



UR Guidelines on Assessment, Examination Moderation & Conflict Prevention

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Guidelines on Assessment, Examination Moderation & Conflict Prevention

1.0 Assessment guidance

Our vision to show the rest of the world that our graduates are as good as those produced anywhere else, is underpinned by a robust assessment strategy. The way in which we conduct assessment is critical to our standards and our legitimacy as a University. Working within HEC guidelines we need to develop valid and reliable assessment tools at all stages of the curricula. It is often said that assessment drives learning and the reality is that students often want to know what will be assessed and will not learn things that are not assessed. Thus we need a comprehensive assessment strategy. It is our belief that proper assessment drives up the quality of education. We have no choice but to excel in this and we must support one another in this endeavor. The following are a series of top tips on assessment with reference to, and in compliance with the Academic Regulations.

2.0 Forms of Assessment

There exist different forms of assessment that may be appropriate for different learning outcomes, therefore, depending on what type of learning outcome is required to assess its level of achievement and the level of studies, the University of Rwanda lecturers are encouraged to select the appropriate form of assessment among the following:

- Tests, examinations, short written pieces (e.g. press releases) that elicit knowledge, understanding and the ability to describe accurately;
- Essays, examinations and other kinds of writing that require students to produce evidence and make reasoned argument on the basis of it;
- Essays and examinations that require students to analyze a problem, diagnose the nature of a substance or complaint, plan investigation or propose solutions;
- Oral and other non-written forms of presentation of arguments or results (oral or poster presentations, websites) – including presentations with a role-play element, such as a presentation to a non-technical audience;
- Role-play to explore and test decision-making or group-work skills, or diagnostic ability;
- Performance: making prototypes, works of art; writing computer programmes, poems; presenting music, drama;
- Plans for practical tasks or situations: proposals for research or social intervention/action or placement activity, plans for works of art or prototypes.
- Practical tasks: laboratory-based tasks; diagnostic tasks; research projects;
- Reports of practical tasks or visits/placements: research reports, laboratory reports, reflexive accounts of placements etc;

3.0 Purpose of Grading Students' Work

- Evaluation and grading of student work at the University of Rwanda as everywhere else, is a very significant quality assurance activity that measures the level of a student's academic achievement;
- Assigning of grades serves multiple purposes as an evaluation of students' work;
 - It is a means of communicating to students and other stakeholders, the student's performance,
 - It is a source of motivation to students for continued learning and improvement,
 - It is a lecturer's means of organizing a lesson, a module unit, or a semester in that grades mark transitions or progress in a module, and bring closure or finality to the module teaching and learning.
- Grading also provides students with feedback on their own learning, clarifying for them what they understand, what they don't understand, and what they can do to improve.
- Grading also provides feedback to lecturers/instructors on the progress of their students' learning, which provides information that can inform future teaching decisions.
- Grading can also be an experience that enhances student learning and a measure for identification of what learning outcomes have been achieved.

However, grades can also be a source of lots of anxiety for students. While some few students view it as a limited assessment of their work on one item, others take grades very seriously, and see them as reflections on their personal worth while others simply want to gain advantage of what they may not have worked hard to earn. This may explain why students are often eager to appeal for a review of their marks, sometimes bringing them at loggerheads with their lecturers.

4.0 Some Important Elements in the Process of Evaluating and Grading Students that could avoid Conflicts between a Student & a Lecturer

4.1 The Lecturer's responsibility

- A lecturer/instructor must make clear to students right from the very beginning of teaching, about their grading standards. He or she could, for example, begin by explaining what level of performance is necessary for a student to obtain an A or a B or a C etc grade in his/her class. In the lecturer's Course Outline that he/she shares with students at the start of the semester, the marking criteria and other related expectations must be clearly specified so there is no suggestion of a mystery imbedded in the whole marking exercise.
- Evaluating students work is more than simply assigning grades. Comments that explain students' assessment and a willingness to have conversations with students over their work and their ideas are equally important. These build trust and understanding between the student and the teacher right from start.
- One of the goals of evaluating students work is to encourage them to continue learning, not to provide harsh feedback that decreases their intrinsic motivation. It is necessary for the teaching staff to establish an open door policy or establish a student-lecturer consultation hours for students to access the teacher easily for consultations.

