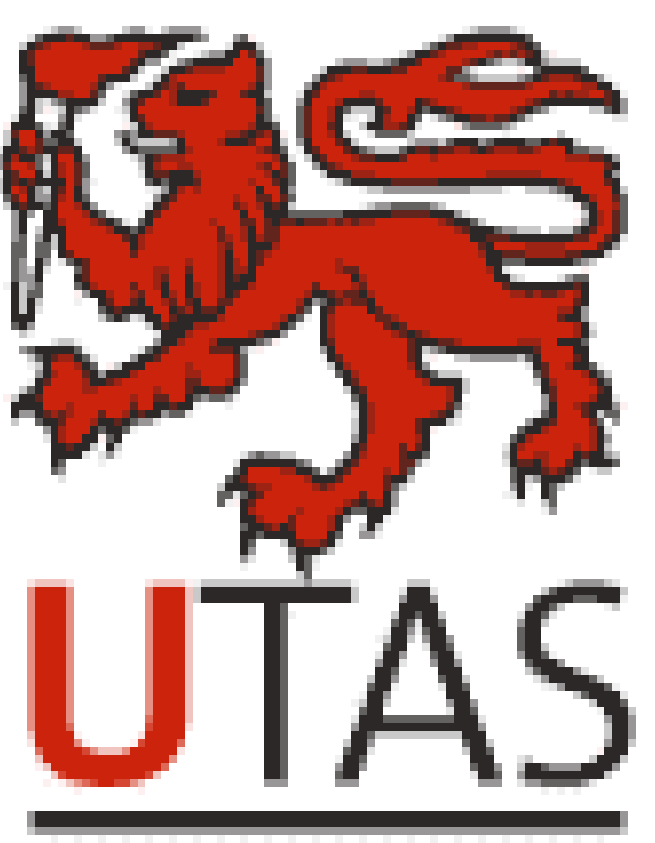




Flexible assessment: a case study – do student choices vary with experience?

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1) The idea

- People with different personality types learn in different ways: teaching flexibly can accommodate these different learning styles
- Less emphasis has been placed on the merits of students being **assessed** in different ways, e.g. students having input into the way in which they are assessed
- Students experience a sense of increased ownership, engagement (Caitlin et al 1999) responsibility for their learning when offered involvement or choice in assessment processes (Ackerman et al 1997; Bickham et al 2001)

4) Reasons for choices

2008 students after completing full 2nd yr

Chose Sem 1 option because:

- “Fairer, gives more even spread if you muck one up”
- “Workload for pracs is higher, so [prac test] should be worth more”

Chose Sem 2 option because:

- “Major assign. took more time relative to other pieces so should be worth more”
- “Less stress later in semester to have higher weighted item [assignment] earlier [than prac test]”

2009 students after completing Sem 1 2nd yr

Chose Sem 1 option (which they had experienced) because:

- “Prac work should be of equal value to theory, fairer, more balanced”
- “25% is just too big/scary for a single assessment piece”

Chose Sem 2 option (which they had NOT experienced) because:

- “Assignments take longer and are more difficult so should be worth more [than the final prac test]”
- “Tests are scary so should be worth less [than major assignment]”

2) The project

To engage students with their own assessment I have offered flexible weightings of major assessment pieces in 2nd yr Zoology unit. Zoology students, at different stages of their 2nd yr program, were invited to select their preferred assessment weightings

3) Student assessment options

The assessment weighting options were:

Sem 1

- 5% critique (wk3)
- 5% open book prac test (wk5)
- 20% major ass (wk12)
- 20% open book prac test (wk13)
- (50% exam)

Sem 2

- 5% open book prac test (wk5)
- 25% major ass (wk8)
- 5% res. task (wk11)
- 15% open book prac test (wk13)
- (50% exam)

At the end of Sem 2, 2008, after experience with both assessment patterns, students did not display a clear preference.

At the end of Sem 1, 2009, a fresh cohort of students were asked to chose between the same 2 options, and displayed a clear preference for the option they had not yet experienced.



5) Conclusions

• Student perception of what is “easy” or “difficult” varies enormously

• Correspondingly, task weighting preference also varies at the individual level

• However, generally, “experienced” students did not display a clear preference for either assessment pattern. Reasons given were usually with a view to longer term and bigger picture factors such as final grades and overall time management

• Less experienced students took a “grass is always greener” approach, with a clear preference for “something else”. Reasons given showed primary concern for more immediate, shorter term factors such as the degree of difficulty or the weighting of the “current” task

• This situation is a good system to explore the possibilities of using assessment weightings tailored to the individual to explore the effect of flexible assessment on increasing student engagement

References

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