

## THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

### University Assessment Policy

The purpose of assessment is for both assessment of learning and assessment for learning. Assessment is defined as the process of forming a judgment about the quality and extent of student achievement or performance. All types of assessment activities which allow for such a judgment are covered by this definition. This Policy<sup>1</sup> sets out the philosophy, principles and regulations that guide and regulate assessment practices for undergraduate and taught postgraduate curricula at the University<sup>2</sup>. Faculties/Schools and the Common Core Office are encouraged to draw up Faculty/School/curriculum/programme-specific assessment policies as they deem fit, for consideration by the Senate.

#### **1. Philosophy of Assessment**

- 1.1 Assessment is an integral component of a curriculum. The University Assessment Policy is underpinned by the notion that assessment should reflect what and how students have learnt, and should enhance, facilitate, and support their learning experiences. Assessment communicates to students what the University holds to be important in student learning; to staff and students the effectiveness of student learning, the attainment of educational goals and the alignment with learning outcomes; and to the community and all external stakeholders the University's realization of its vision and mission, and the achievement of educational aims.
- 1.2 The University seeks to ensure that its students are assessed in appropriate, credible, fair, rigorous and transparent manners at all times. Students should be made aware of the expectations with respect to the standards of their performance in assessments, that they should behave with full academic integrity in all assessments and that they should receive timely feedback, in general or in the specific, on all assessments. The University expects that its teachers will at all times conduct assessment with fairness and academic integrity, and where possible, on an anonymous basis to protect student identity.

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<sup>1</sup> This Policy is based on a paper entitled "Assessment Issues and Implications for Implementation in the New 4-year Undergraduate Curriculum" submitted by the Steering Committee on 4-Year Undergraduate Curriculum to the Senate in April 2010, and a draft paper entitled "Towards a University Policy for Assessment in Undergraduate Curricula" which had been submitted to the Steering Committee. In the drafting of the Steering Committee's discussion papers, the following references had been consulted:

D. Carless, G. Joughin, N-F Liu and associates (2006). *How Assessment Supports Learning*. HKU Press.

Rowntree, D. (1987). *Assessing students: How shall we know them?* (Rev. ed.). London: Herper & Row.

Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to teach in higher education*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Routledge Farmer.

Hunt, L.H. (2008). *Grade Inflation: Academic standards in higher education*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

<sup>2</sup> This Policy is applicable to all learning environments (viz. physical, virtual and hybrid), and should be read in conjunction with the University's "[Policy on Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence for Teaching and Learning](#)".

## **2. Principles of Assessment**

### **2.1 *Assessment for student learning***

2.1.1 Assessment is an important vehicle for supporting and guiding student learning. Apart from assessment *of* learning, assessment should support learning, *i.e.* assessment *for* learning. Care needs to be taken to ensure that assessment will motivate students to learn and promote a deep approach to learning. In the design of curricula and courses, assessment needs to be envisaged as an integral part of the student learning experience.

2.1.2 To facilitate the achievement of educational aims, assessment practices should reflect the following principles:

- Assessment should be appropriately structured to enable students to maximize opportunities for learning and to achieve educational aims.
- Assessment and the determination of assessment results should take into account the progression of cognitive demand and intellectual challenge.
- Assessment should facilitate the integration of knowledge.

### **2.2 *Alignment with learning outcomes***

2.2.1 Students everywhere, and particularly in Hong Kong, are assessment driven. Rather than being seen as undesirable, this should be taken as an opportunity to drive and shape student learning. It provides an opportunity to focus learning on achieving desirable aims.

2.2.2 This principle is important in the adoption of an outcomes-based approach to student learning (OBASL). Faculties/Schools have formulated learning outcomes for the curricula that they are offering. Course learning outcomes for each curriculum are formulated to align with the programme/curriculum learning outcomes. For the outcomes to be achieved, assessment needs to explicitly relate to learning outcomes and provide a test of, or evidence for, their achievement.