4.2 Effective Grading that would not attract conflicts between a student & a lecturer

4.2.1 Some Important Basic Ideas in Assessing Students Work:

For one, a lecturer's/instructor's grading standards should reflect module goals, learning outcomes or competences a student is expected to have achieved by the end of the module or programme. If a module is designed to emphasize analysis and integration of ideas for example, then assignments should reflect this. In addition, criteria for grades should also be built around the extent or degree to which students analyze and integrate ideas.

- 4.2.2 Grading standards should be clearly stated.** These should be well articulated early in the programme. For example, as said earlier,

- What it would take for students to perform in order to earn an “A” etc?
- How technically proficient, for example, must students’ writing be?
- What the criteria for each assignment is
- What contribution to the final grade is class attendance etc.

It is very important that students are given a chance to learn the instructor’s standards as early as the first day of meeting the class rather than wait until the mid-semester to let students discover the lecturer has set high standards and expects nothing short of those standards.

4.2.3 Assign a short paper or homework in the first two or three

weeks of the semester to indicate level of expectations: Some senior teaching staff prefer to grade these early assignments rigorously so as to give students a chance to re-write one assignment as a way of setting their standards, with the rationale that students will learn and retain their lecturer’s high performance expectations for the remainder of the semester.

4.3 Mechanics of Grading

4.3.1 Mark effectively & efficiently: It is important that the grades given to student work are not only fair and consistent, but are also desirable. It becomes imperative therefore, that grading be as efficiently done as possible. Granted there are no quick fixes for grading, but there are some things teaching staff can do to maximize efficiency while grading fairly and consistently. It is important therefore to state the marking criteria explicitly, such as outlining what aspects the module leader will be looking at when evaluating a student’s work. This is helpful in gaining a sense of the overall quality of the papers.

4.3.2 Comment on a student’s work.

Commenting on a student’s work is an important part of the educational and assessment processes; simply assigning a grade is not enough and may appear randomly done. Comments tell the student why they have been graded as they have, and how they can improve in the future. When properly written, comments on student work can inspire them to continue working and improving as learners. Too many negative comments however, can also overwhelm and demoralize a student so the module leader/instructor has to strike a balance. There are several benefits for commenting on student papers:

4.3.3 Comments justify and explain the grade that has been assigned. Students may justifiably question a module leader who returns a paper with a “C”, and no comments, but students are less likely to question the grade when they have been provided with many constructive comments that explain the grade.

- Comments or feedback from a lecturer to a student often help students to continuously improve. Students can see what it is they need to do better or differently in the future to reach the standards set for the programme in question.
- Comments, sensitively handled, can motivate and encourage students, especially if the comments are balanced. Constructive comments generally reflect a balance between three kinds of comments: what was strong or what was done well, what was weak, and how the student can improve.

4.3.4 Explain the grade.

Lecturers/instructors should use their comments to help students understand why the students’ work was graded as it was. For example, the lecturer can sit with a student and explain why his paper earned a B and not an A. He or she may need to point out that whereas the paper has elements of excellence, it lacks in analysis and has careless spelling errors, all of which have kept the student from earning an A.

4.3.5 Write a mix of marginal and final comments. Experience has shown that students learn best from a mix of marginal comments that make specific points in the text, and final comments that summarize the lecturer’s overall impression of the work and that explain the grade.

5.0 Handling Student Complaints

Invariably, no matter how careful and consistent the lecturer is, one or more students will raise a question about the grade they have received. Most students will simply want an explanation as to why they received the grade they did. They are certainly entitled to an explanation. In order to cut down on grade complaints later into the semester, it is important to reiterate that:

- criteria for grades be set by the lecturer right from the start of teaching a class so students are aware,
- comments on each assignment be duly given.
- Each student's performance records be well kept in case of a later need for reference should any questions arise.
- If a student approaches a lecturer and lodges a complaint over an unfair grade, it is better for the lecturer to set up a meeting and later meet the student when fully ready to explain his/her decision.
- Instructors can even ask a student to submit a paragraph explaining his/her concerns over the grade and why they think the grade should be changed.
- Listen to the student. When a student wants to talk about his/her grade, the lecturer's first task should be to listen to his/her concerns. Hearing students out can go a long way to diffusing a potentially tense situation by listening to their concerns before making any decisions.
- Keep an open mind. It is very important that a lecturer keeps an open mind about student concerns over grades matters. We all make mistakes and a student may have legitimate concerns.
- Respond to the student. Once a lecturer has listened, it is time to respond to the student. He or she may show how a student did not meet the required standards. In that case, it is helpful to turn the discussion to what a student might do in the future, pointing to specific examples in his/her work that can be improved.
- If the student is not convinced, then an arrangement would have to be made in which a student would be required to write an appeal to the Dean of the School requesting for a remark of his paper which would involve another lecturer in the same field.

