Purposes and Principles of Assessment

The assessment of student learning is a central activity of the University. It has an important role in motivating and shaping student learning. Through assessment students gain feedback on their learning and their academic achievements are judged and certified. The academic standards and the rigour of our courses are embodied within our assessment schemes and processes. At SCU, assessment practice is guided by the University’s Assessment Policy.

The Purposes of Assessment

Assessment serves three key purposes:

1. **Supporting the process of learning**
   Assessment motivates, guides and reinforces student learning. This occurs through the careful design of assessment tasks to foster rich learning and extend students’ knowledge, skills and understanding. It also occurs through the feedback we provide to students on their progress and how they might improve their performance of a task. (This is often referred to as the ‘formative’ role of assessment.)

2. **Judging student achievement**
   Assessment enables us to make judgements about the quality of student work. This includes the activities of marking, deriving grades and reporting on student achievements. When judging the quality of work, we are using our professional expertise, with close reference to explicit criteria and standards for a task. (This is often referred to as the ‘summative’ role of assessment.)

3. **Maintaining professional standards**
   Assessment ensures that disciplinary or professional standards are maintained, and that our graduates are appropriately prepared to enter their vocations. During a course of study, students are assessed for evidence that they have acquired essential industry skills, attributes and knowledge. Through assessment, we are certifying students as ‘safe’ or ‘capable’ to enter the professions.

Assessment tasks for a unit are designed to establish how well the student is able to perform the unit objectives. All assessment tasks should therefore be in clear alignment with unit objectives. (Biggs & Tang, 2007). This provides an evident rationale for the assessment scheme, and sends explicit and consistent messages to students about what is expected of them. A simple rule of thumb is:

Learning objectives ↔ developmental learning activities ↔ assessment

Assessment tasks for a unit are designed with consideration of other units in a course to ensure a whole-of-course approach to assessment. Such an approach ensures that students undertake a diverse range of assessment tasks and allows a suite of graduate attributes to be developed from first to final year of their courses.

Seven Principles of Effective Assessment

1. Assessment tasks should aim to create authentic challenges for students, based upon real-world tasks, problems, skills and performances. Authentic assessments can motivate students and assist in their transition to the world of work.

2. Assessment tasks are accompanied by marking criteria and explicit standards of performance that provide detailed guidance to students about how judgements are made about the quality of their work. This is known as a criterion or standards-based assessment. It helps to provide transparency to students about our assessment judgements, and to support consistency of our marking.

3. Certain assessment tasks may privilege some students and disadvantage others. Assessment tasks should be inclusive and equitable so that they are culturally appropriate and avoid bias or other unintended negative outcomes. Particular account should be taken for student diversity, including
international students, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students with disabilities, and Indigenous students.

4. It is important to ensure that there is a consistent and reliable approach to the design, marking and grading of assessment tasks. **Moderation processes** aim to provide assurance that all aspects of assessment are clear, consistent and fit for purpose. There are three phases to the moderation process: (1) Before release to students, when unit assessment schemes are checked for sound design; (2) During marking, to ensure that markers are consistently interpreting criteria and standards; and (3) After marking is complete, to ensure all grades have been consistently and fairly derived.

5. The University places considerable trust in academics’ professional judgement and expertise in all aspects of the assessment process. This is particularly so when making judgements about the quality of student work. All discretionary decisions and judgements should be undertaken by academic staff in accordance with principles of **fairness, consistency and transparency**.

6. Plagiarism is not tolerated by the University. Staff should ensure that students are well inducted into academic conventions and the University’s values regarding **academic integrity**. In the design of assessment tasks we should be alert to opportunities that discourage or make plagiarism more difficult to achieve.

7. The University encourages the adoption of assessment practice and innovations that are grounded wherever possible in research-based evidence of **pedagogical effectiveness** and contemporary best practice. We also support the principle of efficiency in all assessment matters, including setting an appropriate student assessment load in each unit, and the timely handling and return of student scripts.

**Sources**

