



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

POLICY:
ASSESSMENT IN COURSEWORK UNITS

Purpose:	This Policy outlines the principles and expectations that guide assessment practices in coursework awards at The University of Notre Dame Australia.
Responsible Executive:	Pro Vice Chancellor Academic
Responsible Office:	Pro Vice Chancellor Academic (contact Manager of Sydney VC)
Effective Date:	January 2015
Last edited:	September 2014
Applicability:	All Campuses
Communication Strategy:	Dissemination to all Staff; Information sessions; PD provided by QMAD
Quality Monitoring:	Evidence of assessment quality assurance, including monitoring and review of student and graduate outcomes in University and School reporting and in course reviews.

1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	RELATED REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS	2
3	DEFINITIONS	3
4	Principles	4
5	POLICY STATEMENTS	5
5.1	Assessment Design	5
5.2	Standards and criteria for making assessment judgements and awarding grades	6
5.3	Communicating assessment information to students	6
5.4	Feedback on learning	7
5.5	Confidentiality	7
5.6	Academic Integrity	7
5.7	Support for professional and scholarly approaches to assessment	8
5.8	Quality Assurance.....	8

1 INTRODUCTION

Assessment is the process of making a judgement about the quality and extent of a student's knowledge, skills and abilities as demonstrated through their achievement or performance in completing specific tasks.

The purpose of Assessment is to:

- guide and support student learning;
- ascertain and certify the level or standard of student achievement in a unit of study; and
- determine their course progression through to graduation.

Monitoring trends for student performance in assessment over time also provides a means for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and the curriculum.

Assessment occupies a central role in learning and teaching as it strongly influences what students learn and how they approach their studies. For this reason assessment needs to be aligned clearly with the intended knowledge and capabilities that students are expected to learn through completing their units.

This Policy outlines the principles and practices for all forms of assessment in higher education coursework units at The University of Notre Dame Australia (the University).

2 RELATED REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Under the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) ACT 2011 the University is subject to regulation within the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011.

This Policy should also be read with reference to the following internal requirements:

- The University of Notre Dame Australia General Regulations
- School Regulations
- Course Regulations
- POLICY: Course Management
- POLICY: Unit Management
- GUIDELINES: Course Approval
- POLICY Unit Outlines
- POLICY: Examinations
- POLICY: Student Appeals
- POLICY: Academic Misconduct (Plagiarism)
- GUIDELINE: The meaning of "Special Consideration" and "Exceptional Circumstances"
- GUIDELINE: Supplementary, Deferred and Irregularly Scheduled Examinations

This Policy replaces the Guideline: Assessment – a guide for Staff at Notre Dame.

3 DEFINITIONS

Academic standards mean an agreed specification (such as a defined benchmark or indicator) that is used to define levels of academic performance or achievement. Academic standards may apply to academic outcomes, such as student or graduate achievement of required learning outcomes, or to academic processes such as student selection, teaching, research supervision, and assessment.

Benchmark means a process used to compare student performances in assessment, as well as assessment and grading practices for similar courses and units offered by other universities and on different campuses of the University.

Blueprint – means a tool that unit coordinators can use to assist them in designing assessments that align with intended learning outcomes both at the course level, as well as at the unit level.

Board of Examiners – has the same meaning as given in the University Statutes.

Course – means a program of study approved by the University, the completion of which leads to the awarding of a degree, diploma or certificate at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Discipline Leader / Head of Discipline means – a member of academic staff with leadership and/or advisory responsibilities for their discipline within a School. The role may or may not be accompanied by formally delegated responsibility.

Course cohort refers to all students who commence in a course of study in a particular year. Course cohorts may be further classified by entry pathway, mode of study, place of study or other groupings.

Formative assessment – assessment tasks that are developmental.

Grade means the summative assessment of performance represented as a unit of measurement in the form of a letter grade.

Graduate Attributes refers to – generic learning outcomes that refer to transferable, non-discipline specific skills that a graduate may achieve through learning and that have application in study, work and life contexts.

