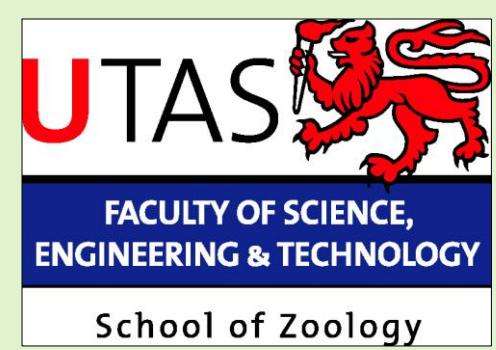


# Evaluation of the implementation of criterion-referenced assessment in a School of Zoology



Ashley Edwards  
School of Zoology, University of Tasmania  
Ashley.Edwards@utas.edu.au



## Introduction

Students are more engaged with their learning and perform better if they know what expected of them (1).

The use of standards-based Criterion-referenced assessment (CRA) to achieve these goals was mandated by the University of Tasmania Senate in 2009, to be implemented across all undergraduate teaching units by Semester 1, 2011, with four perceived outcomes for students:

- Clearer understanding of what is expected of students
- Increased control over students’ own learning
- Increased satisfaction by students about assessment practices
- Increased consistency within and across faculties (2)

For staff, expected benefits include opportunities to:

- Improve assessment practices and evaluate units
- Share good teaching practice with colleagues
- Streamline the feedback process (2)

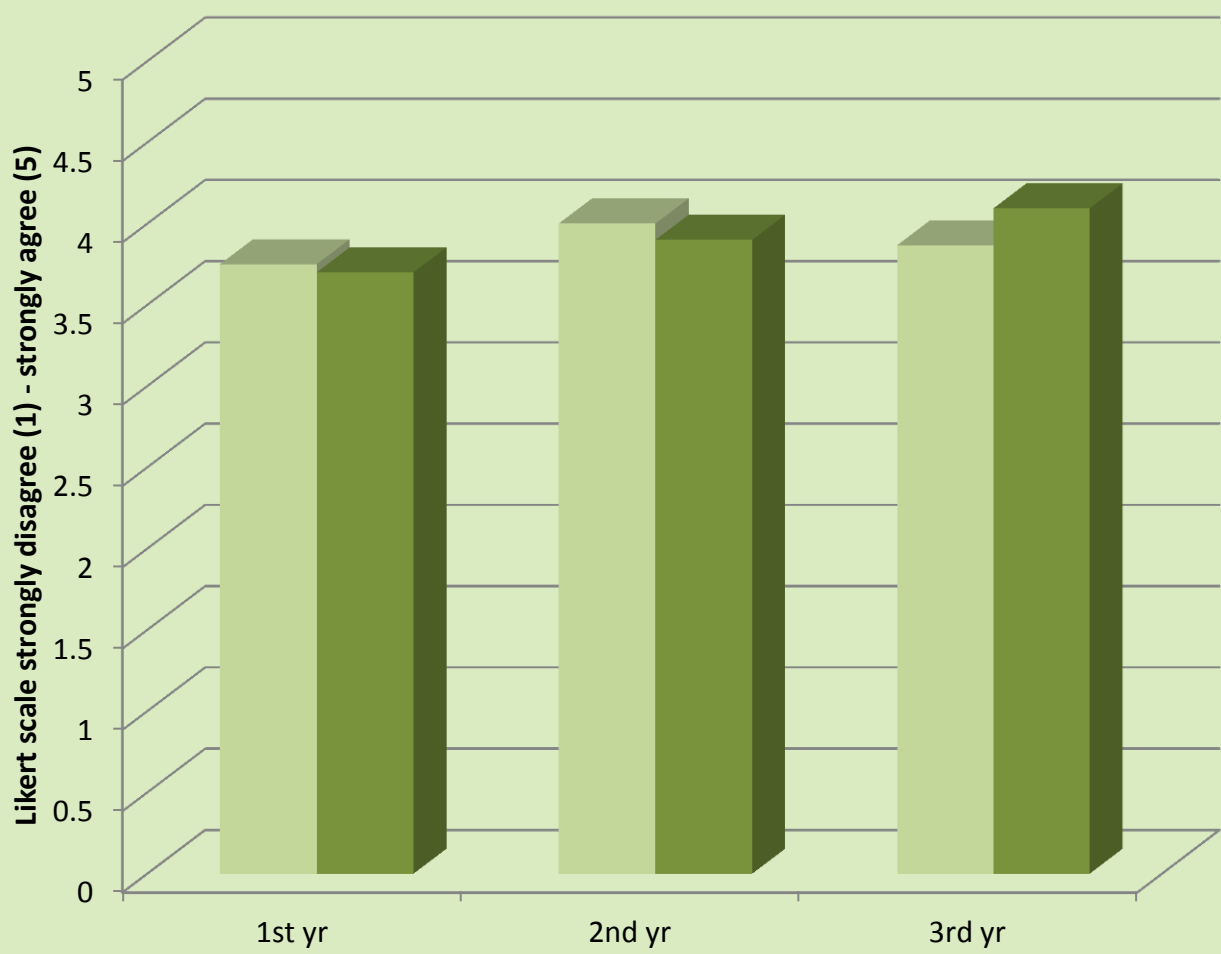
## Methods

Student perceptions were measured via Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (SETL) responses (Likert scale and open questions) comparing results prior to the overt use of CRA rubrics, with 2010 responses after the initial implementation.

