

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

**2020
ASSESSMENT
PRACTICES**



Discussion Document (for ongoing input)

Underlying principles

The Humanities assessment plan for 2020 is being framed as a good practices plan. It is based on departmental practices and insights to help us deal with assessment complexities during Covid-19. It is not to serve as a rule bound plan. It will be aligned to institutional broad guidelines but is a flexible decentralised approach to assessment. Our disciplines range from studio and practical laboratory to theory based modules. An assessment good practices guide is also necessitated by online learning and its social justice concerns, as well as its affordances.

This guide is responsive to the question: What does it mean to assess in socially just ways during a pandemic? Our students have been learning in spaces outside of the university physical university halls. Those who are online, may experience alienation as these are not the normative ways in which they have traditionally learnt. Those who are offline face inequalities not only exposed but intensified by the pandemic. In our response to the question above, we consider the ways in which we can arrive at assessment practices that are just for this time. Our assessment practices are drawn on in order to recognise and make visible struggles with online learning (connectivity, devices, experience and training), and work to ameliorate these in the ways in which we assess. Drawing on Fraser's (1999) concepts of redistributive justice and politics of recognition, the university at large is striving to redistribute the materiality of assessments (making devices, data and software available to students) as well as insider online knowledge (through training, information and online opportunities). We strive to recognise the intersectionalities in the online space and making these visible in our practices. As a humanising approach is our central principle at NMU, we need to bring this to the place of assessments. The student and development of critical consciousness is foregrounded. In this way we pay attention not only to the technologies of online assessments but also to its pedagogies – and how do we engage with what is being asked in assessments. An overemphasis on technologies and indeed technologies that serve assessment integrity interests, may diminish the focus on this critical consciousness and thus the humanising underpinning.

We also look to how emergent practices can inform our assessment practices. Faculty departments will continue to input into this document as per their disciplinary contexts and what makes sense. The faculty undertook to have most of its exams modules converted to continuous assessments for this time. Furthermore, Media and Comms, in their departmental assessment guideline, does not weight any one assessment as 50% or above to prevent a high stakes assessment. Penalties are not imposed for first offence plagiarism and developmental opportunities provided. Second offence plagiarism incidents result in a conversation convened between lecturer, student and student rep. Legal referral is the last resort. Applied Language Studies and Media and Comms both make allowances for re-assessments and feedback so that the developmental principle of continuous assessments is centered.

Institutional policies

The following policies and guideline provide broad frameworks for our assessments. They are:

- Consolidated Examination Policies and Procedures
- IRC Policy (new Assessment Policy)
- E-Assessment (Dr Lynn Biggs chairs this committee) and Continuous Assessment (Dr Sue Petratos chairs this committee) institutional guidelines are being developed.
- Continuous Assessment Policy Guidelines as formulated by LT Collab. (Prof Jenny Clarence-Fincham)

The following aspects detail good practices but also pose a number of questions with which we need to grapple to make sense of assessments at this time. This document will not be providing hard and fast rules but make suggestions for departmental consideration.

1. Dept assessment coordinators

Departments to decide if there is a need for dept assessment coordinators. The role of such a person could be to:

- Keep track of Pathway students.
- Develop assessment timetable for dept.
- Send departmental timetable to Learning & Teaching coordinator for a faculty timetable
- Initiate a secondary contract for this person dependent on funds and capacity of person.
- Assign role to administrators if there is capacity.

2. Understandings of continuous assessment

Departments to proceed from a point of deconstructing the concept of continuous assessment (CA). The question here could be "What is the nature of CA"? Our institutional assessment policy references CA as "assessment for learning" It can also be conceptualised as 'assessment through learning.' Both 'for' and 'through' indicate movement towards learning. Furthermore, we can ask what is it that we are trying to do with CA? Responses here include that CA is an iterative process of engagement with students, with multiple feedback opportunities and a gathering of evidence of student progress. Students are being assessed from the moment they set foot in class. High stakes assessments should not be engaged with. Feedback is constant and important for learning and progression. We are moving towards CA and away from exams as the former is more inclusive at this time.

