UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

POLICY ON ASSESSMENT

CO/01/0312/2012

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A: POLICY STATEMENT

1. Purpose statement

This assessment policy, which is aligned to the teaching and learning policy, aims to enhance the quality of assessment practices in the University.

More specifically, the purposes of this policy are:
- To enhance student learning;
- To ensure that assessment adheres to principles of best practice;
- To ensure that assessment judgements can be justified (explained and defended);
- To assist staff in their understanding of what makes for good assessment practice and be accountable for the quality of assessment they implement;
- To maintain nationally and internationally benchmarked standards of UKZN qualifications by ensuring that assessment practices are appropriate to the qualification levels and module/programme outcomes; and
- To make Schools and Colleges responsible and accountable for translating the policy into assessment practices, so that in any quality audit or evaluation they can show evidence of sound assessment practice.

This assessment policy supports and gives expression to the University's commitment to becoming the premier university of African scholarship through its assessment practices.

2. Introduction and background

The value and standard of the qualifications awarded by a University depends on the quality of the assessment of student learning. High quality assessment is essential to the achievement of the goal of 'Excellence in Teaching and Learning' in the UKZN Strategic Plan.

This policy presents the University's approach to assessment and supports the strategic goal of the University:

> "*To promote excellence in teaching and learning through creative and innovative curriculum design and development, pedagogical strategies, and assessment practices in accordance with the highest quality management principles.*"

The University has identified the improvement of assessment as a priority. The need for an explicit policy, procedures and guidelines for assessment is also

evident from analyses of student module evaluations and graduate opinion surveys.

A review of international and national practice revealed that it is common across universities to have a separate assessment policy, which signals the importance of this activity in teaching and learning. The pursuit of excellence in assessment is equally relevant to research and community engagement activities.

3. Definition of terms

3.1 **Assessment**: The evaluation and grading of work, supervised or unsupervised, carried out by a student in satisfying the requirements of a module (2012, General Academic Rules).

3.2 **Consistency**: The assessment would produce the same result if repeated with comparable students and comparable assessors.

3.3 **Continuous Assessment**[1] (CA) is an assessment approach which involves the assessment of all the outcomes of a module by a variety of methods with timely and frequent feedback throughout the module. CA collectively informs a final mark for that module, without a formal summative University examination. It is distinguished from continual assessments which repeatedly use the same or similar assessment method (e.g. fortnightly tests).

3.4 **Criterion-referenced Assessment**: A type of assessment designed to provide a measure of performance that is interpretable in terms of a clearly defined and delimited domain of learning tasks[2].

3.5 **Fair**: Fairness implies that the method of assessment does not present any barriers to achievements that are not related to the evidence.

3.6 **Flexibility**: Assessment practices should be multi-modal or multi–method and flexible enough to accommodate the scope of knowledge and skills covered by the assessment criteria, variations in context, the range of needs and the personal circumstances of all potential students.

3.7 **Formative assessment**: A range of formal and informal assessments employed by academics during the learning process that focus on the details of content and performance in order to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student attainment.

3.8 **Integrated assessment**: Refers to that form of assessment that permits a student to demonstrate applied competence and which uses a range of formative and summative assessment methods.

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[1] This policy incorporates aspects of the draft Principles and Guidelines for Continuous Assessment tabled at the University Teaching & Learning Committee in 2011 (UTLC Task Team: Ms. L Browning (Chair); Dr J Blight; Dr C Goodier; Prof Y Vawda; Prof P Watt; Ms K Holland).

[2] See for definitions of Criterion- and Norm-referenced assessments: Linn, R. L., & Gronlund, N. E. (2000). *Measurement and assessment in teaching* (8th Edition). Upper Saddle River: NJ: Prentice Hall.

3.9 **Norm-referenced assessment**: A type of assessment designed to provide a measure of performance that is interpretable in terms of an individual's relative standing in some known group.

3.10 **Practicability**: Refers to ensuring that assessments take into account available (financial) resources, facilities, equipment and time.

3.11 **Reliability**: The assessment is consistent from student to student, and from context to context.

3.12 **Rubrics**: These are rating scales (not checklists) used with assessments. They are formally defined as scoring guides, consisting of specific pre-established performance criteria, used in evaluating student work on performance assessments.

3.13 **Summative assessment**: Assessment that enables a total evaluation of the extent of the students'' progress at the end of a learning programme or a finite part of the programme.

3.14 **Transparency**: The assessment process is clear and open to everyone making use of it.

