USING CONSENSUS MODERATION TO ENSURE APPROPRIATE ACADEMIC STANDARDS WHEN MARKING

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Being the course convenor of a large undergraduate core course in an initial teacher education program I have to rely on a team of sessional academic teaching staff to assist in the delivery of tutorials and marking the assessments presented by the students. In my previous academic appointment I was accustomed to working with a small undergraduate enrolment, so after starting at Griffith with large enrolments in the courses I was teaching it became apparent that I needed to establish an approach to ensure that the teaching team had a collective understanding of all facets of the course i.e. the teaching content, the assessment tasks and the marking.

Achieving collective understanding
It is common practice that sessional academic teaching staff attends meetings with the course convenor at critical times during the semester. This is no exception for the courses I convene, perhaps the exception is how we as a team collectively go through the course aims, material, assessment tasks and schedule thoroughly before the start of the semester. I attempt to ensure that the teaching team has a collective understanding of the course and how the aims will be addressed and assessed during the semester. To support the collective understanding of the assessment tasks I create short videos explaining the assessment task, expectations and criteria of the marking rubric. I go through these videos with the team and students and house the footage on the learning@griffith course site as a point of reference for all. Whenever I get enquiries about assessment the first point of clarity is to view the video. The teaching team is familiar with this resource and reminds students to make use of it. They refer the students to the resource for further information, then if still unclear to consult the course convenor. This provides a ‘one’-voice approach to assessment tasks and does not offer a number of possible interpretations from the teaching team. I have noticed that since introducing this resource to support assessment fewer students enquire about what is expected of them or seeking clarification about an assessment task that has morphed through multiple interpretations during the semester.

Remote assignment submission is standard practice for the written assessment tasks in the courses I convene. It is an effective handling and management process of assignments with a large enrolment. What it does provide as well is the opportunity to access assignments submitted prior to the due date and undertake a pre-marking activity. I access 3-5 assignments; de-identify the student’s details and circulate the assignments to the teaching team to mark. Once these have been marked we meet together for a marking review to establish a collective understanding of the marking rubric. During this session the teaching team discuss their understanding of the marking rubric in relation to the assignments submitted. This affords the consensus of instrument for effective assessment purposes and not a reliance on consensus through ex post facto moderation. Once this activity is complete, the
assignments are destroyed and the complete set of assignments is then 'officially' distributed for marking. This approach has resulted in consistent marking of assignments and very few queries from students when the assignments have been returned. The teaching team feel confident in their collective understanding of the assessment task and ensure the integrity of the task is maintained through their consensus of marking.

What's good about the practice?
Quality assurance of assessment is achieved through a team approach that supports the collective understanding of the course and consensus of all associated activities. A key aspect of assessment is that it is meant to inform the teaching and learning process. Assessment does this by keeping the teaching team in touch with the students’ progress and development, assisting the teaching team to understand the learning needs of the students, and enabling the teaching team to identify strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning process. For these ideals to be achieved consensus through collective understanding of the teaching team is needed. To support this collective understanding, video resources are utilized as a point of reference and as confirmation for students and teaching team.

Critical factors
To ensure that assessment is effective and meaningful within a course, I am guided by the following principles:

- a collective understanding of the teaching content, assessment and marking rubric is needed by the teaching team prior to the start of semester;
- the purpose of the assessment should always be made explicit to the teaching team and students;
- a criterion-referenced approach should be used;
- assessment tasks must be authentic, continuous, multi-dimensional, varied and balanced;
- assesment is an integral part of the learning process;
- assessment should be accurate, objective, valid, fair, manageable and time-efficient; and
- assessment results should be communicated clearly, accurately, in good time and be meaningful.

How to implement
1. Ensure that there is alignment between course aims, course content and course assessment tasks
2. Invest in the teaching team to gain collective understanding of course aims, course content and course assessment tasks
3. Prepare resources that support the collective understanding of course aims, course content and course assessment tasks
4. Undertake a pre-marking activity for the calibration of the marking rubric and to achieve a collective understanding of the marking requirements
5. Communicate results to students clearly, accurately, in good time and in a meaningful manner.