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Students' views on assessment: Preliminary Results of Survey with 1st Year Students in Department of Social Sciences

Fiona McSweeney
Technological University Dublin, fiona.mcsweeney@tudublin.ie

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Students' Views on Assessment

Preliminary Results of Survey with 1st Year Students in Department of Social Sciences

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17th February 2005

Functions of Assessment

Certifies achievement

Influencing learning through signalling what is valued

Influencing learning through feedback

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Range of Assessments Experienced

- Reflective journal
- Essay
- Class test
- Oral presentation
- Project
- Case study
- Role play
- Class participation

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What did students say about student assessment?

- Helps me find out what I know and don't know (87.3%)
- Guides my learning (75.5%)
- Helps me link theory to practice (84.3%)

- Helps lecturers evaluate student knowledge (81.4%)
- Enables lecturers to evaluate their teaching (75.5%)
- Used by lecturers to rank students (44.1%)

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Students also appreciated that other skills were learned

- ◆ 50% agreed that role play aided in understanding people
- ◆ 84.3% agreed that reflective diaries help thinking about practice
- ◆ 81.4% agreed that essays helped improve writing skills
- ◆ 88.2% agreed that projects were useful in learning research skills

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Student views on types of assessment

- "The worst form of assessment is having to recite material from memory, which we do for one of the subjects."

- "I feel that it is more favourable to do continuous assessment rather than exams because it develops people better as they have to research and gain extra valuable knowledge from it rather than a test of memory. Also learning journals are very beneficial."

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Purpose of feedback on assessment

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
Check understanding of course material	81.4%	12.7%	5.9%
Help students improve their work	99.0%	1.0%	0.0%
To explain the grade	83.3%	14.7%	2.0%

Comparison of feedback to grade

◆ 75.5% agree that they compare the grade received to the feedback

Does the feedback reflect the grade given?

"I feel lecturers should consult students about their grades not just tell them the grade. Recently I got some assignments back and the comments were 'excellent, good conclusion, good reflections etc.' Nothing bad was written on it, but I only received 50%. I can't understand why it was so bad if all the comments were so positive."

Feedback Formats

The majority of students have received feedback in a combination of verbal and written formats (64.7%)

This is stated as the most preferred format with 81.4% ranking it as their first choice of formats

Feedback being given one-to-one with the lecturer was liked by 92.2%

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Do students understand feedback given?

Crooks (1988) sees feedback on performance through **diagnosis** of strengths and weaknesses, **clarification** of misconceptions and **identification** of difficulties as the most important function of assessment.