2.2.3 In implementing the OBASL, there should be alignment between the programme and course learning outcomes and the assessment processes and standards. Decisions regarding assessment (including criteria and standards) need to be made collaboratively amongst teaching staff at the time of drafting programme and course learning outcomes and not at the end of a teaching cycle. They include the forms of assessment to be used, the expectations with respect to student achievement and how these are to be communicated to students at the outset, the determination of results of assessments, the feedback to students *etc.*

### **2.3 *Diversity of assessment types***

2.3.1 A well designed course should have a variety of types of desired learning outcomes for different types of learning experience in a programme/curriculum. Diverse forms of assessment are required to capture student achievement in a diversity of learning endeavours. In addition, assessment instruments which are highly reliable are often

restricted to the testing of fairly narrow learning outcomes, such as knowledge *per se* rather than use, application and synthesis of knowledge. Hence, a diversity of forms of assessment needs to be employed, and there should be a good balance of different forms of assessment appropriate for different types of learning experience in a programme/curriculum.

- 2.3.2 Assessment needs to be both summative and formative. It needs to be summative because certification is a necessary part of university education. Assessment which does not contribute significantly to grades is unlikely to be taken seriously by students. Summative assessment refers to assessment activities which aim to provide a measure and record of the quality and extent of student achievement or performance. As well as being summative, assessments should be formative by providing timely feedback to help students move progressively towards the achievement of the desired learning outcomes. Formative assessment refers to assessment activities which are directed at enhancing, facilitating, supporting, encouraging and motivating learning, aiming to inform students of their progress, achievement and performance, and to provide guidance to them (and to inform teachers about student learning, misunderstandings, areas of deficiency/weakness/difficulty and areas of strength).
- 2.3.3 Assessment tasks which have strong potential to support student learning and their attainment of learning outcomes should be encouraged. Some examples of these tasks are extended assignments, involving students working on a topic/area/scenario/problem individually and collectively, which typically call for synthesis and application. Others are self-reflective tasks, such as portfolios.
- 2.3.4 Diversity in assessment types also caters for different strengths in learning and should promote student interest and maintain motivation. It is also seen by students as making assessment fairer, in that it caters for differing strengths.
- 2.3.5 A summary of the percentages taken up by different types of assessment in a particular curriculum should be made available for curriculum review purposes.

## 2.4 *Fair Assessment*

- 2.4.1 Assessment procedures employed should exemplify ethical practice, academic integrity and honesty, impartial judgments, equity, and moderation, both in the setting of assessment procedures and in the marking/grading of their outcomes, and fully take into account the level of academic development of students.
- 2.4.2 For assessment to be perceived as fair, the processes involved need to be transparent to students, and where possible, assessment should be conducted on an anonymous basis to protect student identity. Students must be made aware of how they will be assessed, when assignments are due, the standards for awarding grades, and how and when feedback on the assessment will be provided.
- 2.4.3 When students are introduced to new (new to them) assessment instruments, they should be allowed to practise their performance in formative assessments and they should expect feedback on their performance. Independent external moderation is facilitated at stages as specified in curricula regulations through working extensively with External Examiners.

- 2.4.4 Every effort should be expended to ensure that students, no matter what combination of courses is being taken, are not overburdened with assessments to such an extent that they cannot be fairly assessed. The same also holds true for teachers. The teachers should not be overburdened with assessment tasks and should have realistic deadlines for completion and appropriate support so as to ensure that they are in the position of forming fair judgments of student performance.

