

# CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

## CSU ASSESSMENT POLICY

### A CRITERION-REFERENCED STANDARDS-BASED APPROACH

As approved by Academic Senate (AS12/08, 16.05.12) for introduction in 2013.

#### 1. The Scope and Purpose of this Policy

- 1.1 This policy applies to all course and subject offerings from 2013
- 1.2 The policy sets a framework of **minimum** quality standards for assessment within which Faculties/Schools will devise procedural guidelines *for assessment and grading* that are consistent with the intent and directions of this University Policy
- 1.3 This policy should be read in conjunction to the University's Moderation Policy and the assessment regulations of Academic Senate.

#### 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This Policy has been informed by "*Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*" (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2010)
- 2.2 Charles Sturt University (CSU) is committed to providing a variety of learning environments to meet the different needs of students drawn from diverse educational, social, ethnic and economic backgrounds
- 2.3 Assessment is an exercise of professional judgment by staff and others, and takes place in a variety of contexts including classrooms, online and distance learning, work placements and other settings
- 2.4 Assessment is widely thought to be the single most important determinant of learning behaviour. It is an integral part of the teaching and learning process that contributes significantly to learning outcomes. What is assessed and how it is assessed give clear messages to students about what the University considers to be important
- 2.5 Assessment at CSU must cater to the needs of several stakeholders:
  - 2.5.1 Students, who need a fair assessment process that does not place unreasonable demands on their time or competence, contributes to their learning and gives them a reputable qualification
  - 2.5.2 Staff, who have a concern for students and a commitment to professional integrity
  - 2.5.3 The University, which has a reputation to maintain and a budget to consider
  - 2.5.4 The community, which must have confidence in CSU qualifications

- 2.5.5 Potential employers and accrediting bodies, which must be able to trust the reliability and validity of CSU qualifications
  - 2.5.6 Government bodies, such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
  - 2.5.7 External parties, including colleagues in workplace learning locations, who assist with the assessment and grading of CSU students
- 2.6 Assessment is the process of attributing value to the examined outcomes of any task (examination, assignment, practical and other) that a student is required to undertake and complete in order to satisfy the requirements of their studies. The application of this value may be summative (part of the official system of recording performance and grades) or formative (which provides feedback to help students to evaluate, develop their skills and improve their performance)
- 2.7 At CSU, assessment and grading are based on a **criterion-referenced standards-based approach** where assessment is aligned to pre-determined and defined criteria and related standards of skills, knowledge and competencies. Criteria and standards-based assessment practices require specific criteria and performance standards to be identified and stated so that students understand clearly the level of performance required for each assessment task. In this context, criteria are defined performance attributes to which the assessor refers when forming a judgment about the student's response to the different aspects of the assessment task. Standards describe the quality of student performance in relation to the criteria in any assessment task. The use of assessment criteria enhances transparency and consistency because expectations about student performance are made clear to students and staff. This enables students to develop better judgments about their own, and others', performances
- 2.8 Standards established must be aligned to the AQF level of the award and to the year of study. Students must graduate with appropriate standards of achievement
- 2.9 At CSU, there are no pre-determined failure rates for subjects, and there are no given guidelines specifying what percentage of students in a specific cohort will achieve each passing grade.

### **3. The Purposes of Assessment at CSU**

The purposes of assessment are to:

- 3.1** Guide, encourage, evaluate and assign grades to student learning, fairly and reliably, by ensuring that assessment tasks are aligned to the desired learning outcomes which in turn reflect course and subject objectives, learning experiences and CSU curriculum principles
- 3.2** Discover areas of strength and weakness in a student's knowledge and to provide feedback that will help them to improve their future understandings and performances
- 3.3** Encourage students to focus their efforts on developing appropriate knowledge, understandings and skills
- 3.4** Prepare students for life-long self-assessment and the professional judgment of others
- 3.5** Select students on a competitive basis, for example in determining winners of scholarships, and prizes
- 3.6** Measure and certify performance at the end of a course against established criteria and standards so that the level of competency is communicated externally, including to employers and accrediting bodies
- 3.7** Ensure that the University's courses comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and assessment practices are consistent with the level of attainment required before the qualification is granted by the University.

