



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

Assessment Policy and Practices at SU

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SU Policies are available at www.sun.ac.za/policies

¹ Policy Owner: Head(s) of Responsibility Centre(s) in which the policy functions.

² Policy Curator: Administrative head of the division responsible for the implementation and maintenance of the policy

Assessment policy and practices at Stellenbosch University

Implementation: 2012
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1. Introduction

Purpose of the policy

By means of this assessment policy, the University strives to make explicit the points of departure relating to policy that are implicit in existing institutional, faculty and departmental regulations and practices. In the spirit of "*excellent scientific practice*", as stated in the University's **mission**, an attempt is made to bring the assessment practices of the University in line with current, research-based views and standards regarding assessment.

Assessment forms the essence of an integrated approach to student learning. It is generally accepted that assessment probably constitutes the learning and teaching practice through which the most direct influence may be exerted on student learning, as well as the practice in which most is at stake for students, taking the functions that are described in paragraph 2.1 of this policy into consideration.

The purpose of this policy is therefore to provide a framework within which assessment practices at the University

- can be **valid, reliable** and **justifiable**, and
- can be directed and evaluated within faculties on the basis of clear **criteria**

Points of departure of the policy

The policy focuses on the *criteria* for excellent practice in assessment, of which the detailed regulations, rules, and practices are subject to the policy. All institutional and faculty-specific documents that have a bearing on assessment therefore resort under this overarching assessment policy and meet its requirements.

This policy is based on the assumption that lecturers have the competence to decide how assessment should take place within their disciplines and programmes and will be prepared to strive towards excellence in knowledge practice and to develop their skills further. The primary responsibility for the monitoring of assessment practices at the University lies within the faculties. The policy does not propose to be prescriptive with regard to assessment strategies, but rather to create space within which lecturers can make justifiable choices with regard to assessment within their own environments.

2. Assessment as teaching practice

The assessment of student learning can be regarded as a **process** during which:

- the expectations of and standards for performance are clarified and made available;
- evidence is gathered on how good performance compares to these expectations and standards;
- the evidence is analysed and interpreted; and
- the information that is gathered in this manner is used to document, explain and/or improve performance.

2.1 Functions of assessment

Assessment can be applied for a variety of functions.

1. Assessment for **diagnostic** purposes takes place when the strong and weak points of students in the academic sphere are determined in order to, for example, make suitable remedial actions, selection, admission and placement possible.
2. Assessment for **formative** (i.e. assessment **for** learning) purposes primarily serves the learning process by offering students an opportunity to develop the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes with the aid of timely feedback.
3. Assessment for **summative** (i.e. assessment **of** learning) purposes serves to elucidate decisions and findings on the progress of students, e.g. for promotion or certification, during which value judgements are made on students' performance.
4. Assessment can form part of the information that is used for **feedback purposes** (i.e. assessment **for** quality promotion) to evaluate the quality of a learning and teaching programme.

It is important for academic environments to ensure that both the assessors and the students who are assessed thoroughly grasp the different purposes of assessment.

2.2 Criteria for effective assessment

Because assessment exercises one of the most powerful and direct influences on the nature and extent of student learning, the design of assessment *to promote student learning* is of the utmost importance. Effective assessment is based on healthy programme design, development and implementation. It is important to note that the **alignment** of assessment practices with learning outcomes and teaching methods plays a key role in striving towards effective assessment.

The purpose of the set of principles or criteria for effective assessment given below is to provide the lecturers involved in assessment with criteria according to which they can measure their assessment practices, in terms of individual assessment opportunities and the processes at module and programme level. It nevertheless remains the responsibility of faculties and their staff involved in assessment to interpret this for and implement it in their own circumstances.

All assessment opportunities and processes should meet the criteria set out below. The lecturers should be able to justify themselves with regard to all levels of assessment (e.g. at module or programme level) as well as with regard to all assessment instruments that are at their disposal (e.g. web-based tests, multiple choice tests, etc.) in terms of these criteria.

However, these criteria should not be considered or applied in isolation, but rather, as far as is possible, be balanced against each other.