Learning outcomes – are statements of the knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning.

Mark – means the numerical representation of a summative assessment of performance.

Moderation of assessment – quality assurance processes and activities such as peer review that aim to assure: consistency or comparability, appropriateness, and fairness of assessment judgments; and the validity and reliability of assessment tasks, criteria and standards.

Standards and criteria-based assessment – the evaluation of students' work or performances

using pre-defined assessment criteria.

Standard setting –Standard setting refers to the process in which the assessment standard is determined. Standard setting in general comprises two stages. The actual standard setting process itself involves the subjective judgment on how much is enough and how good is good enough by a panel of suitably qualified standard setters based on an approach that is credible, defensible and clearly documented. The second stage involves translation of the subjective judgments on standards by the panel of standard setters into recommended numerical scores as the passing score.

Summative assessment – evaluates the final extent and standard of a student’s learning within a unit of study and is typically used to assign marks that contribute to the final unit grade.

Unit – a discrete component of study that is credited upon completing part of a course.

Unit Coordinator – the academic staff member responsible for the administration and management of a particular unit of study.

Unit Outline – the official University unit information document available to students enrolled in the unit.

Violations of academic integrity – is misconduct and is any action taken by a Student that includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism and any other conduct by which a Student seeks to gain for himself or herself, or for any other person, any academic advantage or advancement to which he or she or that other person is not entitled.

4 Principles

- 4.1 Assessment is a significant and central part of unit design.
- 4.2 Assessment tasks actively engage and support students in their learning.
- 4.3 Assessment practices are valid and produce reliable measures of students’ achievement of expected learning outcomes.
- 4.4 Assessment is undertaken by qualified academic staff.
- 4.5 Assessment and grading practices are based on established academic standards, consistently applied across the course and are comparable with national and international benchmarks.
- 4.6 Assessment practices recognise the diversity of students and do not disadvantage any student.
- 4.7 Assessment is conducted by both staff and students in an ethical and honest manner.
- 4.8 Quality assurance of assessment practices and the standards of student achievement is integral to learning and teaching.

5 POLICY STATEMENTS

5.1 Assessment Design

5.1.1 **Course-level considerations for designing assessment.** Course-level design and planning of assessment for new course proposals is reviewed by School learning and teaching or assessment committees (or their equivalent) (Refer to the Policy: Course Management and Guidelines for Course Approval). This provides assurance at the time of introduction that course-level planning and strategies for assessment meet the following requirements:

- (i) Mapping of assessment to intended learning outcomes across the course curriculum is used to identify how students are expected to achieve course-level learning outcomes, including the Notre Dame Graduate Attributes and any specific external learning requirements (e.g. for the purpose of industry regulation/professional accreditation).
- (ii) Students encounter a variety of learning experiences and assessment formats in their course of study, including authentic tasks with clear links to the knowledge, skills and capabilities required for practice in their chosen discipline and/or profession.
- (iii) Assessment in first year undergraduate units is designed to provide a transition to learning and assessment in the higher education context.
- (iv) The design of assessment tasks reflect a progressive increase in the complexity, depth and autonomy of learning as students move through to higher level units in their course of study.
- (v) Final year students are given the opportunity to consolidate knowledge and skills acquired throughout their course and to produce work that provides tangible evidence of their capabilities.
- (vi) The timing of assessment tasks is coordinated across parallel units in the course, in particular towards the second half of the semester, to avoid a heavy workload imbalance.

5.1.2 **Unit-level considerations for designing assessment.** Assessment design for new units is reviewed by School learning and teaching or assessment committees (refer to Policy: Unit Management) and approved by the Dean of the School. This provides assurance that a unit's assessment design when it is first offered meets the following requirements.

- (i) Learning activities and assessment tasks are aligned with the intended unit learning outcomes and are mapped to the relevant capabilities in the University's Graduate Attributes. Blueprinting is an effective means for unit coordinators to ensure alignment between intended learning outcomes and assessment tasks.
- (ii) Learning outcomes and assessment methods include a focus on developing and assessing students' capacity for higher order thinking.