### **4. Principles of Assessment**

The Assessment Policy is founded on the following principles:

- 4.1** Assessment at CSU is criterion-referenced and standards-based where students' work is assessed against stated criteria that reflect the expected learning outcomes of the course and subject
- 4.2** The level of difficulty /complexity of the assessment tasks will align to, and be consistent with, the AQF requirements for the qualification level of that course
- 4.3** All assessment tasks and practices will be developed from a whole-of-course perspective using assessment mapping and overall the assessments must be aligned with the CSU curriculum principles.
- 4.4** Assessment will be sequenced and scaffolded to enable students to build progressively their capabilities and skills
- 4.5** Assessment requirements in subjects, including the weighting of assessment tasks and the criteria against which tasks are assessed and marked, will be communicated to students before the subject commences
- 4.6** In the same subject offered across different courses, modes and sessions, assessment tasks will be equivalent, and assessment processes will be fair, and consistently applied, for all students
- 4.7** Students will be encouraged to engage in their own education, where students manage their own learning and develop as active partners in the learning process through undertaking challenging responsibilities and making choices

- 4.8 Assessment will be conducted within a framework and context of academic integrity and minimises the occurrence of academic dishonesty
- 4.9 The responsibilities of both staff and students should be stated clearly and unambiguously
- 4.10 Wherever possible, especially in first year undergraduate subjects, students will be required to complete an item of assessment with low weighting early in the teaching period, the purpose of which is to provide feedback to students
- 4.11 Students will receive adequate and timely feedback on their performances in assessment tasks
- 4.12 Assessment will be complemented by appropriate and approved moderation processes
- 4.13 The implementation of the Policy will be conducted by an organisational change framework, including support for staff development
- 4.14 The University will ensure that student achievement in individual subjects is graded in accordance with Academic Senate's assessment regulations
- 4.15 Assessment tasks and marking will allow students to demonstrate their level of capability where differentiation between the performances of different students is required.

## 5. Students' Responsibilities

Students are responsible for their own learning and for reaching appropriate standards in their studies. Students should ensure that reasonable measures are taken to satisfy assessment requirements. These include:

- 5.1 Ensuring that they have the necessary assumed knowledge, skills and experiences for enrolment in the subject
- 5.2 Ensuring that they understand what is expected of them for each subject of enrolment (by reading carefully the online subject outline)
- 5.3 Ensuring they understand the requirements, including timetables, for examinations and other assessment tasks
- 5.4 Completing all assigned activities, as well as preparing for those activities
- 5.5 Becoming familiar, and complying, with the University's regulations regarding academic misconduct
- 5.6 Completing and submitting assigned tasks by the due date and in the required manner
- 5.7 Keeping a copy of submitted assignments, where appropriate
- 5.8 Collecting all marked assignments in sufficient time to learn from the feedback provided
- 5.9 Obtaining assistance, including but not limited to academic and general support, as soon as it becomes clear that assistance is necessary.

## 6. Staff Responsibilities

6.1 Staff have the following **pre-assessment** responsibilities:

- 6.1.1 Developing assessment items with colleagues and course teams to ensure that assessment tasks are peer-reviewed before they are adopted for use

- 6.1.2 Establishing valid criteria and standards of performance that are consistent with the assessment item and are aligned to the relevant learning objectives and experiences as specified in the subject outline
- 6.1.3 Situating assessment regimes for a subject within the assessment map for the course
- 6.1.4 Ensuring that, once set and communicated to students, assessment tasks will not be altered, unless approved by the Head of School
- 6.1.5 Communicating to students the assessment criteria and performance standards in a timely manner, before the subject offering commences. Students will be informed about: the expectations and requirements of assessment tasks; the marking criteria and standards for each assessment task, including the levels of performance required to achieve each passing grade in each task; and, the submission dates and presentation requirements of each task

**6.2 Staff have the following **during-assessment** responsibilities:**

- 6.2.1 Providing relevant feedback on all items of assessment. In providing feedback to students, staff will:
  - Ensure that the feedback is timely, informative and supportive
  - Ensure that marks are justified against the stated assessment criteria and standards
  - Refer relevant students to appropriate academic and support services
- 6.2.2 Ensuring that the University timelines and deadlines for the submission of examination papers are met
- 6.2.3 Gradebook will be used for recording students' marks. Staff will submit assessment marks in Gradebook and release marks to students progressively through the teaching session, and submit final grades for processing within the required timeframe
- 6.2.4 Ensuring that assessment processes and grading are consistent with the University's Moderation Policy and guidelines and that:
  - examination papers and assignments have been checked independently and contain no errors
  - the allocation of final grades in their subjects has suitable moderation checks that help to eliminate errors.

