

# Reforming Undergraduate Student Assessment

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Enhancing & Assessing Students' Learning Outcomes for the New 4-Year Curriculum

14 December 2009

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- **Member, Steering Committee**
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# **Key Issues in Reforming UG Assessment**

- The implications of the introduction of outcomes-based approach to student learning (OBASL) for norm-referenced vis-à-vis standards-referenced assessments and the move to standards-referenced assessments**
- The need to address variations in assessment policies and practices within HKU in view of the introduction of the new curriculum structure in 2010 and 2012**
- Relative levels of GPA scores across Hong Kong**
- Student perceptions about assessment at HKU**
- The need for an institutional policy on assessment to address the issues identified**

# **Educational Aims**

- **The pursuit of academic/professional excellence, critical intellectual enquiry and life-long learning**
- **Tackling novel situations and ill-defined problems**
- **Critical self-reflection, greater understanding of others, and upholding personal and professional ethics**
- **Intercultural understanding and global citizenship**
- **Communication and collaboration**
- **Leadership and advocacy for the improvement of the human condition**

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**The curriculum goal is :**

**to make available multifarious educational experiences**

**and to structure them in a way that enables students to engage with these experiences**

**in meaningful and coherent ways throughout their undergraduate education**

**and beyond.**

**To achieve this over-arching goal, three principles of curriculum design are being adopted for the curriculum reform:**

- *Principle of structure of experience*
- *Principle of continuity of experience*
- *Principle of coherence of experience*

**To achieve this over-arching goal, three principles of curriculum design are being adopted for the curriculum reform:**

- ***Principle of structure of experience*** – that learning (and assessment) should be structured in a way that maximizes the opportunities for learning and facilitates the achievement of the specified educational aims.

**To achieve this over-arching goal, three principles of curriculum design are being adopted for the curriculum reform:**

- ***Principle of continuity of experience*** – that there should be *progression of cognitive demand and intellectual challenge* in learning (and assessment) as students move through the four-to-six years of undergraduate education.

To achieve this over-arching goal, three principles of curriculum design are being adopted for the curriculum reform:

- ***Principle of coherence of experience*** – that students should be able to appreciate the interrelationship between their learning experiences, and *to integrate the knowledge and skills* they acquire, and for this *integration* to be assessed.



**Guided by these three principles of curriculum design, **Assessment practices** should reflect the following principles:**

- **Assessment** should be appropriately structured to enable students to maximize opportunities for integrated learning and to achieve the specified educational aims.
- **Assessment and the determination of assessment results** should take into account the progression of cognitive demand and intellectual challenge.
- **Assessment** should facilitate the integration of knowledge.

# Multiple Forms of Assessment

The recommendation that there should be **multiple forms of assessment** in the curriculum is coherent with the other six distinctive features of the curriculum.

In particular, when students go through diverse learning experiences (as opposed to learning only through lectures)

in multiple contexts (as opposed to only learning in lecture halls),

and are engaged in collaboration across disciplines (as opposed to single discipline studies),

the various learning outcomes will need to be assessed in multiple different ways.

# OBASL

In introducing **OBASL**, Faculties are asked to ensure that there is alignment between the programme and course learning outcomes and the assessment processes and standards.

This means that, contrary to traditional practice, decisions regarding assessment need to be made at the time of drafting programme and course learning outcomes and objectives and not at the end of the teaching cycle.

Hence the transition towards **OBASL** entails a reform of undergraduate **Assessment** in the following aspects:

- from a separate endeavour of testing to multiple endeavours to achieve alignment with and in support of learning and the attainment of learning outcomes,
- from traditional university course-end/programme-end examinations to diverse, integrated assessments aligned with learning outcomes,
- from fragmented course-by-course stand-alone assessments to integrated assessments coherently tracking the attainment of learning outcomes and desirable graduate attributes, as reflected in The University's mission statement and the institutional learning outcomes,
- from norm-referencing to standards-referencing assessments.

**“Did you hear about the dreadful  
accident that befell a university  
professor?”**

**“Did you hear about the dreadful accident that befell a university professor? – he was grading on a curve.”**

***Anonymous***



# Report of a Quality Audit *of* The University of Hong Kong



November 2009  
Quality Assurance Council



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Several Faculties use norm-referenced assessment; others adopt partial or full standards (criterion)-referencing through the use of explicit grade descriptors. The present policy leads to different expectations of students and variability of academic standards. HKU's Institutional Submission acknowledges that the adoption of an outcomes-based approach to student learning, which entails standards-referenced assessment, will pose a challenge to standardisation, particularly in honours classification.

**The normal curve is a distribution most appropriate to chance and random activity. Education is a purposeful activity and we seek to have students learn what we would teach. Therefore, if we are effective, the distribution of grades will be anything but a normal curve. In fact, a normal curve is evidence of our failure to teach.**

**B. Bloom, J.T. Hastings, and G.F. Madaus (1971)  
*Handbook on formative and summative evaluation of student learning*  
New York, McGraw-Hill**

**The QAC recommends that HKU implement an assessment policy for all taught programmes as a matter of urgency, to be applied across all Faculties and Departments, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; and that it is effectively communicated to staff and students.**



# **Steering Committee's Recommendation 1**

- a) An assessment policy be drawn up at The University level.**
- b) Assessment policy be clearly communicated to students, e.g. in student handbooks.**

# **Steering Committee's Recommendation 2**

- a) standards for assessment be explicitly stated and communicated to students and staff at the beginning of the course and be widely accessible in written form;**
- b) for consistency of standards used, moderation of grades be carried out;**
- c) it is expected that starting from 2012-3 academic year, all Faculties will implement (a) and (b); but Faculties are encouraged to put them into practice as soon as possible;**
- d) support be provided to academic staff through centrally organized as well as Faculty / discipline based workshops.**

# **Steering Committee's Recommendation 3**

**Faculties ensure that each degree curriculum include diverse forms of assessment and that there be a good balance of different forms of assessment appropriate for different types of learning experience.**

**A summary of the percentages taken up by different types of assessment in a particular degree curriculum should be made available for curriculum review purposes.**

**Q. “What is your stand on animal testing?”**

**A. “I think it’s a disgraceful practice. They can’t withstand the pressure, get flustered, and give all the wrong answers.”**

***Anonymous***

# **Steering Committee's Recommendation 5**

**With effect from the 2012-13 academic year, the weighting of GPAs be standardized in the determination of Honours classification and that all courses carry equal weighting.**

# **Steering Committee's Recommendation 7**

**Each Faculty lay down a policy for provision of feedback on assessments for students.**