3. Student and staff experiences of e-assessments and remote assessments

We remain cognisant of the differing student and staff experiences with e-assessments. Some of the challenges include lack of online experience; time-consuming nature of e-assessment design; connectivity challenges, assessment integrity and workload. E-assessments also have many enablements with exciting innovative technologies used to solve problems. Staff may require training wrt feedback opportunities. Remote assessments pose very real challenges. These include the nature of such assessments, issues of assessment integrity, feedback opportunities and receipt of assessment. Departments will need to consider a repertoire of mediums from posting of hand-written assessments (with reverse billing perhaps) to Whatsapps.

4. The nature of formative (including approaches for studio/creative assessments) and end-of-module assessments (EMAs)

A burning question here is whether we should revisit definitions of formative and summative assessments? Should all assessments be seen as formative and we dispense with EMAs?

- Academics could have autonomy to design their syllabi from smaller to larger assessments.
- There could be more than one EMA so that the EMA is not a high stakes assessment.
- Feedback is a feature of CA assessments. We can engage interactively with students on discussion forums, by giving feedback on formative and summative assessments. We can request LT Collab to provide training sessions on feedback. The Lesson tool on Moodle is also helpful for structuring learning probing questions.
- Huge classes make it hard to give multiple feedback on multiple platforms. Many platforms (Moodle, email, WhatsApp, etc.) can be used to send submissions. Students should liaise with lecturers re the platforms in which they are uploading assessments for submission. It is easier to give feedback on Moodle but not easy for remote assessments. Is a standardised way of submission possible or desirable as we cannot rule out the submission on multiple platforms due to the constraints and practical purposes?
- Questions should be inclusive of higher order questions, including reflective and essay questions, to teach criticality.

5. Number of assessments and weightings of assessments

The number of assessments in a module (term, semester or year) could be dependent on the following factors:

- That it not be overly burdensome with numerous assessment linked to a grade and student passing.
- Assessments to be linked to feedback

6. Timing of assessments

As noted above digital divides and inequities mean that we cannot lose sight of the students and their circumstances. Technology must be used to solve challenges not exacerbate these. It is also noted that it is difficult to enforce a situation where 100% integrity will prevail. It is therefore recommended that:

- Tests be open for 24 hours minimum to a maximum of one week with more than one attempt
- Different tests could be set at different times to mitigate against cheating.
- Questions be randomised.
- Higher order questions be set that include reflective questions – to mitigate against cheating.
- Students read/sign an assessment declaration (drafted by the department) that the work is their own.
- Be kept in mind that students may be kicked out of a test due to connectivity.
- Proctoring software like Respondus Monitor be used for virtual invigilation and locking down of application on a device a student uses.

7. e-moderation

- The HoD/Lecturer is responsible for contacting the external e-moderator.
- CT contacted for access to Moodle by the external and internal e-moderators (Koshala Terblanche - contact person).
- The e-moderator moderates the test and completes an online report
- The e-moderator moderates 10% of the student answers as per institutional policy.

8. Peer assessment

Students can do peer assessment if given checklists for essay writing or presentations, for example.

9. Self-assessment

Similarly here, a student can do a self-assessment with a checklist for an assignment. The feedback on formative questions also allows for self-assessment.

10. Assessment integrity

- Plagiarism and academic integrity - institutional policy regarding academic plagiarism and integrity should still apply until a new policy is finalised.
- Staff indicated that they have cases that need to be referred to with severe plagiarism. Legal Services/Registrar needs to be approached to ask how they will deal with this issue during Lockdown and how long processes may take.
- Departments may wish to set and publicise a minimum Turnitin score which cannot be an exclusive benchmark for academic plagiarism. However, it is important that **Lecturers investigate what the Turn-it-in report is saying**, if indeed plagiarism (e.g. referencing an earlier assessment if a student resubmits, referencing bibliographic references or similar correctly quoted material between assessments).
- Staff are advised to provide a Turnitin deadline 48 hours prior to their final deadline since students only receive their Turnitin score 24 hours after assessment submission. By then it is too late for a student who may have a high plagiarism score to either explain the score or address any oversight if these exist.