## 2.5 *Provision of feedback*

- 2.5.1 An important function of assessment is that it can provide feedback on learning to students. Feedback on achievement or performance in assessment may be given individually or collectively in the specific or generally, orally or in writing, with the aim of enhancing student learning. Consideration should be given to each assessment to determine how it can best provide feedback to enhance student learning.
- 2.5.2 The feedback practices adopted in one and the same professional core or major/minor programme should be consistent and, insofar as possible, should be the same or broadly similar within the same curriculum.
- 2.5.3 The principles on the provision of feedback on student performance in examinations are as follows:
- (a) Faculties/Schools are encouraged to provide group feedback on the overall student performance in the examination within 2 weeks of the publication of final course results in a manner deemed appropriate by the Faculty/School concerned, as learning from peer performance is considered beneficial.
  - (b) At the discretion of the Faculties/Schools, individual feedback on student performance may be provided at students' request.
- 2.5.4 Each Faculty/School should lay down a policy for provision of feedback on coursework assignments and written examinations, and the policy should be clearly communicated to students and staff.
- 2.5.5 Students are also expected to be able to give feedback on their perceptions of assessment tasks/activities. They are encouraged to enhance their learning through the full range of feedback opportunities available.

## 3. **Standards-referenced Assessment**

- 3.1 Internationally, there is a shift in the assessment trends from norm-referenced to criterion-referenced or standards-referenced assessments. Norm-referenced assessment refers to student performance/achievement being ranked in relation to the performance of a cohort of students. Criterion-referenced assessment refers to the use of elements of student performance/achievement (*e.g.* relevance, organization, presentation, sequencing) against which to base a judgment. Standards-referenced assessment means using not only criteria but also expected levels of student achievement/performance to be recognized by different grades for students at a given developmental stage in making a judgment.

- 3.2 In association with the implementation of OBASL, the University adopts standards-referenced assessment, which affords a more holistic judgment of competencies and attainment of learning outcomes. Also, making grading standards explicit facilitates student learning and demonstration of graduates' possession of a specified set of attributes.

#### **4. Information on Assessment**

- 4.1 Given the importance of assessment design, care must be taken to adhere to the assessment principles outlined above when new programmes and courses are developed. Among other items, items of assessment inclusive of the range of weightings towards the overall course grade should be specified in the course outline and the Credit Unit Statement.
- 4.2 Should any subsequent changes be made to the assessment requirements, the necessary approval should be sought and the students concerned should be informed accordingly.

#### **5. Grade Descriptors**

- 5.1 Expected standards of performance at different levels should be made explicit in descriptive statements which correspond to each grade awarded. They are referred to as "grade descriptors". The drafting of grade descriptors should be done at the time when learning outcomes and the appropriate means of assessment of these outcomes are determined. This requires collaboration among teachers on the standards expected of students. Faculties/Schools should develop programme-level grade descriptors related to standards for all programmes/curricula.
- 5.2 The development of clear and detailed grade descriptors enables students to understand the level of performance expected and the nature of exemplary work. Grade descriptors also promote consistency in standards when there are multiple markers. They are particularly important for new teaching staff to align their standards with the standards expected at the University.
- 5.3 At the beginning of each course, teachers should help students understand the grade descriptors adopted and the criteria on which they will be assessed by explaining to them the level of performance expected, inclusive of engaging them in dialogues around exemplars (which however should not be viewed as model answers to be imitated).
- 5.4 Generic grade descriptors should be placed in the assessment regulations for the curriculum, whereas for each course, more specific grade descriptors should be included in the course outline.

## **6. Moderation of Grading**

- 6.1 To ensure that there is common understanding among teachers of what the grade descriptors mean and the grading standards, moderation of grading should be carried out, *i.e.* when there are two or more teachers for a course, before the actual marking, a small sample of student scripts (or assignments) will be graded independently by those teachers and the grades will be compared to ensure a common understanding and application of the grade descriptors and grading standards. Moderation should be done at course level.

## **7. Grade Point Average (GPA)**

- 7.1 Differential weighting of different courses in the calculation of honours classification or classification of awards may result in courses that are weighted less being taken less seriously than those which carry a heavier weighting. To enable the achievement of the University's educational aims, the weighting of Grade Points of all courses is standardized in the determination of GPA, honours classification and classification of awards.
- 7.2 The GPA scale is 0 – 4.3 with A+ as the top grade. Teaching staff should be reminded that the full scale should be used so that students will not be disadvantaged. No percentage should be allocated to any grading scale.

