinations, special consideration etc.

## 7.12 Registrar's Office

### 7.12.1 The Examinations Office is required to:

- Organise final examinations for all examinations of two and three hours in accordance with the policy approved by Academic Council Resolution 16/94.
- Provide Boards of Examiners with faculty policies relevant to final assessment.
- Wherever practicable, enable students with disabilities, permanent or temporary, to take examinations in appropriate conditions.
- Process and issue results, in accordance with the policy approved by Academic Council in Resolution 17/94, in the minimum time.

### 7.12.2 The Examinations Officer is encouraged to:

- Provide feedback to heads of schools on matters within the school's control which contribute to difficulties in examinations.

Cases relating to academic misconduct in examinations will be dealt with in accordance with Statute No. 17 Student Discipline and the Regulations for Student Conduct and Discipline, available <http://www.secretariat.uwa.edu.au/home/policies/discip>

## 7.13 Boards of Examiners

Each Faculty's Board of Examiners is responsible for considering the results of examinations and reporting them to the Registrar.

Boards of Examiners may also recommend to faculties on matters relating to assessment which have come to their attention.

5 July 1995  
Updated: October 2001  
Amended 3 June 2004 by Teaching and Learning Committee