

## Summary of the newly revised [SU Assessment Policy](#)

At SU, we see assessment as a two-way conversation between lecturer and student. Assessment comes from the Latin *assidere* which means “to sit beside”. The SU Assessment Policy encourages this notion whereby assessment for a module may be considered as a conversation between the lecturer and student. In other words, as something that is learning-centred, with less of a focus on tests and marks, and more of a focus on giving students opportunities to judge their own progress and to receive feedback.

The SU Assessment Policy sets out one of the responsibilities of the lecturer as the willingness to keep on learning, from colleagues and from other sources. The student responsibility is to utilise the opportunities created by the lecturer to the best of their abilities. Ideally, it would be great if such two-way conversations could be one-on-one, but for modules with large enrolments, such as we often have to deal with, it may be constrained by what is achievable.

Assessment at SU can serve multiple purposes. The SU Assessment Policy argues that assessments serve various purposes to further the goal of facilitating effective teaching and learning. It is important to familiarise ourselves well with these different purposes because when thinking about how assessment can drive learning, we need to understand how the different purposes of assessment can influence learning.

These purposes are:

- 1) **diagnostic**, to evaluate students’ prior knowledge and skills before instruction; e.g. as a pre-assessment for a module (most often academics refer to this as baseline assessment). Diagnostic assessment is aimed at helping us to find ways to teach towards students’ strengths or weaknesses, to decide what action or approach may be required of the student and/or the lecturer.
- 2) **summative** assessment (i.e. *assessment of learning*), which informs decisions and findings on students’ progress, e.g. for promotion or certification, or to make value judgements about students’ performance. In summative assessment, we are interested in finding out whether the student has mastered the work well enough to progress to the next level. These are seen as high stakes assessments for students, meaning it contributes significantly towards their marks. Here it is critical that judgements can be made with certainty and that final judgements are valid. The validity of judgements is impacted by a number of factors or principles (more about these later in this document). Summative assessment may be more useful for student learning when combined with formative and sustainable assessments.
- 3) Assessment for **formative** purposes (i.e. *assessment for learning*), serves the learning process primarily by offering students an opportunity to develop the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes with the aid of learning-centred feedback. The purpose here is not to judge, but rather to providing feedback to students on how their current knowledge or performance compares with the expected assessment criteria, which needs to be communicated to and made clear to the student. The focus is on the provision of feedback and scaffolding of learning opportunities and follow-up assessments where students can use the feedback to enhance their

learning. Essentially formative assessment is aimed at improving learning through feedback. Unlike summative assessments, formative assessments are regarded as low stakes assessments where the focus is on the process of learning.

- 4) **Sustainable assessment:** The focus in sustainable assessment is on preparing students to become life-long-learners, who will be able to judge their own performance after graduation, in a workplace with no formal assessments. Lifelong learning has become crucial in an ever changing and increasingly complex world where critical thinking and reflection skills are required. Sustainable assessment is *Assessment as Learning*, focusing more on the process than the product of assessment. Self- and peer assessment can also promote sustainable assessment, as this requires students to engage with the assessment criteria.
- 5) Assessment for **evaluation** purposes happens when results from the assessment process are used, along with other information to inform our assessment practice and evaluate the quality of a learning and teaching event or module or programme. It does not mean that if my students performed poorly that my assessment was designed poorly. When that happens, it gives us the opportunity to step back and ask, “what happened; what were the gaps; how can I improve or structure the assessment differently”.

The SU Assessment Policy furthermore offers a set of nine principles as an integrated framework that can serve as the standard for effective assessment. These are:

- Achievability – the demands imposed by the assessment task are manageable for both lecturer and student
- Learning-centred feedback to direct student learning
- Validity – where we can conclusively say what students are able to do and whether they have mastered the outcomes of the module
- Authenticity – which relates to assessments or tasks in real-life settings
- Reliability –employing appropriate assessment strategies and methods to effectively facilitate the learning process
- Assessment for Educational impact happens when lecturers consider, as far as possible, how each assessment contributes to the holistic assessment of the module and programme, including how each is aligned with the outcomes and contributes to the final mark
- Academic integrity –the assessments done by students are their own work
- Transparency – where students know exactly what the assessment process is about and what to expect
- Fairness – each student has a fair chance to demonstrate their acquired knowledge and skills

These principles are of differing importance, depending on the purpose of the assessment. In summative assessments we might zoom in on academic integrity and the feedback principle might be reduced to a mark, but as already mentioned, in formative assessments we zoom in on feedback. We need to be aware that the principles are always in interplay and often in tension with each other depending on the assessment purpose and the learning outcomes.

At the heart of the SU Assessment Policy is a flexible approach, i.e. one that encourages doing various assessments throughout a module to contribute to a final mark. Although test-type assessments during dedicated assessment periods are still widely used, SU's position is that an effective assessment strategy requires careful consideration of the different purposes of and principles of assessment. Thus, each programme or module must consider an effective assessment strategy and the most appropriate methods for their defined purposes.

Lastly, the policy assumes that academics are best placed to make the most appropriate assessment decisions in their modules. They are best placed to choose the assessment approach that best suits the outcomes and pedagogical approach selected for the module and to find the opportunities that will improve their assessment skills and practices.

In summary, the SU Assessment Policy encourages assessment practices that are aligned, integrated, flexible and contextual.