- (iii) Unit assessments should ensure that students are provided with sufficient opportunities for formative feedback on progress towards desired learning outcomes during the teaching period.
- (iv) Assessment tasks are regularly updated to maintain currency and reduce the potential for violations of academic integrity.
- (v) Assessment in undergraduate units must include a final invigilated examination component amounting to at least 30% of the total unit marks. Exemptions from this requirement must be approved as part of the unit approval process or as a change to an existing unit (refer to Policy: Unit Management, see also 5.8.1 below).
- (vi) The demands and weighting of each assessment task reflect the importance of the learning outcomes being assessed.

5.2 Standards and criteria for making assessment judgements and awarding grades

- 5.2.1 Assessment at Notre Dame is based on standards and criteria that are clearly described and which objectively evaluate students' achievement of a unit's intended learning outcomes. Assessment assists students to understand the standards of performance expected and it allows for defensible judgements of the quality of student work.
- 5.2.2 At a course-level, standards and criteria-based assessment provide a means for setting clear expectations for teaching and learning in the course and for the capabilities of graduates who complete the course.
- 5.2.3 The development of these assessment standards and criteria and their application to awarding marks and grades relies on the experience of academic staff and their understanding of accepted standards of performance within the discipline/profession and the University. This is achieved through moderation and collegial review and benchmarking of assessment practices (see 5.8 below).
- 5.2.4 Validity in assessment scores interpretation is dependent on a credible and defensible pass fail cut-score. To ensure meaningfulness and comparability, numerical assessment scores derived from each assessment tool or component need to be scaled or equated to a common standard scale (i.e. the UNDA scale) using the standard set pass mark as the anchor.
- 5.2.5 Where appropriate, self and peer assessment are used to give students experience in making assessment judgments and to develop their understanding of what constitutes a high standard of work.

5.3 Communicating assessment information to students

- 5.3.1 Information about assessment is provided to students in Unit Outlines and in the unit's site in the University's Learning Management System at the beginning of semester (in accordance with the Policy: Unit Outlines).

5.3.2 As a minimum requirement the following details of specific assessment tasks are provided for students at the beginning of semester:

- (i) A summary of assessment tasks that includes for each task the purpose, description, value, and due date;
- (ii) Alignment with the learning outcomes being assessed;
- (iii) A marking scheme that makes explicit the criteria and standards (or levels) of performance and provides detailed guidance to students about factors under consideration when a judgement is made about the quality of their work;
- (iv) Information about the timing and format of feedback that will be provided;
- (v) Procedures for requesting extensions;
- (vi) Penalties for late submission; and
- (vii) Procedures for appeal on assessment and grading decisions.

5.4 Feedback on learning

5.4.1 Feedback is a fundamental part of teaching and assessment and is provided to guide students to develop and improve the quality of their work and/or performances.

5.4.2 The provision of feedback is built into the assessment plan for units and its form and timing ensures students can apply it when working on subsequent assessment in the unit. Typically this occurs within the first six weeks of a standard 13-week semester.

5.4.3 Feedback is also provided as a means for justifying the marks or grade awarded and is available to students for all assessment tasks, including for examinations on request.

5.5 Confidentiality

5.5.1 Teaching staff shall not discuss or disclose a student's assessment results to anyone who does not have a legitimate right to access the information.

5.5.2 All reasonable efforts should be made to ensure a student's right to privacy is maintained throughout the administration of student assessment.

5.6 Academic Integrity

5.6.1 A consistent approach is adopted towards fostering academic integrity that relies on:

- (i) Ensuring students develop the understanding and capabilities needed to meet their responsibilities;
- (ii) Having mechanisms in place to deter students from deliberate plagiarism and other

forms of academic misconduct; and by

- (iii) Following assessment practices that minimise the opportunities for plagiarism.

