HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

POLICY FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

1. Overview

1.1 The Hong Kong Baptist University acknowledges that assessment is an important part of learning and teaching. Accordingly, assessment should aim at engaging and motivating students as well as promoting the trust between teachers and students, thus enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at the University. Towards that end, there is the need for articulating a policy for the assessment of student learning which highlights the guiding principles for a common approach to assessment which must be observed by all sub-degree, undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes in the University, however funded.

1.2 Within the context of the common approach, this policy specifies only the basic requirements for the design, delivery and management of assessment and related activities. The University supports the introduction of additional requirements developed by individual faculties/schools and programmes, provided that they complement those stated in this policy and they are consistent with the guiding principles highlighted in Section 3 below. That is because the University recognizes that the types of assessment and related activities do vary across programmes and faculties/schools according to different disciplinary characteristics and pedagogical needs, and such a diversity must be respected and encouraged. By the same token, for some of the practices advocated in this policy the implementation details are left to the Faculty/School Boards, Programme Management Committees, or Departmental Examination Committees, as the case may be, to work out.

1.3 In line with the suggestion of the Panel commissioned by the Quality Assurance Council to conduct the quality audit of HKBU in 2009, extensive reference to the wealth of international practice on student assessment has been made in the process of drawing up this assessment policy. The main reference materials which have been used are acknowledged herewith (on p. 11).

1.4 For the purpose of this policy paper, the term "Department" is used in the generic sense to refer to the academic unit offering a course, which is responsible for the teaching and thus assessment of the course, though in practice this unit may carry other names such as Programme (as in the case of Translation), or Division (as for the School of Chinese Medicine), or Academy (as in the Academy of Film). Accordingly, the decision-making body for assessment matters of all the courses taught by a Department is referred to in this policy paper generically as the "Departmental Examination Committee" (DEC). There are many other parties involved with the implementation of this policy and their respective roles and responsibilities are set out in Section 14 below.

2.   Purposes of Assessment

2.1   Assessment serves a number of purposes, with the main ones being as follows –
- the checking of a student's prior knowledge, skills and interests in the subject matter (diagnostic);
- the development of student learning (formative);
- the passing of judgment about student learning (summative); and
- the monitoring of student learning as an indicator of teaching effectiveness (evaluative).

3.   Guiding Principles

3.1   Assessment must encourage and reinforce learning.
This principle is translated into action by the assessment practices set out in Sections 4.1 and 8 below.

3.2   Assessment must be aligned with the course intended learning outcomes (CILOs).
With the adoption of outcomes-based teaching and learning (OBTL), every assessment task in a course should aim at checking that one or more of the course ILOs (CILOs), and this information must be made explicit to the students.   More specifically, this principle is further illustrated by the assessment practices under Sections 4.3, 5.1 and 5.2 below.

3.3   Criterion-based referencing should be used in grading assessment tasks.
Criterion Referencing Assessment (CRA) is a logical consequence of the adoption of OBTL.   In CRA, the quality of a student's performance in a course is measured by reference to pre-determined criteria and standards linked to the CILOs, and not by reference to the achievement of other students.   Pre-defined grade distributions (which constitute the basis for norm referencing assessment) are not compatible with OBTL and therefore should not be used.   This principle underpins the assessment practices set out in Sections 7.1 and 7.2 below.

3.4   Assessment must ensure that the desired academic standards of the programmes are maintained.
In keeping with this principle, the assessment practices under Sections 9 and 12 are put in place.

3.5   Assessment should enable robust and fair judgments about student performance and assessment practices must be fair and equitable to the students.
This principle is demonstrated by the assessment practices under Sections 6.1, 6.2, 9, 11 and 13 below.

4. Formative and summative assessment

4.1 For every course, assessment tasks are set for formative as well as summative purposes. These tasks can take a variety of forms such as essay, coursework assignment, oral presentation, written test/examination, laboratory report, and project, just to name a few. Each of these tasks, with the exception of the one conducted at the end of the course, can be taken as both formative and summative – formative in that it helps a student to identify strengths and weaknesses and thus ways for improving performance, and summative because its result normally contributes towards the determination of the final grade for the course.

4.2 For formative purposes, the provision of timely feedback to a student about his/her performance in an assessment task is crucial to his/her learning. This is further discussed in Section 8 below.

4.3 The number of these assessment tasks and their scheduling should be appropriate for the achievement of the CILOs of the course. In scheduling these tasks, the need to give timely feedback after each task must be taken into consideration.