3.15 **Validity**: An assessment is valid if the assessment focuses on the requirements laid down in the standard. An assessment is valid when it assesses what it claims to assess.

4. Scope

The policy is applicable to all modules in the University.

This policy should be read with reference to the NQF and HEQF; programme and module approval (as appropriate) by internal University structures, Department of Higher Education and Training, accreditation by the Council on Higher Education (and Professional bodies), registration with South African Qualifications Authority; and together with the University General Academic Rules.

In particular, this policy document is linked to the revised University Policy on Teaching and Learning; Policy on Quality Promotions and Assurance and associated Principles, Procedures and Guidelines; the University Teaching Workload Framework; and the amended University Strategic Plan (2007-2016) Goal 4 on Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

5. The Policy

5.1 Assessments in the University are underpinned by the principles set out in the Policy on Teaching and Learning.

5.2 Assessments must draw on criteria that are clearly related to the purposes and outcomes of the curriculum by ensuring coherence between assessment criteria, the purpose, outcomes and assessment methods.

5.3   Monitoring, reviewing and improving assessment in practice must be incorporated into all programme and School review processes.

5.4   Valid and reliable assessments must be included as an integral part of the teaching/learning cycle.

5.5   Assessments must enhance engagement with the learning task and be aligned to the pedagogy and teaching methods.

5.6   The standards of UKZN qualifications must be maintained by ensuring that assessment is appropriate to and fits the specified module outcomes and the exit level outcomes of the programme, including the generic and disciplinary outcomes expected of a tertiary level qualification.

5.7   In adhering to principles of best practice, assessments must be transparent, consistent, practical, fair and flexible.

5.8   Academics are accountable for the quality of the assessments they implement and must be able to explain and justify their assessment judgements to students, examiners or any stakeholders.

5.9   Colleges, Schools and academics are responsible for translating policy into sound assessment practice, and their regular monitoring and evaluation through quality audit and assurance processes. Assessments must adhere to that which is approved in module and programme templates. These must be accurately reflected in the College Handbooks and reviewed and updated annually.

5.10   Students are responsible for reading, understanding and complying with the rules and regulations related to assessments in the modules and the programme for which they are registered; for using assessments to engage in critical self-evaluation of progress towards learning outcomes; and for behaving ethically and responsibly in the conduct of assessment tasks as stipulated in module outlines, College Handbooks and University Academic Rules.

5.11   In module planning a range of assessment options should be considered such as: peer and self-assessment; criterion- and norm-referenced assessment; formative and summative assessment; and continuous assessment, as appropriate to the outcomes of the particular module. Assessment planning must be guided by the notional study hours for the module to avoid over- or under-assessment.

5.12   Integrated assessments are important in relation to the question of whether the exit level outcomes of the programme or qualification have been achieved.

5.13   Continuous assessments, when approved for assessing an entire module must be:
        5.13.1 systematic – involving assessment tasks that are carefully planned, timed, recorded and communicated to students;

5.13.2 comprehensive – using a range of assessment methods for formative and summative purposes, with different weightings; levels of complexity and explicitly assessing all outcomes;

5.13.3 cumulative – so that each assessment builds on the previous and provides scaffolding for the next, giving students multiple opportunities to be assessed on selected tasks; and

5.13.4 formative – in that each assessment informs students learning, further teaching and assessment.

While no formal summative examinations are written, assessment tasks under test or exam-like conditions may be included. There are no supplementary examinations or special examinations when a whole module is approved for assessment by continuous assessment.

5.14 The timeframes within which assessments (excluding formal examinations) are returned to students should not exceed a maximum of 20 working days (four weeks); and feedback provided must be adequate to ensure that it is sufficiently detailed, constructive and can be acted upon by students.

5.15 All exit level modules must be externally examined, and all other modules must be subject to independent moderation. For all modules at least 50% of the total module assessment should be externally examined or independently moderated; which must be pre-determined, planned and communicated at the beginning of the module to students; and to the examiner/moderator at the end of the module.

5.16 External examiners'/moderators' reports must be annually reviewed by Schools and appropriate action taken where indicated to improve teaching, learning and assessment of the module/programme.

5.17 Appropriate confidentiality of (summative) assessment outcomes must be maintained throughout the process.

5.18 Evidence of formal assessed work (examination scripts) by students must be stored for a minimum of one year.

B: PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

1. Senate, Colleges and Schools and, most importantly, individual academics have collective responsibility for the implementation of this policy and for translating it into specific procedures.

2. Policy implementation will be monitored by School Committees responsible for Teaching and Learning, together with the respective School and College based Deans and Academic Leaders on an annual basis.