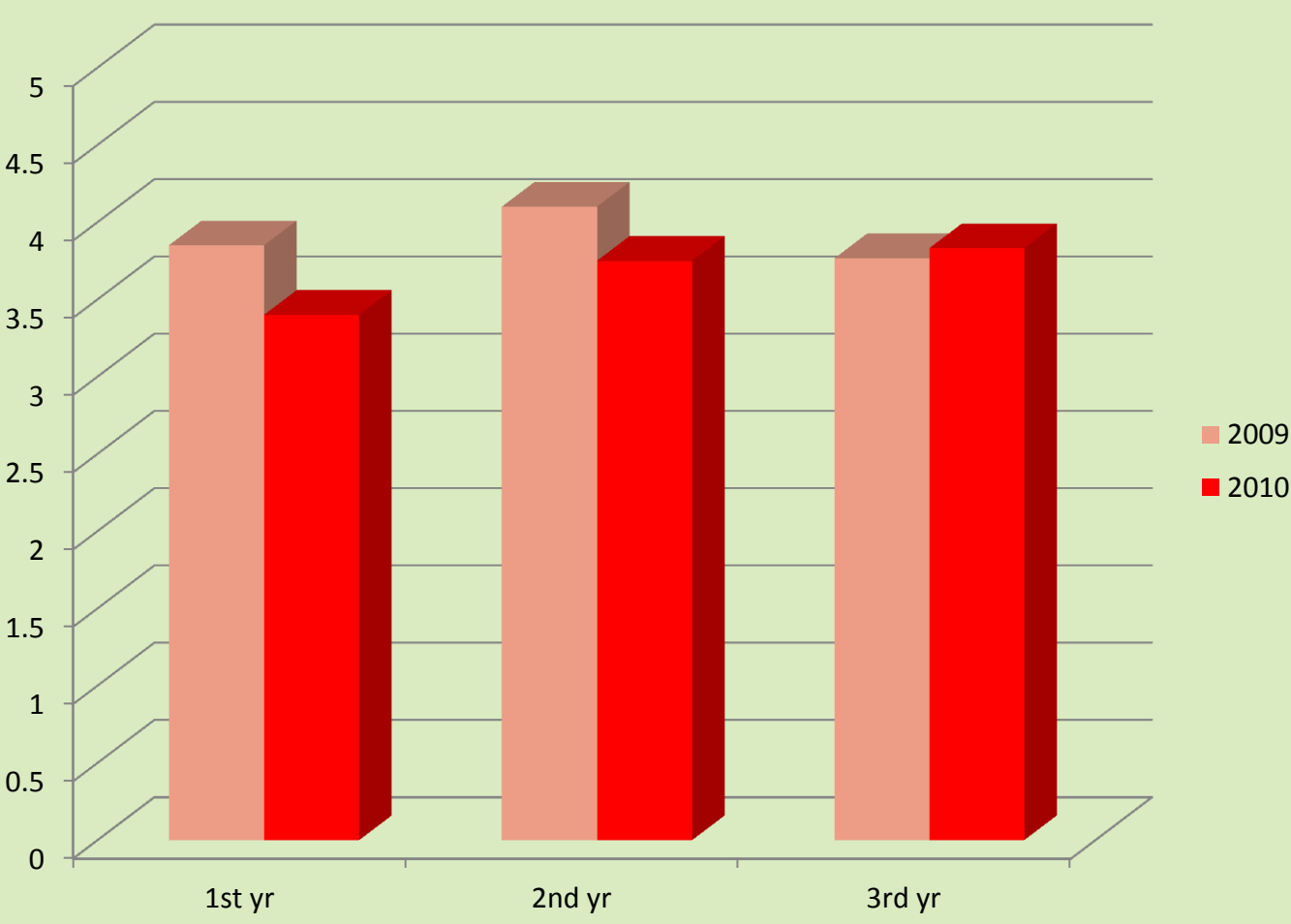
Staff at UTAS School of Zool. were surveyed about their use of CRA rubrics as both assessment and feedback tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the transition, and whether modifications for 2011 might ameliorate any concerns. Univ. of Otago (NZ) Biol. Dept were also interviewed for a broader perspective.

