

Assessment Modes in Science



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Formal examinations and the assessment of generic skills.

Anecdotal evidence suggests assessment in undergraduate Science courses is focused on content rather than on generic skills despite an increasing emphasis on graduate attributes in Universities. Emphasis on content may be accompanied by a heavy weighting on formal written examinations, which offer limited capacity to assess generic skills. This project defines current practice in the types of assessment used in undergraduate Science teaching at La Trobe University and looks at staff attitudes to assessment to provide a basis for discussion about teaching and assessment of generic skills.

1. Assessment modes in Science at La Trobe:

Information on assessment modes has been collated from subject descriptions. A preliminary survey shows the average weighting for formal examinations is 60% and that this is largely invested in a single exam. Further documentation on the links between assessment mode and the learning objectives for a unit of work is being collated.

2. Staff attitudes to assessment:

Staff across the Faculty of Science at La Trobe are being surveyed to investigate the reasons behind the emphasis on formal examinations. Preliminary informal discussions suggest staff select examinations because of resource restrictions, fears of cheating and plagiarism and because examinations are thought to be more rigorous. Data from La Trobe staff surveys will be compared with information from staff interviews at Flinders University in a parallel project lead by Dr Jamie Quinton.

***"...you may survive the exam but
you will almost certainly forget
everything you memorised for it..."***

(Ramsden, 1992 p45)

References

Ramsden (1992) *Learning to teach in higher education*. 1st ed. Routledge, London