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I always understand the feedback on assignments
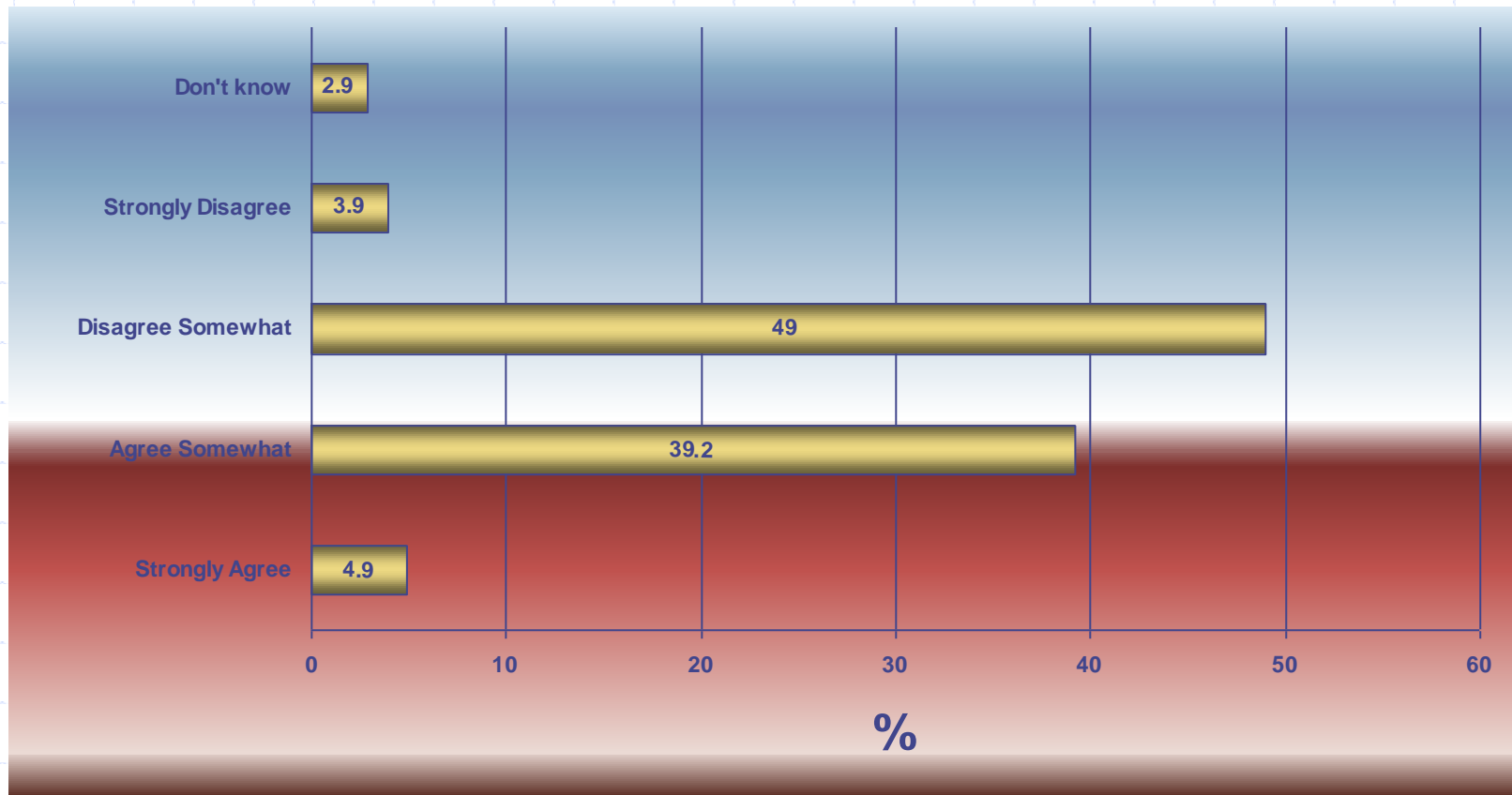
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Would the student ask for clarification of feedback?