4.4 At the programme level, a Programme Management Committee (PMC), or equivalent, should be formed and a Programme Director (PD) appointed for every programme, with the PMC chaired by the PD.

5. Assessment guidelines

5.1 Assessment guidelines and/or assessment rubrics should be developed for the major assessment tasks in a course and be included in the assessment information to be given out to the students. They are meant for promoting student engagement in the teaching and learning process through communicating to them at the outset the aims and expectations of assessment.

5.2 Assessment guidelines may be generic or discipline/course specific. The guidelines pertaining to an assessment task in a course should spell out *inter alia*
- how the particular assessment task is aligned with the CILOs. (If and when only some, but not all, of the CILOs are being assessed, that should be made explicit to the students).
- the assessment criteria and standards, which must be based on the CILOs being assessed.
- any submission procedures and deadlines, including penalty for late submission (if applicable).

5.3 The establishment of assessment criteria and standards upfront and making them transparent to students highlights the adoption of criterion referencing in marking and grading assessments. Criterion referencing is to replace norm referencing which has been used hitherto.

5.4   While the adoption of CRA means that the final grades of the students in a course need not comply with any **pre-defined** grade distribution guideline (as in the case of norm referencing), these grades and their distribution are subject to internal moderation by the Departmental Examination Committee (DEC) which is normally chaired by the Head of Department. This is discussed further in Section 9 below.

6.   Assessment information for students

6.1   Information about the assessment tasks in a course should be given to students within the first two weeks of classes. For a course involving team teaching, a coordinator should be appointed to collate such information from the different teachers.   Similarly for the assessment guidelines, as well as the weighting of each task, viz. how its result will contribute to the final grade of the course. Where applicable, the weighting of an assessment task should reflect the importance of those CILOs which are being assessed by that task.

6.2   For a major assessment task, the assessment rubric should be given to the students well before the task is to start.   At the same time, the teacher of a course may choose to give, as soon as teaching has started, all the assessment rubrics of the course, for those students who may wish to have early access to such information (e.g. uploading the rubrics to a course room of an e-Learning platform).

6.3   Assessment tasks and their weightings should not be changed after teaching in a course has started and the students have been notified. Under exceptional circumstances when a change cannot be avoided, prior written approval from the Head of Department must be obtained, and the approved change should be communicated to the affected students promptly.

7.   Grade descriptors

7.1   The University has established a set of generic grade descriptors for undergraduate courses and another set for postgraduate taught courses, and these are set out in detail in the Appendix.

7.2   Grading/Assessment rubrics at the faculty/school level as well as the course/programme level will be developed, together with course-specific grade descriptors which should be consistent with the university-wide grade descriptors set out under par. 7.1.

8.   Giving feedback to students

8.1   Constructive feedback must be provided in a timely manner to a student for each assessment task he/she has completed in a course, with the exception of the last assessment task conducted at the end of the course.

8.2   In order to be constructive and formative, feedback should be aimed at facilitating a student's learning and assisting him/her to prepare for subsequent assessment tasks and improve his/her performance.   Feedback must also be linked to the assessment criteria.

8.3   Feedback can be delivered in many ways including, but not limited to, individual oral feedback, group discussion, individual written comments, feedback sheets, and model answers.

8.4   As timeliness is crucial, the work submitted by a student for an assessment task should be marked/graded and returned to the student with appropriate feedback as soon as practicable and in any case no later than three weeks after the deadline for submission.   For some assessment tasks, there may be good reasons for requiring a longer time-scale, and prior approval for extension should be sought from the Head of Department.

9.   Moderation of assessment

9.1   At present the last assessment task conducted at the end of a course, for a majority of the courses in the University, is in the form of a final examination.   In many cases, this final examination has a weighting of 50% or more in the determination of the final grade for the course.   Given such a high weighting and the judgment it makes about the overall achievement of a student, there is a need for closely monitoring this assessment task through peer discussion and review. Such a process is referred to as moderation, and its main objective is to enhance the validity and reliability of this assessment task as well as ensuring consistency of marking/grading when there are more than one assessors.

9.2   Currently the task of internal moderation of this end-of-course final examination rests with the DEC.   As the final arbiter on matters related to the final examination and other assessments, the DEC should have *inter alia* the authority to modify the examination question papers and/or other assessment tasks set by the course teachers and adjust the grades they submit, when there are justifications for doing so.   Efforts should be made to improve the rigour of the moderation process for every course, especially with regard to checking that –
- the final examination is in agreement with the assessment guidelines communicated to the students;
- the examination paper can provide a fair assessment of the students which is commensurate with the CILOs being assessed, in terms of the level of difficulty of the examination questions and the time allowed for completing the answers.
- there are assessment criteria and grade descriptors.