11. Re-assessments and deferred assessments

- Students can re-submit after a formative assessment (be granted more than one attempt on a quiz for example).
- Only final year students are to be given one more opportunity to redo a final EMA that was failed. The question here is if they can get a second and third opportunity if they still fail? They can also redo other assessments failed during the course of the module.
- If first and second year students fail an assessment during semester, they can redo these assessments. The last assessment becomes tricky, especially at year end when mark calculation needs to be done.
- Departments should consider the maximum mark for a re-assessment. **Rationale for 50% only on re-assessment:** if you incentivise the fact that students can only do well on the first assessment, they may perform better. Otherwise students may think they have another chance in a second test.

Re-assessments and deferred assessments (continued)

Students are not able to cherry-pick which assessment. **Counter argument:** A student should not be given only 50% as that it does not support student learning for progression as per CA principles. The actual mark obtained should be given.

- Students who fail an essay can resubmit the weakest part or the whole essay for re-assessment.
- Deferred assessments to be considered especially for the different Pathways due to lack of connectivity or illness. Students should ask for deferrals in writing and only one deferral be granted per assessment and a record kept of the same.
- Any request for another deferral of the same assessment strongly suggests issues that are limiting the student's ability to take Pathway One. The student should be advised that they should take Pathway Two after consultation with the student success coach, Terry-Anne Jones.

12. Timetabling of assessments

- Departmental and programme staff can be asked to populate a shared calendar of assessments that would have to be divided by an academic year of study (first-year, second-year etc) in each specific programme. The e-technologists may be able to advise the best tool for staff to store calendar data so that staff can map assessment deadlines and weighting.
- A Caveat: While this would give staff a GENERAL idea of particular bottlenecks for Pathway One students, it does not solve the issue of how to spread out assessments for all courses any student may be registered for within the Pathways. Another challenge is students may be taking modules at different academic years, in different departments, faculties or have been allowed be taking more modules.

13. Rules of progression

Rules of progression between pre-requisite semester modules be suspended, as per the DVC LT and Registrar. This is because we are not sure when all students will complete Semester One.

14. Uploading of student e-assessments by lecturer

- All Pathway One work should be electronic. Moodle accepts most formats and permits staff to upload scanned reports, MS word documents and PDFs.
- Staff can upload student assessments upon obtaining consent students consent prior to uploading an assessment to Moodle.
- If the assessment is a Turnitin assessment, this will allow the assessment to be 1) centrally stored 2) available for comparison 3) available for direct feedback 4) available for mark capture in a single central database where records of submissions can be kept.

15. Pathway changes and implications for assessments

- Pathway One assessments will be evaluated on assessments they have submitted until the date on which they inform the lecturer that they are changing Pathways. This needs to be recorded by the lecturer concerned.
- Departments need to decide on the way ahead for students who only do the final EMA and not earlier assessments.

- Departments need to decide on the way ahead for students who only do the final EMA and not earlier assessments.
- Both Pathways to complete similar formative assessments.
- New EMAs would need to be set for Pathway Twos.

16. Assessments for auditing purposes

- The assessments should be stored for two to five years for auditing purposes, depending on disciplinary and professional body requirements.

17. Copyright issues for e-assessments

Staff are advised to do as follows:

- Use open access
- Send reading links
- Apply to Maria Hansford for Dalro copyright approval

18. Due dates

- Departments can set internal time-frames for uploading of marks for Pathway One. This will need to happen in July so that students can be identified for Pathway Two, which also commences in July.
- Students need to see how they are progressing.
- Blank – mark not available can be used for Pathway Two student.
- Final calc cannot be done until both Pathways are completed.

19. Implications of our plan for institutional policies

Staff advised to consult the broader institutional policies and if anything is of concern here, to consult with the relevant units.