2.2.1 Validity

The assessment measures what it is supposed to measure and the deductions and actions that are based on the results of the assessment are appropriate and accurate. The validity of the assessment results increases to the extent to which

- 2.2.1.1 the assessment component of a programme is planned and developed in such a manner that students are given the opportunity to demonstrate how they achieved the stated outcomes, both specific and generic;
- 2.2.1.2 it is ensured that what is assessed will reflect the content of the stated outcomes sufficiently;
- 2.2.1.3 the assessment methods (for example tests, assignments, tasks, practicals, orals, etc.) are selected on the basis of the nature of the learning outcomes that are being assessed;
- 2.2.1.4 the relative number of opportunities for the different types of assessment places suitable emphasis on the different learning outcomes; and
- 2.2.1.5 where applicable, different assessment methods are used.

2.2.2 Reliability

Assessment consistently distinguishes between good and poor performance. The results of individual assessment tasks or opportunities, as well as the results of assessment processes (modules and programmes) are repeatable in different contexts or over time. The reliability of assessment increases to the extent that

- 2.2.2.1 the assessment methods are selected according to their acknowledged reliability for the assessment of the stated outcomes;
- 2.2.2.2 during the *implementation* of the assessment methods, attention is paid to the factors that could influence the reliability of the method;
- 2.2.2.3 the *number* and *variety* of assessment methods are consciously selected to improve their reliability; and
- 2.2.2.4 the marking of assessment items by one or more examiners involved in a module within departments and faculties is uniform.

2.2.3 Academic integrity

As far as is possible, the necessary procedures are in existence to avoid, detect and deal with dishonesty. This implies that all those involved are fully informed of the Senate regulations in this regard.

2.2.4 Transparency

Information on assessment is made known to the students. This includes information on the reasons for the assessment, when it will take place, the methods that will be used, the criteria according to which it will be measured, the manner in which the final mark will be calculated and any environment-specific appeal mechanisms, in addition to those contained in the General Calendar Part 1. Transparency increases when

- 2.2.4.1 the students are informed of any environment-specific appeal procedures, in addition to those contained in the General Calendar Part 1;
- 2.2.4.2 where meaningful, the students receive clear information about the assessment requirements against which their performance will be measured during the different assessment opportunities or assessment methods;
- 2.2.4.3 marks for assessment tasks, as well as the final mark, are determined on the basis of previously determined requirements and standards, rather than with reference to the performance of other students; and
- 2.2.4.4 the method according to which weightings are allocated to different assessment opportunities and according to which the final mark is compiled are set out clearly in the module framework.

2.2.5 Fairness

Assessment systems are equitable in that all students are treated fairly, without prejudice and with the necessary assistance to overcome inability or handicaps. Assessment assignments are of such a nature that they can be suitably understood and interpreted by students from different backgrounds. Fairness increases to the extent that

- 2.2.5.1 the compilation of marks for a module is a considered, justifiable process;
- 2.2.5.2 the reliability and validity of the judgements that are made on student performance can be ensured;
- 2.2.5.3 a variety of assessment methods are used;
- 2.2.5.4 the criteria in terms of which the task is to be assessed are announced to the students in advance;
- 2.2.5.5 the assessment does not make unreasonable demands on the students; and
- 2.2.5.6 as far as is possible, purposeful attempts are made to safeguard the assessment against any intended or unintended forms of unfair discrimination.

2.2.6 Achievability

The costs and practical implications of the assessment process are reasonable within the context and the purpose of the assessment.

2.2.7 Timely feedback

Lecturers provide timely feedback on *formative* and *summative* assessment tasks. The feedback enables the students to identify the sections that have been completed satisfactorily and to clearly know which sections require further study. By supporting students to monitor their own learning and to reflect on learning experiences, rather than to focus one-sidedly on marks, is to support and promote student learning. Timely feedback on *formative* and *summative* assessment tasks is critical for student learning and is made available in order to identify the sections that have been completed satisfactorily and the ways in which learning can be improved. Student learning is promoted if

- 2.2.7.1. where applicable, formative assessment with timely feedback is included as part of the assessment of programmes and modules;

- 2.2.7.2. assessment opportunities are distributed throughout the semester to promote the quality of learning, which is encouraged and supported by assessment and feedback;
- 2.2.7.3. timely feedback on formative and/or summative assessment is made available where appropriate;
- 2.2.7.4. student performance during assessment is dealt with as a form of feedback on teaching;
- 2.2.7.5. students are informed about the ways in which feedback on assessment can be used for further development; and
- 2.2.7.6. teaching staff continuously consider the results of individual assessment opportunities and general strategies critically so that misunderstandings about teaching can be addressed appropriately and, where necessary, practices can be adapted.

