USING CONSENSUS MODERATION TO ENSURE APPROPRIATE ACADEMIC STANDARDS WHEN PLANNING COURSE ASSESSMENTS

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Assessment provides academic teaching teams with a means of identifying what needs to be done in the classroom, when it needs to be done and how it needs to be done. Academic teaching teams can then make appropriate teaching interventions, adapt materials according to the needs of the students and plan teaching and learning strategies based on the information they have gathered. In this way assessment informs the teaching and learning process and helps to make it more effective. The process of assessment has more meaning when:

- it involves students in the assessment process in such a way that they understand it and are aware of what criteria are being applied
- it enables students to be part of monitoring and reflecting on their own progress
- it provides students with a number of opportunities, in varying contexts, to demonstrate different aspects of their abilities and to show what they know, understand and can do
- it provides students with feedback which is constructive.

A key role of assessment is to inform the teaching and learning process. Assessment achieves this by:

- keeping academic teaching teams in touch with the students’ progress and development;
- helping academic teaching teams to understand the learning needs of students; and
- enabling academic teaching teams to identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual students.

1. Developing a course learning plan
   - Consider the course learning objectives
     It is important to decide which course learning objectives are to be focused on and how they are going to be packaged together. This becomes particularly important when the overarching program requires professional accreditation.
Identify assessment standards
Identify the assessment standards for each learning objective that will be targeted by each activity within the course

Determine teaching, learning and assessment context(s)
Two main contexts have been identified:
  o Broad consideration of the social, cultural and environmental contexts of the students; and
  o The nature of the discipline pedagogical content knowledge.

Select content
The content selected is the vehicle for effective learning. Content is selected to ensure that development and progression of discipline pedagogical content knowledge; as well as to address the developmental needs of the students.

Allocate time
It is important to check that the time allocated to the content is consistent with meeting the demands of the discipline pedagogical content knowledge.

2. Developing a course schedule

This task involves designing a course schedule for the relevant learning course plan and increases the level of detail provided for each aspect or element dealt with when developing the course-learning plan. The course work schedule is also different from a course-learning plan at the level of detail in the nature of the teaching, learning and assessment strategies that will be used for each activity.

The following should be considered when developing a course schedule:
- Select/identify the course learning objectives(s) that you will be focusing on, drawing from the course learning plan
- Identify assessment standards
- Establish the context and select the content that best address the course learning objectives and related assessment standards
- Identify/select resources to be used
- Allocate time/duration to be taken by each section
- Plan assessment activities as part of the development of teaching and learning activities.

3. Developing learning units

Individual educators develop the learning units from the course learning plan and the course schedule. A learning unit is assumed to be a complete, coherent series of teaching, learning and assessment tasks in small units. It will typically consist of an activity or several activities spread across a number of weeks. In as much as the course design is influenced by philosophy and policy, so the learning unit is influenced by classroom realities. Realities of the classroom that have an impact in planning a learning unit are:

- **Learning styles** - since different students have particular and preferred learning styles, every class is certain to contain groups of students who assimilate information and develop understanding in different ways. Before the academic teaching team is able to plan a learning unit a clear sense of the learning styles of the class is needed together with a a sense of those activities that are likely to succeed with particular students or groups and those that are unlikely to, and must plan to accommodate all the students.

- **Barriers to learning** - while it is possible to list many different types of barriers to learning in general, not all of these will apply to every group of students. Similarly there may be barriers to learning that are particular to some students. When planning a learning unit the academic teaching team must have a clear sense of barriers that exist to overcome these barriers through the way in which activities are selected and structure.
Resources available - different schools have access to different types of resources, and so while a particular learning unit plan may work well in one school, it may fail in another because of a difference in the availability of resources - both types and quantity.

What students already know - it is important to be aware of the prior learning that is both required for different learning units and the levels of this prior learning present when planning a learning unit. Students would demonstrate different levels of knowledge and conceptual development from the same learning experience. What students already know becomes an important point of departure for planning what will happen next in an activity. At times the academic teaching team may wish to perform some form of baseline assessment to be able to establish the level of prior learning and to plan for the support needed by students who have barriers to learning.

University policies - in the same way that professional accreditation impacts programme design, so too will the policies of the University impact on the design of the learning unit and its execution.

Once these issues have been considered, the academic teaching team is finally ready to plan the learning unit in detail. Within the planning, the academic teaching team has to:

- Develop and / or source teaching and learning activities
- Identify the role of outcomes and concepts in concurrent courses
- Assessment strategies and instruments to be used
- Planning how to support students who are experiencing barriers to learning.

After a learning unit is planned, the execution remains. In the execution of the learning unit the academic teaching team will become aware of issues that may not have been anticipated. These will need to be incorporated and should, in turn, be considered when planning the next learning unit(s). Like the development of a course-learning plan, learning unit planning is not a linear process but rather one of continual modification, reflection, revision and refinement.

Critical factors
- Transparent, democratic, clearly focussed and participatory.
- Integrated with teaching and learning.
- Based on pre-determined criteria or standards.
- Integrated, in making use of integrated tasks and activities, and a variety of methods, tools, techniques and contexts in assessing students’ performance.
- Valid, reliable, fair, and flexible enough to allow for expanded opportunities.

How to implement
I have developed a 10-step guide to assist with the successful planning. This guide is merely what it says - a guide! There is and never will be a blueprint for educators to follow. Just as the students we teach are unique, so too are our approaches, teaching strategies and styles. We can fashion our approach on set models, but ultimately you will develop your own approach and strategies that best suit you.

10 steps to successful Planning, Teaching and Learning
1. unpack each course learning objective and associated assessment task
2. attach a form of assessment to each assessment task
3. identify all possible contexts
4. cluster course learning objectives together into activities while unpacking possible contexts
5. design and sequence activities
6. identify the course learning objective to be assessed and design an appropriate assessment tool
7. spread assessment across the semester
8. teach discipline pedagogical content knowledge necessary for activities
9. assess the course learning objective and evaluate level of success
10. record the result.