5.6.2 Academic dishonesty is managed fairly and accurately in accordance with the Policy: Academic Misconduct.

5.7 Support for professional and scholarly approaches to assessment

5.7.1 The University provides budgetary and academic support for Schools and individual academics to develop and apply professional and scholarly practices in teaching and designing curriculum and assessment.

5.8 Quality Assurance

5.8.1 **Moderation and validation of assessment.** Moderation of assessment is required to ensure assessment tasks are aligned with learning outcomes and the marks/grades are accurate and reflect marking criteria.

5.8.2 Moderation also provides the means to develop and maintain a consistent understanding of academic standards for the unit that is acceptable to the University, the discipline and/or the profession.

- (i) **Pre-semester review (pre-moderation).** Unit assessment is reviewed by the Unit Coordinator and colleagues teaching into the unit (or cognate units) before the start of each semester to ensure assessment tasks are appropriate for the unit's learning outcomes and able to assess higher-order learning.
- (ii) **Establishing requirements for assessment.** When assessment tasks are set for each semester, assessors meet to reach a common understanding of the intentions and wording of specific tasks. This is used to finalise marking guides and rubrics based on agreed criteria.
- (iii) **Ensuring consistency of marks and grades awarded.** Immediately before marking occurs and if necessary, during the marking assessors meet to review and discuss judgements using exemplars of student work at different standards (and review where necessary) to inform and guide further marking. After marking is complete assessors meet to review the distribution of results using samples of student work, resolve borderline cases and where necessary, address variations or anomalies occurring between different assessors.
- (iv) For a unit involving an individual assessor, strategies are employed to ensure consistency of marks and grades, e.g. work of a similar standard is progressively grouped to monitor and review judgements made during the marking process.
- (v) In appropriate circumstances and where it is practicable, anonymous marking is used to avoid bias.

- (vi) **Review of unit grades prior to consideration by the Board of Examiners.** At the end of semester the unit grades achieved by students are reviewed with regard to the performances of individual students; student attrition; student progress; course completions; the distribution of final grades; and through the monitoring of unit grades over time by comparing the performance of current students against past cohorts.

- (vii) The University monitors grade distributions as a means for addressing artificial grade inflation. Where the distribution of final grades for a unit varies from the requirements in Section 6.21.1 of the University's General Regulations the Board of Examiners can only confirm the grades where there is evidence that the appropriate mechanisms for moderation have been followed.

5.8.3 Monitoring of unit assessment standards. Assessment standards in units (expected and achieved) are monitored over time by comparing assessment exemplars across different grades awarded with those from previous years. This process can involve the Unit Coordinator, colleagues teaching into the unit (or cognate units), including on different campuses where the same unit is offered in different locations.

5.8.4 Monitoring and review of assessment at course level. Assessment practices are systematically monitored at the course level with reference to appropriate standards (such as discipline and qualification standards, industry and/or professional accreditation requirements) to provide assurance for the overall quality of assessment design, grading practices, as well as the standards of learning achieved by students.

Course level quality assurance for assessment standards occurs within the context of one or more of the following:

- (i) Monitoring and review by the Board of Examiners for each School and School learning and teaching or assessment committees (or their equivalent);

- (ii) Internal peer review processes to ensure consistency and comparability across units within the course, including where the course is delivered on different campuses;

- (iii) A 'whole of course' approach that ensures assessment is used to foster the development of graduate attributes in an appropriate developmental sequence from first to the final year in the course in which the unit is offered;

- (iv) External benchmarking with other institutions to compare assessment processes and practices;

- (v) As part of preparing for professional accreditation and/or external course review; and

- (vi) Through the use of external examiners or assessors.

5.8.5 **Changes to assessment tasks for an existing unit.** Proposed changes to unit assessment tasks are reviewed by School learning and teaching or assessment committees (or their equivalent) prior to approval by the Dean of the School.

The Unit and Course Approval Committee approves variations to the weighting of invigilated examination components in a unit (refer to Policy: Unit Management).