	GPA scale
A+	4.3
A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
F	0

(Note: The grading system is not applicable to the respective professional core of the BDS and MBBS curricula and certain curricula/courses.)

- 7.3 All courses in all years of study carry weightings which are proportionate to their credit values. All course results, including failures, will be included in the calculation of Semester GPA, Year GPA, Cumulative GPA and Graduation GPA to reflect students' actual performance in their studies, except for those courses which are not graded on a GPA scale, and subject to paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 below. For undergraduate students admitted between the 2017-18 and 2024-25 academic years who have successfully completed six Common Core courses, the calculation of Graduation GPA is subject to the proviso that either five Common Core courses with the highest grades (covering all four Areas of Inquiry), or all six courses will be counted towards Graduation GPA, depending on which generates the higher

Graduation GPA. For students in the 2025-26 intake and thereafter who have successfully completed six 6-credit Common Core courses, the calculation of Graduation GPA is subject to the proviso that either five 6-credit Common Core courses with the highest grades (covering all five Areas of Inquiry), or all six 6-credit courses will be counted towards Graduation GPA, depending on which generates the higher Graduation GPA. For students who have successfully completed two 3-credit Common Core Microcredentials in place of one 6-credit Common Core course, the average grade point of the two 3-credit courses will be treated as the grade point of one 6-credit Common Core course.

## **8. Advanced Standing and Credit Transfer**

- 8.1 Students may, with the approval of the Board of their home Faculty/School, be granted advanced standing for approved studies completed before admission to the University. Students awarded advanced standing will not be required to complete any further courses in order to satisfy the requirements of those parts of the curriculum or programme for which they have been granted advanced standing. Credits granted for advanced standing shall not normally be included in the calculation of the GPA unless permitted by the Board of the Faculty/Board of Studies, but will be recorded on the transcript of the student.
- 8.2 Students may, with the approval of the Board of their home Faculty/Board of Studies, transfer credits for courses completed in other institutions (whether inside or outside of Hong Kong) at any time during their candidature, but the results of those courses will not be included in the calculation of GPA. Reference should be made to the credit transfer principles approved by the Senate.
- 8.3 The maximum number of credits of advanced standing and/or credit transfer that can be awarded are stipulated in the relevant undergraduate and taught postgraduate regulations, and the [“Credit Accumulation and Transfer Policy”](#).

## **9. Honours Classifications (applicable to undergraduate curricula)**

- 9.1 The weighting of Grade Points of courses is standardized in the determination of GPA and honours classification. All pass and fail grades are counted for the purposes of honours classification<sup>3</sup>. Students who fail courses will not be debarred from being considered for First Class honours if they are so eligible.

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<sup>3</sup> For undergraduate students admitted between the 2017-18 and 2024-25 academic years who have successfully completed six Common Core courses, the calculation of Graduation GPA is subject to the proviso that either five Common Core courses with the highest grades (covering all four Areas of Inquiry), or all six courses will be counted towards Graduation GPA, depending on which generates the higher Graduation GPA. For students in the 2025-26 intake and thereafter who have successfully completed six 6-credit Common Core courses, the calculation of Graduation GPA is subject to the proviso that either five 6-credit Common Core courses with the highest grades (covering all five Areas of Inquiry), or all six 6-credit courses will be counted towards Graduation GPA, depending on which generates the higher Graduation GPA. For students who have successfully completed two 3-credit Common Core Microcredentials in place of one 6-credit Common Core course, the average grade point of the two 3-credit courses will be treated as the grade point of one 6-credit Common Core course.