9.3   For a course with multiple sections which has a final examination, the current practice of requiring a common paper for the final examination and a common marking scheme to be used by all the markers involved should continue and be improved, with the marking scheme replaced by an assessment rubric which is more comprehensive.

9.4　　As a matter of good practice, the course coordinator in charge of developing the common paper and assessment rubric should do so in consultation with all other teachers of the same course.　The common assessment rubric should be sufficiently detailed so as to reduce the risk of disadvantaging some students because of inconsistency among different markers.

9.5　　The final grades of the students in a course and the corresponding grade distribution should be reported to the relevant DEC, which has a role in monitoring these grade distributions and checking whether there are apparent anomalies in any of them.　Exactly what would constitute such an anomaly is a matter which depends on *inter alia* the discipline area as well as the nature of a course, and it is therefore best left to the professional judgment of the DEC concerned.

9.6　　If and when there is an apparent anomaly in the grade distribution of a course, the course teacher/coordinator should be invited to give an explanation to the DEC, making reference to *inter alia* the published assessment criteria and standards, the application of such criteria and standards, the examination paper, and the grading or assessment rubric if applicable. In light of this explanation, the DEC will decide whether there is a need for any follow-up action which may lead to the adjustment of some of the grades.

9.7　　There are many possibilities for this follow-up action of moderation, including for instance second marking all examination scripts (if the number involved is relatively small) by another marker, second marking a sample of the scripts, or second marking only those cases considered to be borderline between two grades. The DEC can choose the best course of action depending on the gravity of the anomaly and the practicalities surrounding a case.　　If so warranted by the gravity of the situation, the DEC may decide to seek assistance from external peers in conducting the second marking or pursuing other follow-up actions.

9.8　　The course coordinator should be informed by the DEC in writing of any moderation to the course grades.

9.9　　Moderation is in keeping with the guiding principle spelt out under par. 3.5, and so is double marking, which is already widely-accepted internationally.　For this University, as of now many Departments are adopting it as a regular practice for the course of Honours Project.　Given that it can increase the extent to which the assessment outcomes are fair and valid, especially for open-ended and less structured assessments, the University encourages a wider application of double marking to the assessment tasks in other courses, while recognizing that for some courses there are constraints due to staff workload and tight deadlines.　Thus the Faculties/Schools and their Departments are urged to consider how double marking can be applied to those courses for which such constraints are either absent or resolvable.

9.10   Anonymous marking is another practice which is in keeping with the guiding principle under par. 3.5, and it has no implication for staff workload.   As it has been widely adopted internationally, the University considers that anonymous marking should be used unless there are academic reasons against it.

9.11   For a small number of programmes, there is external moderation of assessment by external examiners, in addition to internal moderation. The appointment and duties of the external examiner, as well as the guidelines for the conduct of external examining, are available in the web-page of the AR/GS.

10.   Classification of awards

10.1   According to current practice, the various classifications for the undergraduate degree awards are based on the cumulative GPA (cGPA).

10.2   Individual faculties/schools may develop additional or alternative indicators for the award classifications in their programmes (for example, the final year project must attain a grade of B+ or above in addition to the cGPA).   Approval for introducing such indicators must be sought from the Senate.

11.   Retention of assessed materials

11.1   For the purpose of facilitating internal and/or external moderation, as well as to allow for the need to conduct investigation in possible cases of student appeal against the final grade and/or academic misconduct, the final examination scripts of the students (and similar assessed materials when the end-of-course assessment takes a form different from written examination) are retained by the Department of the course teacher/coordinator for a specified period of time. According to the current guidelines, this retention period is 6 months from the deadline for receiving student appeals against the final grade.

11.2   Apart from the end-of-course assessment, sample materials from assessments during the course or those from continuous assessments should also be collected and retained as evidence of student learning. In these cases, the retention period will be longer than 6 months and the materials concerned should be de-identified to maintain the anonymity of individual students.

11.3   For the purpose of providing evidence to external review panels in accreditation and/or Academic Consultation Panel (ACP) exercises, some selected samples of students' assessed materials will be retained (in electronic formats) for at least three academic years.