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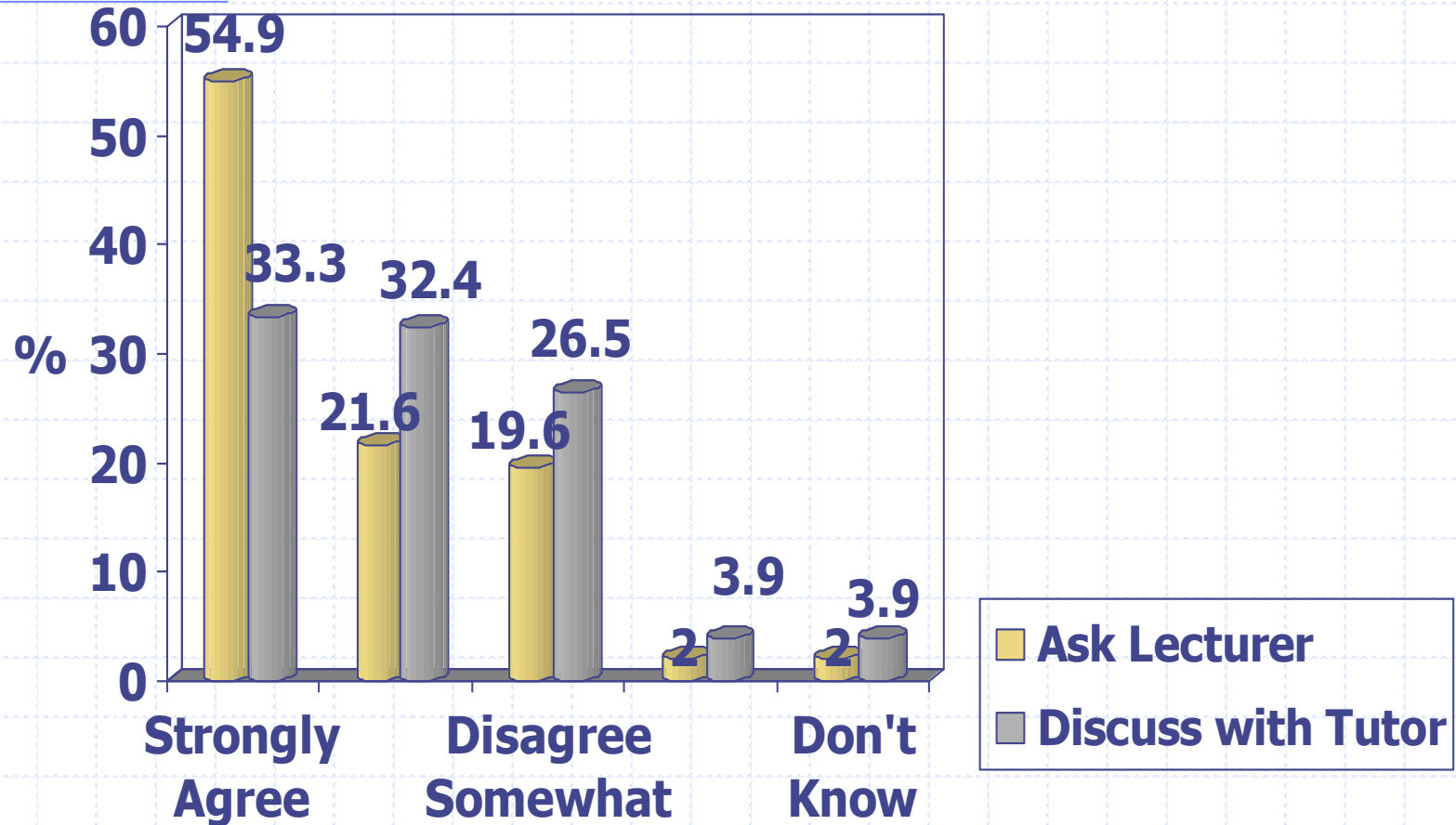
However nearly a quarter of the students surveyed indicated that they would not approach the lecturer for clarification of feedback:

"I think it would be helpful if lecturers took specific time to speak with all their students to discuss exam results etc. At present lecturers leave it up to the student to come forward. This doesn't work because students who haven't done well are less likely to come forward to speak to their lecturer."

Feelings about grades

◆ James (1995), regarding mature students, points out that grades on assignments were significant for the self-perception of students.

◆ Krause (2001) cites the discouragement of receiving a lower than expected grade on assignments as a contributory factor to attrition in first year students.

Feelings about grades

- Self-perception (pride and inadequacy) was affected by grades
- A good grade had more effect on the students' self-perception than a poor grade
- No significant different between a good and poor grade on 'making me work harder'