3. Assessment system at Stellenbosch University

This assessment policy proposes that SU use the next five years, from 2012 to 2016, to consider the possibility of moving to a single, flexible assessment system within which all the diverse needs of the different environments can be accommodated. During this period the use of the proposed new system will be tested and analysed in a smaller, controlled sample, with the view to implementation in 2017. It supposes that the next round of reviewing of the policy will commence in 2015. A serious attempt will be made to ensure that it is tested in a representative variety of contexts.

This policy thus allows for the introduction of a third assessment system, namely flexible assessment, alongside the two existing formal assessment systems, namely end and continuous assessment from 2013. Environments which would want to use this system from 2013 will be able to apply to do so during 2012. Since the period from 2013 to 2016 will be used to test the flexible assessment systems and to evaluate the implications of using it on a larger scale, the number of faculties or departments allowed to use it will be limited during this test phase. Information regarding the procedures for the introduction and implementation of this system as well as the accompanying application process will be made available by the end of 2011.

In the flexible assessment system, the relationship between assessment during the course of the module and end assessment is determined at module level, subject to the stipulations of the General Yearbook. The distinction between an end exam and an end test thus disappears and there is just a single concept of end assessment.

4. Scope of the policy

4.1 Types of assessment

All forms of assessment of student learning at SU, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, tests, exams, assignments, clinical work, service learning, e-assessment or any other form of assessment are subject to the terms of this policy and should thus meet the criteria for effective assessment detailed in this document. Individual faculties, however, have the responsibility to interpret the policy for their specific situations and to apply it in their contexts. This includes any arrangements made for students with special learning needs or disabilities.

4.2 Categories of assessors

This policy distinguishes between four categories of assessors at SU, namely

- 4.2.1. Newly appointed academic staff;
- 4.2.2. Academic staff already appointed in permanent positions;
- 4.2.3. External or contract staff involved in the assessment of student learning, e.g. in service learning or clinical training; and
- 4.2.4. Students involved in the formal assessment of student learning, for example post graduate or senior students involved in the assessment work of students in first year modules which contribute to a final mark.

4.3 Others statutes, rules and guidelines that relate to assessment

All statutes, rules and guidelines that have a bearing on assessment of student learning at SU, including yearbook regulations, faculty specific rules and guideline documents, i.e. the e-assessment guidelines or the early assessment protocol, are subject to and should meet the terms of this policy.

5. Implementation of the policy

5.1 Monitoring the assessment

The University accepts that all faculties strive for teaching activities of a high quality, but accepts that the quality assurance mechanisms may differ to make provision for the differences between programmes and contexts. The University emphasises the necessity for clear, comprehensive and transparent analysis of and reporting on assessment practices within departments and faculties.

5.2 Responsibilities with regard to the implementation of the assessment policy

5.2.1. Responsibilities of the student

The student

- 1. ensures that he/she is fully informed of the rules and regulations with regard to examination, as contained in the General Calendar Part 1;
- 2. ensures that he/she is fully informed of the rules and regulations with regard to the assessment in a specific module as contained in the module framework; and
- 3. commits himself/herself to making an honest and dutiful attempt during assessment tasks.

5.2.2. Responsibilities of the Academic Affairs Council

The Academic Affairs Council

- 1. brings problematic trends in relation to assessment to the attention of the relevant persons or environments;
- 2. orientates students via their faculty structures with regard to assessment and their responsibilities in this regard; and
- 3. is informed with respect to the stipulations of the Assessment Policy and can inform students about them.

5.2.3. Responsibilities of the assessor (the lecturer)

The assessor

1. is familiar with the stipulations of the assessment policy and any subordinate documents which have a bearing on assessment in the specific context;
2. makes a purposeful attempt to apply the criteria for effective assessment in their own context;
3. ensures that all information with respect to how assessment will proceed in their module is made available to students in the module framework; and
4. takes responsibility, in cooperation with the departmental chairperson and the programme coordinator, for his/her own further development and/or training in assessment skills.

