

BENCHMARKING FIRST YEAR ASSESSMENT AND STANDARDS ACROSS THREE INSTITUTIONS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF A LAW PROGRAM

*Pauline Collins, USQ, Nichola
Corbett-Jarvis, JCU, Anne
Schillmoller, SCU & Mandy Shircore,
JCU*

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- To compare cross institutionally our assessment practices in three non-metropolitan universities with a view to demonstrating objectively across the sector our standards and quality assurance.



SEMINAL QUESTION POSED

- How do teachers at the coalface, feel confident that the learning outcomes and standards we are expecting and imposing on our students are appropriate?



RESPONSE

- To identify the standard of student learning outcomes through the external moderation, comparison and evaluation of assessment items and practices.
- Develop protocols and criteria for the three participating universities to undertake this comparison of each of the three law schools.
- Today we will report on why this project was undertaken, and where we are to date.

AIM OF THE PROJECT



- To gather and analyse data in first year assessment practices in 3 Universities;
- Illuminate an understanding of assessment practices and provide evidence of what is done across the 3 universities in order to substantiate we are meeting the sector requirements and standards through the provision of objective evidence;
- To provide evidence that enables research, reflection, publication and improvement in relation to the design of law assessments.

METHODOLOGY

The research is focussed around **first year assessment** in law schools at **3 universities**.

- **Investigators** work across the 3 law schools.
- They are all **course leaders** in **first year core** curriculum courses.
- **Cross marking exercise**, information gathering, collection and comparison across selected courses, and comparison of the policies and practices at each institution in regard to first year assessment items in law.
- The process is based in **exploratory action** research methodology and the **review of the data** is based on quantitative and qualitative research principles.

Higher Education Context

Bradley Report 'Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report' 2009.

TEQSA renewed emphasis on the development of transparent standards and quality assurance.

Threshold Learning Outcomes through the ALTC standards law project team (Kift and Israel, 2010).

AUTC- 'Learning Outcomes and Curriculum Development in Law: A Report commissioned by the AUTC, 2003(Richard Johnstone & Swnitra Vignaendra).

CALD - 'Learning and Teaching in the discipline of Law: Achieving and sustaining excellence in a changed and changing environment' 2009 (Gary Davis et al).

THE UK APPROACH

- ◉ UK quality assurance framework - Quality Assurance Agency
- ◉ Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education - Section 4 'External Examiners'
- ◉ External examiners' reports
- ◉ Review of external examiners



PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

- USQ: specialist in distant education provision. Law school established in 2008. Offers LLB and JD. Delivers across two campuses (Toowoomba and Springfield) and off-campus.
- JCU: Regional university with campuses in Cairns and Townsville. Law program wholly on-campus with some subjects conducted by video-link, and / or academics fly between campuses.
- SCU: Regional university with campuses in Lismore and Coffs Harbour, Tweed Heads (NSW) and the Gold Coast. The School of Law and Justice delivers its programs both on campus at Lismore and the Gold Coast, but the majority of students study off campus by distance education.

FRAMEWORKS INFORMING LLB CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

- ◉ **Contextual mapping framework**

School/Faculty, University, Government,
Legal Professional , Practice, Legal Education

- ◉ **Cross Institutional Assessment Mapping
Framework**

Assessment Type, Graduate Attributes,
Assessment Practices, Resources, Workload
Casual markers.

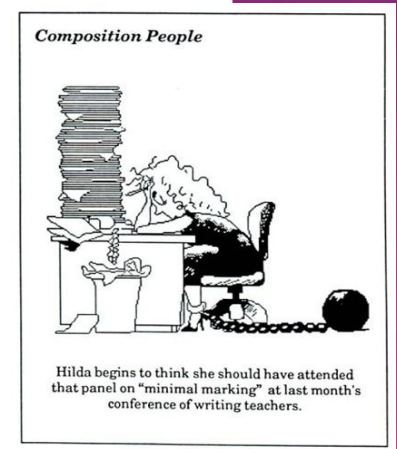
PARTICIPANTS STATISTICS

University	A	B	C
Student No.	<500	>500	500
ATAR/OP	6/91	15/70	9/84
Off- Campus	8.0%	N/A	71.28%
On- Campus	74.5%	100%	14.26%
Multi modal	17.5%	N/A	14.46%
Female	66.5%	60%	61.91%
Male	33.5%	40%	38.09%
Under 25	19%	72%	38%
F/Time	Not available	Not available	43.38%
P/Time	Not available	Not available	56.62%
NESB	Not available	Not available	5%
Regional/Remote	56%	16.6% / 2.9%	Not available
Low SES	17%	19.8%	Not available

Feedback provided by Cross-Institutional Marker

Could you please complete the following form providing reasons for your critique of the assessment task.

- The assessment task was aligned to the learning outcomes for the subject.
Agree Yes, but could be made clearer Alignment not clear
- The instructions for the assessment task were appropriate and easy to follow
Agree Most aspects, but some could be made clearer
I struggled to follow the instructions
- The assessment task as set, was appropriate for first year law students.
Agree Most aspects were appropriate Not really appropriate.
What could improve?
- What have you learnt from this cross-marking exercise? / Has this exercise caused you to reconsider any aspects of how you set assessment tasks?
- Can you provide any other comments that may be useful to the unit coordinators about the assessment task.



ASSESSMENT ITEMS AT EACH UNIVERSITY: LEGAL CONTEXT SUBJECTS:

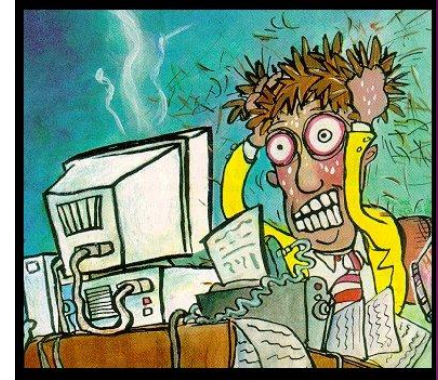
Uni A	Uni B	Uni C
Presentation (10%)		
Assignment (40%)	Assignment (40%)	
Exam (50%)	Exam 50%	
	Tutorial participation (10%)	
		Adjudication report (10%)
		Online test x 3 (40% in total)
		Written argument 20%
		Debate (30%)

ASSESSMENT ITEMS AT EACH UNIVERSITY: LEGAL CONTEXT SUBJECTS:

Uni A	Uni B	Uni C
Presentation (10%)		
Assignment (40%)	Assignment (40%)	
Exam (50%)	Exam 50%	
	Tutorial participation (10%)	
		Adjudication report (10%)
		Online test x 3 (40% in total)
		Written argument 20%
		Debate (30%)

IS THIS PROJECT EASY?

- Slow process determining methodology / terminology etc..
- Confining the research questions - ensuring exploratory stage only
- Process for sampling, de-identifying and tracking papers needs to be centrally administered and clear records kept.
- Obtaining staff buy-in and getting staff time to mark papers





Round up and questions