6.0 Timeline for preparing pre-graduation examinations to be held in each academic year.

Below is the proposed timeline for developing pre-graduation examinations held in May/June of each year. It is important that this timeline be strictly adhered to:

May/June of each academic year	Examinations
15 th January of current year (e.g. 2017)	After final changes, exams are locked down.
15 th December of previous year (e.g. 2016)	Papers sent to Principal after being modified following feedback from

	external examiners.
1 st December of previous year (e.g. 2016)	Papers returned from external examiners
1 st November of previous year (e.g. 2016)	Examination papers and model answers/marking schemes sent to external examiners
1 st October of the previous year (e.g. 2016)	Start to draft exams, model answers/marking schemes

N.B: For all other examinations such as end of module papers, the examination papers and the model answers must be locked down by the start of the module.

7.0 Assessment Imperatives

All assessments must

- map to a blueprint of all learning outcomes.
- examine the full range of knowledge, skills and competences.
- use a range of assessment tools that must be valid and reliable.
- have model answers written alongside them.
- have the method of standard-setting made explicit.

8.0 Other Key Considerations

When requesting feedback from external examiners on draft examination papers, all question papers with their model answers must be sent.

At the time of the examinations, trained administrative staff can ‘mark’ MCQ papers. Academic staff must double mark a sample of papers and review trends in performance of questions and students.

9.0 External Examiners’ role in written examinations (see also *UR Guidelines for the appointment of External Examiners document*)

External Examiners do not need to be physically present for any of the stages described below.

- After the students have taken the written papers, the External Examiners should be sent a sample of 15% of marked scripts from the top, 15% from the middle, and 15% from those around the pass mark as per the Academic Regulations for Undergraduate programmes.
- You may wish to ask them to moderate two internal examiners’ marks where the marks are divergent, or where a student is very close to the pass mark.
- The External Examiners will normally mark the papers and confirm the internal examiners’ marks.
- All papers – draft papers and marked student scripts can be scanned and sent electronically to External Examiners. They can be password protected.
- In some cases, the External Examiners are asked to make high stakes determinations on students’ performance. The marks of the External Examiners are considered at the School

Council in the same way that other examiners' marks are considered. The External Examiner should never be the sole marker.

10.0 External examiners in clinical examinations.

In the specific case of clinical examinations, the following simple rules will help to articulate expectations of external examiners:

- They are not expected to attend all clinical examinations at one sitting, and neither are they required to stay in the country for the duration of the examinations.
- They should sample the clinical examinations.
- Their role is to check the integrity and fairness of the examination process – they 'examine' the internal examiners. For this reason they may assess a student's performance but only to confirm the fairness of the internal examiners' assessment
- Accommodation should be sought in University premises; fees will be reviewed.

11.0 Continuous Assessment (CA) in UR Colleges.

UR needs to re-consider what 'continuous assessment' means for us.

- To what degree should we use formative and summative CA?
- How can best practice be used in CA to develop students' knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as attitudes and behaviours?
- How much CA is enough? We should make more use of weekly quizzes and test questions in lectures.

11.1 Student authored questions.

Engage students in writing Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) and other examination questions. This develops a high level of appreciation of the question style and construct, and also provides a potential bank of questions for summative and formative use.

11.2 Mock examinations.

All students should be given the opportunity to sit mock examinations. These can be incorporated into a classroom teaching session with 30-minute 'papers' followed by peer or self-marking, during which time the lecturer can explain answers and deal with misunderstandings.

- For clinical examinations, mock examinations should be arranged in the module leading up to the final examination. Again, this experience can be an abridged form of the real examination and can be peer-marked too.

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