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Preparation for Assignments

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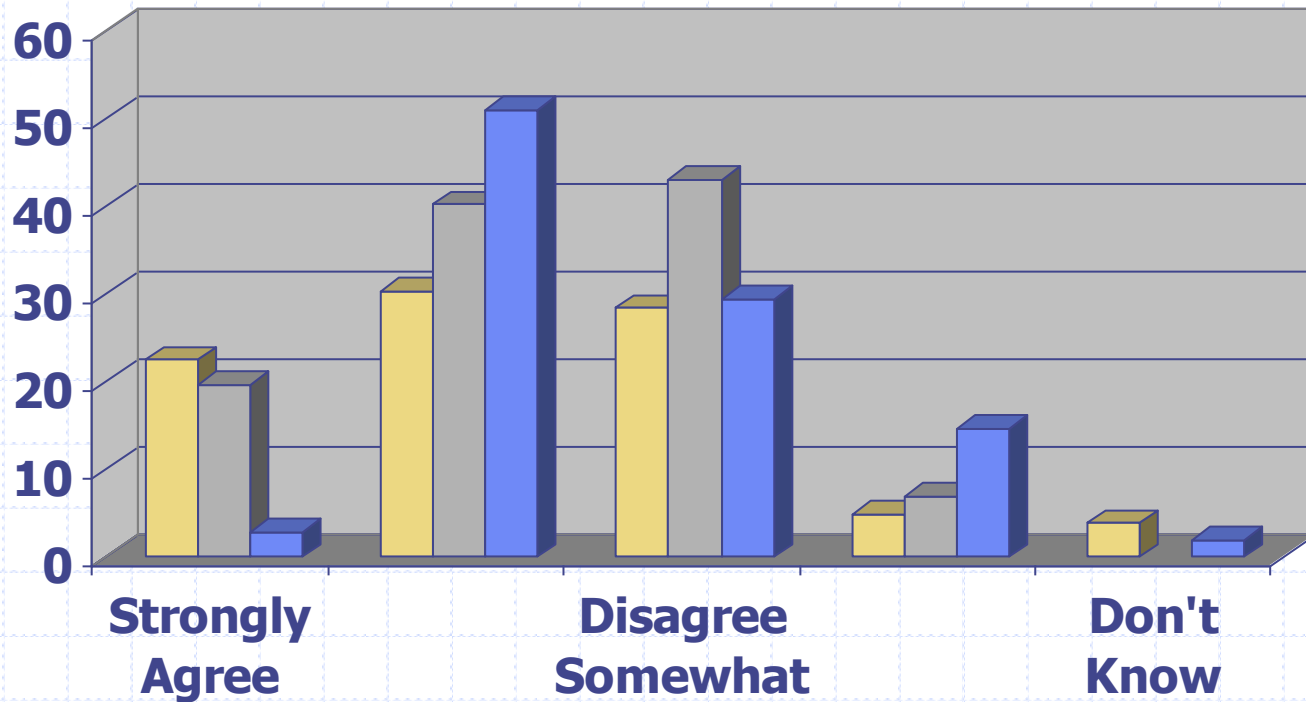
Anxiety about Expectations

- Student anxiety about written assignments in college is well documented e.g. Murphy and Fleming (1998) & Merrill (2001)

- Krause (2000 p. 150) suggests that "becoming accustomed to new forms of assessment and grading may present sufficient academic difficulty for students that they consider leaving."

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Students' Views

- "Lecturers need to be much clearer when giving out essay titles indicating what they want. I think past pupil essays/sample essay should be given out to give a better insight to what is expected."
- "We need more feedback, guidelines and instructions on assignments."
- "Methods of writing and assessing reflective journals could be clarified."

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Students' Views

"Upon entering the course first years were expected to automatically know such things as essay layout etc. and it appears to have been forgotten that we came from secondary school where layout and formats were different. To save lecturers getting annoyed they might want to explain this clearly."

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Assessment Criteria

O'Donovan, Price and Rust (2004) argue that experienced lecturers use tacit as well as explicit knowledge in marking assignments. The transfer of tacit knowledge to students requires participation in a variety of exercises.

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Smith, Campbell and Brooker (1999) found a relationship between understanding of assessment criteria and the complexity of essays produced by students.

More complex essays were produced by students with a more sophisticated understanding of common assessment criteria.

Writing Strategies of Students

- Only 22.5% described spending time planning as 'very me'
- 31.4% consistently wrote a plan first
- 18.6% consistently did several drafts
- 24.5% consistently discussed assignment with classmates
- 23.5% worked consistently over a time period
- 43.1% consistently check against title

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Writing Strategies

Torrance, Thomas & Robinson (2000), from a longitudinal study of student essay writing strategies, found that a minimal drafting strategy is associated with the poorest results.

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Conclusion

- 1st Year students have experienced a range of assessment formats.

- They appreciate the multiple purposes of assessment.

- They acknowledge that various skills can be learned by doing assessments.

- The preferred format for receiving feedback is a combination of verbal and written, preferably individually with assessor.

Conclusion

- Less that 50% of students have understood feedback given on assignments.
- 25% would not ask for clarification from assessor.
- Approximately 66% feel that assessors explain titles and requirements.

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Conclusion

◆ Approximately half the students describe themselves as confident about assignment requirements, but only 3% are very confident.

◆ The writing strategies used by students are unsophisticated and have been associated with poor results by other research (Torrance et al., 2000).

Finally

- 15.7% felt that the lecturer's perception of the student affected their grade.
- 8.8% associate getting a good grade with 'easy marking'.

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