**6.3 Staff have the following **post-assessment** responsibilities:**

- 6.3.1 Ensuring that adequate and accurate records, of marks and grades of individual student performances in their subject, are maintained and are accessible by relevant School staff
- 6.3.2 Reviewing assessment tasks for their effectiveness in the assessment and grading processes
- 6.3.3 Recommending grades to relevant School committees

## **7. The Roles of Faculties and Schools and Assessment Committees**

- 7.1 The Dean is responsible for applying this policy
- 7.2 The Faculty Assessment Committee is responsible for determining the grades of students in each subject

- 7.3 Course directors or equivalent should ensure that a “whole of course” approach is adopted for assessment tasks, including the alignment of criteria and standards to the AQF level of the award, the level (year) of study, and the subject and course learning objectives, outcomes and learning experiences
- 7.4 The Dean (or nominee) will be responsible for the assessment tasks and processes of courses and subjects taught by CSU teaching partners, in consultation with Heads of Schools
- 7.5 The Head of School (or nominee), with the support of Course Directors, will ensure that assessment methods and practices of all staff, including sessional staff, comply with this Policy and the Moderation Policy
- 7.6 With a view to continual improvement, School and Faculty committees regularly will review and monitor the outcomes of subject assessment and will facilitate appropriate action plans to address issues of concern
- 7.7 For the responsibilities of relevant staff refer to assessment regulations G2: Delegations Assigned in the Assessment Regulations ([http://www.csu.edu.au/acad\\_sec/academic-manual/docs/g2.pdf](http://www.csu.edu.au/acad_sec/academic-manual/docs/g2.pdf))
- 7.8 In extraordinary circumstances, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) or nominee, in consultation with the relevant Dean and with appropriate disciplinary input may determine the grades of individual students or of a cohort of students, and these grades will be reported to Academic Senate, along with the reasons for the determinations.

## **8. The Role of Academic Senate**

Academic Senate is responsible for:

- 8.1 Approving and amending this Policy
- 8.2 With the assistance of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), monitoring the implementation and regular reporting on the outcomes of this Policy.

***END OF POLICY***

## APPENDIX 1: Definitions of terms

**Assessment** is the process of ascribing value to the outcome of any work that a student undertakes whilst engaged in a course of studies.

**Assessment tasks** include, but are not limited to: essays, tests, examinations, laboratory, clinical or field practicum, projects, compilations, productions, presentations, performances, web-based discussion.

**Cohort** refers to all students correctly enrolled in a unit of study.

**Criterion referencing** is the assessment of the extent to which a student achieved the stated learning outcomes of a subject. This assessment is carried out against previously specified benchmarks ('criteria'). Where a grade is assigned, it is assigned on the basis of the standard the student has achieved on each of the criteria. It provides a focus for teaching and learning and specifies for the lecturer and student what is required from the assessment task. In criterion referenced assessment, judgments about the quality of students' performance are made by reference to predetermined criteria and standards and not by reference to the achievement of other students. Criterion referenced assessment differs from norm-referenced assessment in which grades are determined by reference to other students' performance with only a certain percentage of students able to attain each grade. At CSU, assessment is not norm-referenced.

**Criteria** are specific performance attributes or characteristics that the assessor takes into account when making a judgment about the student response to the different elements of the assessment task.

**Formative assessment:** A single assessment task is formative when it provides feedback to students on how their work can be improved. In this way, the intent is to help students to monitor and reflect on their learning progress and determine where improvements can be made.

**Summative assessment:** Assessment is summative when it forms part of the final grade in a subject. The student's work is assessed in terms of pre-determined standards so that it can be classified in terms of levels of achievement (grades).

**Norm referencing** means awarding marks and grades by reference to the performance of other students in the cohort, according to a prescribed distribution of grades.

**Moderation** means the process of reviewing and checking the marking and grading of individual assessors to achieve consistency in the application of unit objectives, performance standards and marking criteria.

**Standards** are statements describing the level of the quality of student performance in relation to the stated criteria in an assessment task. In standards-based assessment, specific criteria are established and standards (which are specified levels of the qualities of performance) are developed for those criteria for each assessment task. A student's achievement (and marks awarded) can then be assessed by reference to their standards of performance in various aspects of the assessment task. In this way, comparisons can be made between students based on their achievement of the standards. To achieve this, staff will need to identify and articulate clearly the different levels of performance that are connected to the grade and communicate those standards to students and other staff.