11.4   Further details pertaining to Sections 11.1 to 11.3, including *inter alia* the policy for the disposal of such assessed materials upon the expiry of the retention period, should be developed by the Teaching and Learning Policy Committee (TLPC), for consistent application to all Faculties/Schools and communication to the students.

11.5　The University's guidelines on confidentiality and personal data privacy must be observed in handling all matters regarding the storage and disposal of these assessed materials of the students.

12.　Academic honesty

12.1　The University upholds a high standard of academic honesty and all students have an obligation to understand and follow honest academic practices in pursuing their studies at the University.　As far as assessment is concerned, all work submitted for assessment by a student is accepted on the understanding that it is the student's own effort without falsification of any kind.

12.2　Any case of suspected academic misconduct will be actively investigated by the University, in order to safeguard the integrity and credibility of its awards and to ensure fairness for all students. Any substantiated breach of the established requirements for honest practice – whether intentional or due to a failure to take reasonable care – will result in disciplinary action being taken against those involved.

12.3　Academic misconduct includes the following actions –
(a) plagiarizing;
(b) breaching the examination regulations;
(c) inventing or falsifying data, evidence, references, experimental results or other materials which are presented in a student's work submitted for assessment;
(d) failing to observe ethical/responsible research protocol when collecting data for the honours project;
(e) submitting work which has been done by another person on behalf of a student;
(f) impersonating another student or allowing another student to impersonate him/her in an examination; and
(g) taking any other action which gives a student an improper advantage in his/her assessment and unduly disadvantages other students.

12.4　Plagiarism is a specific and serious form of academic misconduct. Information about what constitutes plagiarism must be communicated clearly and made readily available to all students at all times.　In the context of such information the course teacher should, at the start of a course, provide guidance to his/her students accordingly, drawing on any course-specific requirements as appropriate.

12.5　Clear guidelines regarding honest academic practice and what constitutes academic misconduct must be formulated and disseminated widely to students and staff.　Similarly for guidelines on the procedures for the investigation of suspected academic misconduct and the possible penalties. The AR should coordinate this process of information dissemination by collating pertinent information from other offices (such as the Graduate School) and providing a central point of access to students and staff.

12.6 Course teachers should take care to minimize the opportunities for academic dishonesty, when designing assessment tasks and setting the assessment topics/questions in such a task. In that connection, it is a good practice to refrain from assigning too heavy a weight to the final examination of a course, as well as to ensure that assessment topics/questions are regularly reviewed and to avoid re-using the same or similar materials in recent examination papers. More importantly, assessment tasks and questions/topics requiring knowledge recall are less preferred than those which aim at testing a student's higher-order cognitive abilities such as application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

13. Mitigation and review

13.1 A student who is prevented from completing an assessment task by extenuating circumstances beyond his/her own control must be given the opportunity to seek mitigation, in accordance with established procedural guidelines.

13.2 A student with disability (as defined in the Disability Discrimination Ordinance) can apply to the Academic Registry/Graduate School for additional support or adjustments to assessment which he/she may require. Without compromising the academic rigour of an assessment task, such a request should be met.

13.3 A student who believes that his/her final grade in a course is unfair or inaccurate may request for a review, in accordance with clearly established procedural guidelines.

14. Roles and responsibilities

14.1 The formulation and execution of this assessment policy, as well as subjecting it to regular review in the light of experience, depends on the genuine collaboration of many parties in general and the following in particular –

At University level:

(a) The Teaching and Learning Policy Committee (TLPC) is responsible for developing and overseeing the implementation of this institution-wide assessment policy, incorporating CRA principles, by September 2012. The policy document provides guidance to students, teachers, committees and examination boards (or equivalent) under the CRA model. The TLPC should monitor the effective implementation of CRA, review the policy document where appropriate and propose necessary remedial actions to the Senate from time to time.

(b) The Academic Registry (AR)/Graduate School (GS) are responsible for implementing the academic regulations which underpin the various practices set out in the institution-wide assessment policy. AR/GS will work with the CHTL to assist faculty members and students to adopt the CRA model.

(c) The CHTL is responsible for helping faculty members and students adopt the CRA model by offering workshops and seminars, assisting teachers to develop assessment rubrics and reviewing the mechanism for systematic feedback and evaluation on CRA.

At Faculty/School/AVA level:

(d) The Deans, who chair the respective faculty/school boards, assume the overall responsibility for the oversight of assessment methods and grading within their respective faculties/schools, as part of the quality assurance mechanism for their programmes. Deans should ensure that the departments comply with the institutional assessment policy.