## Results - student evaluations

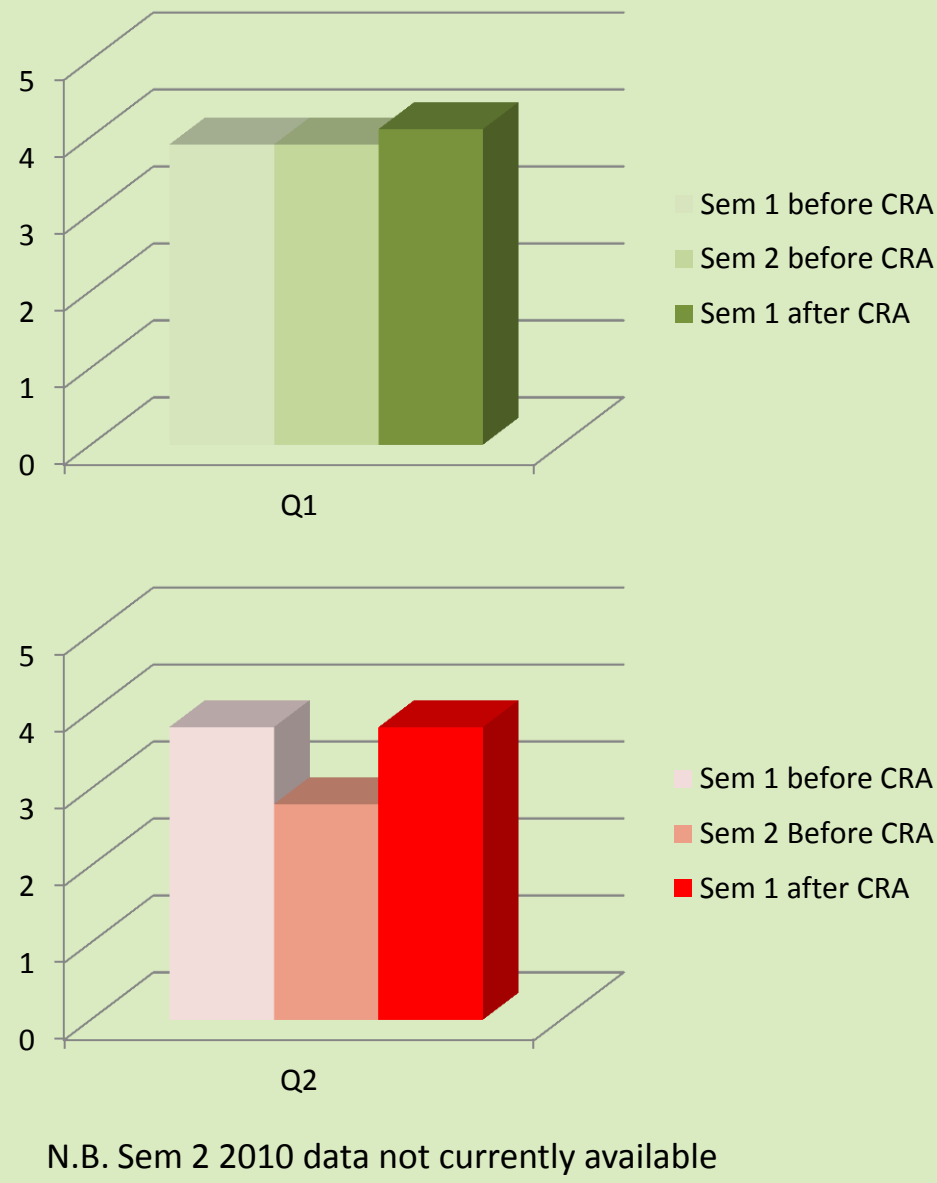
Q1. The criteria for each assessment component were clearly identified



Q2. I was given useful feedback on my assessment work



## Results - Science faculty SETL means



## Results – UTAS staff impressions of CRA

Positive	Negative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•Providing feedback was made easier for some</li><li>•Marking time was sometimes reduced</li><li>•Marking consistency was sometimes improved</li><li>•Transparency of expectations improved</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•A lot of work to set up initially</li><li>•Criteria may not be transferable between years</li><li>•Marks may not as well spread as in previous years</li><li>•Rubrics not as helpful to students when there is not a single correct answer</li></ul>

## Results – Univ. of Otago (NZ) CRA-related practice

1 <sup>st</sup> + 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr teachers	3 <sup>rd</sup> yr + PG coursework teachers
1 <sup>st</sup> + 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr teachers used feedback sheets and written comments on returned work to provide feedback, but did not use assessment rubrics with descriptions of standards of achievement <i>per se</i> .	3 <sup>rd</sup> yr and post graduate course work teachers were firmly against the use of assessment rubrics, viewing them as a form of “spoon feeding”, saying “If the students don’t know what we want from them by now...”

## Interpretation

- School of Zoology SETL scores are comparable to Faculty means
- Staff report both benefits and costs to the use of CRA rubrics
- Benefits may come at the expense of perceived quality of feedback at 1<sup>st</sup> + 2<sup>nd</sup> yr

References 1. Huba M. E. and Freed J. E. (2000). Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning. Allyn and Bacon, USA. 2.Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CALT) (2010). <http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/assessment/whats-in-it-for-students>. 3. Morgan C., Dunn L., Parry S. and O'Reilly M. (2004). The Student Assessment Handbook –New Directions in Traditional and Online Assessment. Routledge Falmer, London.