

Item: Best Practices on Alternative Assessment Methods

Recommendation: Faculty should consider the use of assessment methods other than traditional invigilated tests and examinations.

Rationale: Many faculty members use invigilated testing as a key part of assessment. There is a large body of research supporting the use of alternative assessments, both in-class and on-line rather than rely on invigilated high stakes testing.

Context: We recommend the use of more frequent assignments and or quizzes that are worth less, and to move away from high stakes testing. For assignments that are worth more, it is suggested that they are more effective if broken up into parts that students work on and submit throughout the semester. It is also suggested to allow students some flexibility in weighting their assignments. The idea is that:

- The more invested/involved in a course the student is, the more they learn, the more confident they are and are therefore the less likely to cheat.
- Smaller, more frequent assessment is also formative. Weekly quizzes for lower level learning and assignments submitted in parts, allows for early feedback and correction.
- More frequent assessment provides instructor interaction more often throughout the course and has the potential to improve the teacher-learner relationship which can be more challenging online.
- Smaller more frequent assessment can lead to less intensive marking (e.g. could use excel for grading and feedback).
- Open book exams are recommended for higher order thinking (deeper application-based questions).

It is also suggested that online course syllabi should provide detailed instruction and expectations for students. Articulate how the learning outcomes are connected to assignments so students understand what they should be learning. Where there is no in-person instruction, the opportunity to explain things needs a different approach. For example,

- Indicate which online resources are permitted to use and how they can be included
- Rubrics for assignments are very important so students are clear as to how they will be evaluated and how the assignment is connected to the course learning outcomes.
- Provide samples of discussion posts so it is clear what you expect from students and what they can expect from you.

There are several tools for assessment of student learning that are suited to an online course. Faculty can choose from among them. Available tools include, but are not limited to, portfolios, discussion forums, group work, recorded presentations, quizzes, and written assignments

St FX Moodle supports assignments, discussion forums, Wiki forums, and quizzes.

- Group assignments are supported by making groups for students to work in, to submit their assignment, and for grading. For group grading, feedback and a grade can be entered for one

student in the group and it will populate the other group members' Moodle assignment. This reduces the time it takes to grade all the students.

- Assignments can be submitted in many formats – recorded presentations, videos, written papers, images, and embedded links.
- Discussion forums enable threaded conversations, but you can also click on one student and follow their posts.
- Time limits can be provided to open and close forums.
- Wiki forums trace the history of a discussion so you can see in order how the discussion went and do individual student tracking.
- Quiz questions can be multiple choice, fill in the blank, matching, and essay and any combination of these.
 - For graded tests, multiple choice could be edited to be applied knowledge type questions rather than fact based.
 - Or these can be used frequently (e.g. weekly) for few or no marks as they are more so formative. How the quizzes are being used for learning and assessment should be explained in the syllabus, so students understand the point of them.
- Question banks can be populated, and you can choose from those to make up a test.
- Respondus can be used to lock out browsing but only on the device the student is using, it does not rule out student using more than one device.

There are many other assessment strategies so faculty/instructors should determine what will fit best for their course. The following are some links to online assessment information.

Videos on Teaching in a Digital Age

<https://www.tonybates.ca/2020/04/29/12-shortish-videos-on-teaching-in-a-digital-age/>

Five Principles for Meaningful Online Assessment

<https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/teaching-continuity/online-assessment-principles>

Assessment Toolkit II: Time-Constrained Examinations

<https://london.ac.uk/sites/default/files/cde/assessment-toolkit-II-2017.pdf>

Moving Forward:

1. Professional development is needed to understand assessment in online courses, options available, and how to set up electronic assessments. (E.g. Moodle resources, how to use Excel for grading, feedback and mail merges to help with grading for large numbers of students).
2. Professional development is needed on how to use Moodle and electronic resources to monitor students' progress and activities in a course.
3. Provide a repository of resources that faculty / course instructors can access to help with developing course evaluation, assessment strategies, and syllabi. For example, provide access to the recorded sessions from the Dalhousie University Centre for Learning and Teaching, and post a list of assessment information websites.
4. Support for more frequent assessment in courses, e.g. TA's to assist with marking.

5. Change in academic regulations around the proportion of the grade from written tests and final exams and around the requirement for invigilated exams.