At Department/Programme level:

(e) The Heads of Department are the "gatekeepers" who monitor compliance at the department level. They should oversee the supportive structures for individual departments and monitor the progress of OBTL implementation and CRA adoption.

(f) As the Chair of a PMC, the Programme Director/Coordinator should be in charge of the design and revision of programme curriculum and various student matters (such as academic problems, progression and graduation). Under his/her guidance, the PMC should have an assessment plan for the evaluation of learning outcomes and student performance at the programme level, and oversee the development of assessment rubrics for similar assessment methods within a programme. In some cases, a Head of Department can also be Programme Director, in which case the individual concerned will assume the responsibilities as listed in both (e) and (f).

At Course/Individual level:

(g) The faculty members have the responsibility for developing engaging pedagogies and relevant assessment methods, including assessment rubrics (based on the overall set adopted by their respective departments), and for helping students achieve the outcomes of the courses they teach. They are expected to analyze and interpret the assessment data with the view to introducing instructional changes in their courses.

(h) The students should take charge of their own learning and ensure that they understand the aims and expectations of assessment, and strive to perform to the best of their ability. They must observe the regulations for assessment and conduct themselves with academic honesty and integrity at all times.

14.2 As a matter of good practice, this policy should be kept under regular review and updated in the light of experience with its implementation.

References

The assessment policies of the following universities –

University of South Australia
University of Adelaide
University of Queensland
University of New South Wales
University of Otago, New Zealand
University of Canterbury, New Zealand
City University of London
University of Edinburgh
City University of Hong Kong
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Assessment Grading System (*for undergraduate programmes*)
Letter grades are used to indicate the results of assessment. The number of grade points gained by a student in a particular course corresponds to the letter grade.

Letter Grade	Academic Performance	Grade Point Per Unit	Grade Descriptions
A A-	Excellent	4.00 3.67	An excellent performance on all Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and a thorough mastery of the subject matter.
B+ B B-	Good	3.33 3.00 2.67	A good performance on all ILOs and is competent in knowledge of the subject matter. OR An excellent performance on the majority of the ILOs and is competent in knowledge of the subject matter.
C+ C C-	Satisfactory	2.33 2.00 1.67	A satisfactory performance on all ILOs and an acceptable level of knowledge of the course. OR A good performance on some ILOs which compensate for marginal performance on others, resulting in an overall satisfactory performance. An acceptable level of knowledge of the course.
D	Marginal Pass	1.00	A marginal acceptable performance on the majority of the ILOs and the student is permitted to proceed to more advanced work in the subject area.
E	Conditional Pass	0.00	A temporary grade applicable only to the first-semester component of a year course. A student who receives the conditional grade may continue to study the course in the following semester. If the student obtains a passing grade in the following semester, the first-semester grade E will be converted to grade D. In the case of failure (F grade), withdrawal from, or discontinuation of that course in the following semester, the first-semester grade E will be converted to grade F.
F	Fail	0.00	An unsatisfactory performance on the majority of the ILOs. A student with grade F in the first semester of a year course is not allowed to continue his studies in that course in the following semester.
S	Satisfactory	Not included in GPA calculation	A satisfactory completion of a course.
U	Unsatisfactory	Not included in GPA calculation	An unsatisfactory performance in a course. It is applicable only to courses approved by the Senate.

Assessment Grading System (*for taught postgraduate programmes*)

Letter grades are used to indicate the results of assessment. The number of grade points gained by a student in a particular course corresponds to the letter grade.

Letter Grade	Academic Performance	Grade Point Per Unit	Grade Descriptions
A A-	Excellent	4.00 3.67	An excellent performance on all Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and a thorough mastery of the subject matter.
B+ B B-	Good Satisfactory	3.33 3.00 2.67	A satisfactory to good performance on all ILOs and is competent in knowledge of the subject matter.
C+ C C-	Marginal Pass	2.33 2.00 1.67	A marginal acceptable performance on the majority of the ILOs.
F	Fail	0.00	An unsatisfactory performance on the majority of the ILOs. A student with grade F in the first semester of a year course is not allowed to continue his/her studies in that course in the following semester. Courses with grade F must be repeated.
S	Satisfactory	Not included in GPA calculation	A satisfactory completion of a course.
U	Unsatisfactory	Not included in GPA calculation	An unsatisfactory performance in a course. It is applicable only to courses approved by the Senate.

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