- 9.2 Honours classifications shall be awarded in five divisions<sup>4</sup>: First Class Honours, Second Class Honours Division One, Second Class Honours Division Two, Third Class Honours, and Pass. The classification of honours shall be determined by the Board of Examiners for the degree in accordance with the following Graduation GPA (GGPA) scores, with all courses taken (including failed courses) carrying weightings which are proportionate to their credit values<sup>3</sup>:

<u>Class of honours</u>	<u>GGPA range</u>
First Class Honours	3.60 – 4.30
Second Class Honours	(2.40 – 3.59)
Division One	3.00 – 3.59
Division Two	2.40 – 2.99
Third Class Honours	1.70 – 2.39
Pass	1.00 – 1.69

- 9.3 Honours classification may not be determined solely on the basis of a candidate's Graduation GPA, and the Board of Examiners for the degree may, at its absolute discretion and with justification, award a higher class of honours to a candidate deemed to have demonstrated meritorious academic achievement but whose Graduation GPA falls below the range stipulated in the preceding paragraph of the higher classification by not more than 0.1 Grade Point.

9.4 *Determination of Honours Classifications of Dual Degrees*

- 9.4.1 It is the Senate's authority to approve specific provisions for the determination of honours classifications of undergraduate dual degrees.

## 10. Award of Taught Postgraduate Curricula

- 10.1 On successful completion of a curriculum, the award of a taught postgraduate qualification shall be as set out in the [Regulations for Taught Postgraduate Curricula](#).

## 11. Examinations

- 11.1 The University has a long and proud tradition of working with External Examiners for the international benchmarking of its qualifications. Its policy on External Examiners is set out in the Senate document "[Policy on External Examiners for Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates](#)", under which there are "[Regulations Governing the Appointment and Duties of External Examiners for First Degrees](#)", "[Regulations Governing the Appointment and Duties of External Examiners for Diplomas, Certificates and Higher Degrees by Coursework](#)", "[Regulations Governing the Appointment and Duties of External Examiners for Professional Doctorate Degrees](#)", "[Regulations Governing the Appointment and Duties of External Examiners for the](#)

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<sup>4</sup> The honours classification system is not applicable to the BChinMed, BDS and MBBS curricula.



[Degrees of MD and MS](#)”, and “[Regulations Governing the Appointment and Duties of External Examiners for the Postgraduate Certificate in Laws \(PCLL\)](#)”.

- 11.2 External Examiners are expected to comment and advise on the design, learning outcomes and content of the curriculum/programme; the effectiveness of the assessment processes; assessment standards; and other issues relating to teaching and learning as reflected in the performance of students. They should comment on the overall performance of the students as compared against students’ academic performance at other international universities. They may be requested by the Chief Examiners to also participate in the assessment of individual students. External Examiners overseeing a curriculum with multiple programmes/specialisms are further expected to undertake a holistic review of the coherence of the different learning experiences of the students in the same curriculum.
- 11.3 The appointment, roles and duties of Internal Examiners and Chief Examiners for taught curricula are set out in the “[Regulations Governing the Discharge of Duties in respect of University Examinations](#)”.
- 11.4 Internal Examiners set questions or papers and mark examination scripts under the Chief Examiners’ instructions. Chief Examiners are responsible to the relevant Boards of Examiners for the examinations of their subjects, inclusive of allocation of papers and/or questions to Internal Examiners for setting and marking, liaison with External Examiners, and handling other examination-related duties. The Boards of Examiners, *inter alia*, receive from the Chief Examiners lists of examination and assessment grades of candidates, consider the lists and determine the results of examinations. The Boards of Examiners submit to the respective Boards of Faculties/Boards of Studies the pass lists of successful candidates’ names and within the appropriate divisions (or awards). The Boards of Examiners also receive and discuss External Examiners’ reports.
- 11.5 In accordance with the “[Guidelines for Handling Students’ Requests for Examination Scripts and Other Examination-related Personal Data, and for Provision of Feedback to Students on Assessment](#)”, all examination scripts (and the relevant examination-related data) should be destroyed after 60 calendar days following the publication of final course results, in the absence of any student request for accessing his/her examination script as personal data or other justifiable purposes, and save for sample anonymized scripts retained for the purposes of audit, scrutiny by External Examiners, and/or collection of direct evidence for the Programme Learning Outcome Achievement Scheme. Samples of anonymized examination scripts (at least 1 anonymized script for each of the high, middle and low grades) should be retained for the duration of one cycle of Quality Assurance Council audit, currently 5 years.