3. In order that the Policy on Assessment is implemented effectively, formal responsibilities are delegated to individuals expressly responsible for teaching and learning in the reorganised Colleges and Schools. However, it is the responsibility of all academics, and the teaching and learning leadership to ensure that assessment is practiced in accordance with the highest teaching, learning and research quality management principles.

4. Academics are responsible for ensuring that:

4.1 The learning outcomes of a module, together with associated assessment methods and criteria, are made available at the start to students registered for the module;

4.2 The programme of all assessment tasks, together with due dates are communicated and explained to all students at the start of the module; (as far as possible, cognate schools should communicate with each other about test dates and due dates to ensure that students do not suffer overload at any one point of term);

4.3 The criteria and rubrics for marking any assessment task are explained to students sufficiently in advance; some components of assessment may be negotiated with students;

4.4 Assessment tasks are varied in order to keep the students motivated, to target the appropriate level of competence expected in the module, to accommodate student diversity and to ensure that all the outcomes are met; this may mean that some assessment tasks are designed to show specific detailed understanding or skills, whereas others are more holistic and integrated;

4.5 There is fairness in the assessments in that the content is not selective or biased in such a way that any one cultural or racial group feels excluded or insulted; and special arrangements are made for any student with a declared disability;

4.6 Academics are alert to the opportunities for formative assessment that arise in the course of teaching, and for eliciting feedback from students on their understanding and learning that can indicate how the teaching process should be adjusted;

4.7 Assessments are implemented in such a way that students and moderators or examiners can be certain the procedures were not open to abuse or cheating;

4.8   Marking of assessment tasks is done in accordance with assessment task rubrics, noting that some tasks will require independent thinking, creativity and autonomous judgement;

4.9   Students are given detailed information on their performance in all assessment tasks, which is aimed at facilitating students' understanding of the mark given;

4.10   Marking of assessments are done in such a way that moderators (or a student who exercises the right to see the marked script) can see immediately how a given mark can be explained or justified according to the criteria;

4.11   Feedback on assessment during a semester is given within a maximum of 20 working days, preferably fewer, and is specified in the information given to students at the start of the module;

4.12   Feedback on assessment is given individually, in writing or orally, or given on marking templates, and/or given in general remarks to the whole class; although feedback often entails judgement of current performance, it is formulated in such a way that the student(s) can see how to improve their learning and are motivated to do so; and is given in a respectful, formative and faciliatory manner; and

4.13   They are present for the first 10 minutes of all formal examinations of their modules to answer queries.

5. Academic Leaders: School Teaching and Learning are responsible for ensuring within their School that:

5.1   They monitor, review and improve assessment in practice at School level through School Teaching and Learning Committees;

5.2   All assessment marks are entered within the stipulated time-frames on the SMS system, to improve data quality and allow for monitoring;

5.3   Internal moderators and external examiners are nominated and approved within the stipulated time-frames and in consultation with the appropriate Academic Leaders;

5.4   Moderators and external examiners are provided with the module template, module outlines, any student guides, the assessment tasks and rubrics together with the criteria, as well as the evidence of the students' performance (scripts; products; portfolios; reports etc.); and examiner/moderator reports are received and reviewed to effect appropriate improvements;

5.5   Initial exam results are released before supplementary exams; and

5.6   The School keeps records for any quality audit: the module template, course materials, assessment task rubrics, examination and test papers, moderator and external examiner reports, as well as the evidence of the students' performance.

6. Deans: College Teaching and Learning and Research (where appropriate) are responsible for ensuring within their College that:

6.1 The assessment policy, procedures and guidelines are consistently implemented and monitored across Schools in the College;

6.2 All academics in the College complete the professional development programme as stipulated in the Talent Management Policy, Procedures and Guidelines with respect to the assessment module and teaching portfolio;

6.3 Support is provided to academics with regard to the development and implementation of appropriate assessment practices;

6.4 Systems and strategies are developed for review, feedback, reflection and action in relation to all aspects of assessment;

6.5 Curriculum design are reviewed and evaluated to ensure coherence and synergy between teaching, learning and assessment processes which encourage engagement and creativity; and

6.6 Quality assurance processes take place; needs-oriented research on relevant aspects of assessment is undertaken; and appropriate reports produced for consideration by the relevant structures.

7. The Teaching and Learning Strategy Group, the University Teaching and Learning Office, and Quality Promotions and Assurance are responsible for supporting Colleges with 6.1 to 6.6 above with respect to assessment at an institutional level across all Colleges.