5.2.4. Responsibilities of the Faculty

Faculties, through an appropriate person or group, i.e. committee tasked with assessment, ensure that the requirements and stipulations of this policy are interpreted, made applicable and realised in the assessment practices in the faculty.

Each faculty is required to assign a person or group tasked with the implementation of the policy. This person or group will be specifically responsible for

1. the interpretation the policy in terms of the requirements of the faculty;
2. the development and implementation of procedures for the advancement of effective practices with respect to assessment in the faculty;
3. the establishment of procedures and mechanisms to identify and repond to problems related to the implementation of the policy;
4. ensuring³ that all categories of assessors (see 4.2) receive appropriate training and/or development opportunities so as to ensure compliance with the Higher Education Quality Committee's (HEQC) requirements for assessor competence (also see 5.3 for stipulations with respect to the training of assessors); and
5. reporting on assessor training and development provided for the different categories of assessors in the faculty (also see 5.3 for stipulations with respect to the training of assessors). This reporting will take place annually via the Committee for Learning and Teaching, in a format determined in collaboration with the individual faculty persons tasked with assessment.

5.2.5. Responsibilities of the programme coordinator ⁴

The programme coordinator monitors the following matters and follows up on matters that deserve attention:

³ Faculties can provide their own training or buy in the necessary services or utilize the services of the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

⁴ *Duties and responsibilities of programme committee chairpersons and programme coordinators* (Senate resolution, 20 August 2004)

1. that assessment provides sufficient evidence that the outcomes of the programme are achieved; and
2. that appropriate assessment criteria and assessment methods are used.

5.2.6. Responsibilities of the department / module team

The departmental chairperson / module chairperson

1. develops a monitoring system for the assessment practices of the department/module to ensure that they comply with University policy;
2. identifies procedures, mechanisms and a support system to deal with deviation from the University's Assessment Policy;
3. monitors the perceptions of students of the quality of their assessment by means of module and lecturer feedback and develops a support system for instances in which the assessment does not appear to be up to standard; and
4. ensures, both at their appointment, but also continuously, that lecturers who are involved in the assessment of student learning have sufficient and appropriate training and/or experience.

5.2.7. Responsibilities of the Committee for Learning and Teaching

The CLT monitors the implementation of the University's Assessment Policy through

1. monitoring the interpretation and implementation of the policy; and
2. ensuring that this assessment policy is reviewed five years after its implementation (in 2017).

5.2.8. Responsibilities of the Centre for Teaching and Learning

The Centre for Teaching and Learning

1. provides support to lecturers with regard to the development and implementation of appropriate assessment practices;
2. provides training for lecturers, for example by means of workshops and a short course in assessment;
3. consults with individual lecturers, programme coordinators, module chairpersons, departments and faculties on the evaluation and adaptation of assessment practices;
4. supports, on request, persons or task groups tasked with the implementation of the Assessment Policy in faculties; and
5. undertakes needs-oriented research on relevant aspects of assessment.

5.2.9. Human Resources

The Human Resources Division

1. requires proof of the necessary assessment skill at time of permanent appointment; and
2. does not appoint any academic staff in permanent positions without proof of assessor competence.

5.3. Training of assessors

In 2009, the HEQC indicated that the University's processes with respect to assessor training and development is such that this function could be delegated to the University. This implies that the University is authorised to train and accredit assessors. It is however critical that all assessor training, also in faculties, meet the standards on which the self accreditation status was awarded to the University. Persons or groups tasked with assessment in the respective faculties report to the Vice Rector (Teaching) about the provision for each of the following categories of assessors at SU (also see 4.2, 5.2.4. and 5.2.9).

5.3.1. Newly appointed academic staff

The University expects that all newly appointed academic staff complete assessor training as requirement for permanent appointment. Different options in this regard include:

1. the SU short course on assessment of student learning presented by the Centre for Teaching and Learning;
2. appropriate proof of completion of similar training at another institution;
- or
3. submission of a portfolio as proof of assessor competence – such portfolios will be assessed by staff of the Centre for Teaching and Learning who are involved in the short course.