## **12. Checking of Assessment Results of Taught Courses**

- 12.1 All assessment results of courses and examinations are determined by the respective Board of Examiners after careful scrutiny and deliberation by the examiners concerned and the relevant subject/departamental/Faculty/School committee(s). Given the University’s stringent review process, decisions on examination results by the Board of Examiners are final. There shall be no appeal against the results of examinations and all other forms of assessment.

- 12.2 Students may, however, request checking of the final course grade or the result of any assessment component of any course if they have reason to believe that there is any procedural irregularity or technical error in the determination of that result (*e.g.* an error in the recording, collating or aggregation of grades/marks which contributes to the final result) (*vide* the “[Procedures for Checking of Assessment Results of Taught Courses](#)”).

### **13. Treatment of Failure and Re-assessment**

- 13.1 In respect of a student’s failure in a written examination or in any other written form of assessment which contributes to 50% or more of the overall result of the paper, the University requires that the failure has to be determined on the basis of the assessment of more than one teacher. In the case where two teachers have been involved in the assessment of a student’s work and where there has been disagreement between the two teachers, the case should be referred to the Chief Examiner, and a third opinion (normally an external examiner) has to be sought.
- 13.2 To support inter-disciplinary studies and diverse learning activities and assessment modes whilst assuring academic standards, students are required to make up for failed courses in the following manner as prescribed in the relevant curricula regulations:
- (a) undergoing re-assessment/re-examination in the failed course to be held no later than the end of the following semester (not including the summer semester); or
  - (b) re-submitting failed coursework, without having to repeat the same course of instruction; or
  - (c) repeating the failed course by undergoing instruction and satisfying the assessments; or
  - (d) for elective courses, taking another course *in lieu* and satisfying the assessment requirements.
- 13.3 Each Faculty/School should formulate a policy on failure cases for each programme or curriculum or the Faculty/School as a whole which may comprise one or more of the options specified in the preceding paragraph, to suit the different curriculum requirements of professional and non-professional disciplines (as applicable). The policy should be clearly communicated to students and staff.
- 13.4 In respect of the undergraduate curricula, the Senate retains the authority to determine the consequences of failure for the Common Core, language enhancement and mandated artificial intelligence literacy courses on the advice of the Academic Board Sub-group and AB’s sub-committees.

## **14. Discontinuation of Studies**

- 14.1 Students may be recommended for discontinuation of studies if their progress is not satisfactory and/or they have exceeded the maximum period of registration, as stipulated in the relevant undergraduate and taught postgraduate regulations, and curricula regulation.
- 14.2 Students who are recommended for discontinuation of studies because of poor academic results may appeal against the decision to their Faculty/School Review Committee on Student Performance and Discontinuation, but only on the basis of extenuating non-academic circumstances. Students have a further and final opportunity to appeal against discontinuation to the Committee on Discontinuation which makes the final decision.

## **15. Academic Integrity**

- 15.1 Academic integrity is of utmost importance and the cornerstone of teaching and learning. Students must at all times comply with the “[Regulations Governing Students’ Academic Conduct Concerning Assessment](#)”.
- 15.2 Plagiarism is a disciplinary offence. Any student who commits the offence is liable to disciplinary action in accordance with the relevant University Statutes and regulations. Students should refer to the “[Policy on Student Plagiarism in Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Curricula](#)”, which articulates the general principles adopted by the University towards plagiarism, outlines the teaching and learning strategies for educating students about academic integrity, and clarifies various issues related to the handling of student plagiarism cases. The University has a website that provides students with general guidance on what constitutes plagiarism, why it is wrong, and how to avoid it (<https://tl.hku.hk/plagiarism/>).

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