5.3.2. Academic staff who are in permanent appointments

Faculties are responsible for creating opportunities where the assessment skills of permanent staff can be honed and developed. This provision can take a number of forms and can, if preferred, be planned and presented in conjunction with the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

5.3.3. External or contract staff

Faculties take the responsibility for ensuring the assessor competence of all external and/or contract staff involved in any aspect of the assessment of student learning and make the necessary arrangements for appropriate training. The nature of the training will be determined by the nature of the assessment that the staff is involved with. Training can be planned and/or provided in consultation or collaboration with the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

5.3.4. Students involved in the assessment of student learning

Students should be tasked with the assessment of student learning with caution. Faculties take the responsibility for making special arrangements for appropriate training of any student involved in assessing student learning. The nature of the training will be determined by the nature of the assessment the student is involved with. Customised training can, if preferred, be provided in conjunction with the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Existing opportunities offered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, such as tutor training, can also be utilised for this purpose.

6. Other relevant documents

The following documents also have a bearing on assessment and should, as necessary, be read with this policy.

- 6.1 Early assessment protocol
- 6.2 Regulations for internal and external moderation
- 6.3 Policy on the assessment and recognition of prior learning
- 6.4 Policy on students with special learning needs/disabilities
- 6.5 e-Assessment guidelines.

Dr. HJ Adendorff
Centre for Teaching and Learning
1 April 2011

Task group members: Dr Hanelie Adendorff (CTL, convenor), Dr François Cilliers (CTL), Dr Catherine du Toit (Arts and Social Sciences), Dr Steve Kroon (Natural Sciences), Dr Brenda Leibowitz (CTL), Ms Liezl Nieuwoudt (Economic and Management Sciences), Prof Geo Quinot (Law), Mr Wynand Spruyt (AAC), Prof Estelle Swart (Education) and Prof Elizabeth Wasserman (Health Sciences)

Proposed Yearbook entry for a third assessment approach

Notes

- These rules do not replace any of the existing rules and regulations relating to examinations and promotions, which currently appear in Part 1 of the Yearbook with respect to end and continuous assessment.
- These rules are thus added to the existing rules under University examination in Part 1 of the Yearbook and are accordingly numbered.
- The purpose of these rules is to create a third assessment system which can be used as an interim approach in specific modules in order to inform decisions with respect to the consideration of a single, more flexible assessment approach for all modules when this policy enters the next review phase.

8.1.19 Flexible assessment

Flexible assessment (in terms of the determination of a performance mark) is a process by which a student's work in a semester- or year-module is systematically assessed and weighed through consecutive opportunities during the course of the semester/year using a variety of assessment methods e.g. assignments, tests, portfolios, orals, laboratory investigations, seminars, tutorials, project reports etc. (depending on the specific requirements and outcomes of the module). A final performance mark is awarded without concluding the study period with a formal university examination. Also refer to par 8.5 later in this chapter.

8.5 Rules with respect to flexible assessment in modules

The stipulations of paragraphs 8.3.4 and 8.3.5 above applies to modules which use flexible assessment.

Further to this, the following rules for flexible assessment in modules apply for the purposes of determining a final performance mark:

- 8.5.1. No formal class mark is obtained. Only a performance mark is entered into the university's central computer systems on the prescribed submission date for performance.
- 8.5.2. The final mark is based on assessment of students' work in various assessment opportunities, distributed over the semester(s) of the module, and by means of more than one assessment method.
- 8.5.3. A final mark of below 50 may be awarded to students who have not participated in the predetermined number of assessment opportunities.
- 8.5.4. A final mark of below 50 may be awarded to students who have not met other requirements as contained in the module framework or study guide.
- 8.5.5. The ratio or weight of the mark awarded for each of the different assessment opportunities will be determined beforehand, and students will be informed of this in the module framework or study guide.
- 8.5.6. Students should receive regular feedback on their progress.
- 8.5.7. The first assessment opportunity must take place within five weeks from the start of the module.

- 8.5.8. The official first examination period must always be used for an assessment opportunity.
- 8.5.9. In terms of the Rules for Internal and External Moderation, assessment tasks and assessment products representing at least 50% of the performance mark must be moderated.
- 8.5.10. In modules in which flexible assessment is used there is no remarking of assessment scripts. Students who are of opinion that their performance marks have been calculated incorrectly can, however, upon payment of a R40 deposit, apply in writing to the Registrar to have their performance mark in the specific module carefully recalculated by the department in question. Applications accompanied by the above-mentioned deposit must reach the Registrar by no later than 7 calendar days after the official approval of the examination results by the Vice-rector (Teaching).