Good Practice in Assessment Case Study – Foundation Studies in the Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel, and Sport Management.

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This case study demonstrates how through teamwork, peer and self assessment, students repeatedly witness and reflect upon the different ways in which they and their peers view real-life situations in a wide range of industry settings.

Introduction

In 2009, a program review of the Bachelor of Business (with majors in Hotel, Tourism, Event, Real Estate and Property and Sport Management) was started. This review was part of the normal cycle of program reviews in the University and was also designed to respond to a number of issues that had emerged in relation to the program's curriculum design. Based on known problem issues, three courses were identified that could be targeted for re-development prior to the conclusion of the review. The intent behind this pre-emptive action was two fold: first, to address the issues as early as possible so that the best outcomes for students could be achieved, and secondly, to create case study exemplars of course reform that could be used as illustrations to guide others in their efforts to respond to further course development work after finalisation of the program review. In all cases course reform focussed on improved assessment practices. The three courses identified were across all three years of the degree. In the first year it was 1001HSL Foundation Studies, in the second year it was 2208HSL International Food and Beverage Management and in the third year it was HSL3301 Strategy and Change.

This case study reports on adjustments made to the first of these courses and how it resulted in good practice in assessment being developed and implemented. In doing so it serves as an illustration of the process by which these developments were achieved as well as an illustration of good assessment practice.

The two other courses are reported separately.

The main issue identified with the first year course was that it was attempting to accomplish too much. The curriculum was overloaded, driving students to respond in a more instrumental, strategic and superficial way to the learning challenges presented. The principal response to this was to remove the lion’s share of content associated with teaching basic information literacy skills and to relocate that content into another course (Information systems - also being re-developed). Thus, with respect to the information literacy skills content, the Foundation Studies course only retained material relating to the basic requirements (or ground rules) for academic integrity such as the requirement not to plagiarise, to be ethical and social contracts such as no "loafing" in groups. This freed Foundation Studies to focus much more explicitly on the development of the socio-cultural foundations of the leisure industry; aspects of team and group work, deliberate exposure to multiple cultural perspectives to develop 'cultural intelligence' and a multi-disciplinary approach to analysing leisure experiences.

Context

Foundation Studies is a core course for several Bachelor of Business degree programs in tourism, hotel, event and sport management. The course explores different ways of conceptualising and understanding the socio-cultural nature of leisure experiences
including hospitality, events, sport and tourism. It also makes links between student career choices and the commercial, voluntary and public sector organisations that provide sport, events, hotel and tourism services.

Leisure industries are inevitably multi-cultural and 'people focussed'. Understanding diversity and knowing how to communicate effectively is critical for anyone working in this sector. Accordingly, this course also helps students to develop their understanding of cultural diversity in relation to different leisure experiences, motivations and social contexts, and to develop reflective and analytic skills that are important for effective teamwork and inter-cultural communication.

By definition, this course is foundational. It provides an essential grounding for students' subsequent learning across a range of related degree programs. Foundations Studies complements material covered in other core courses, particularly in the first year courses such as Management Concepts, Introduction to Research and specialist introductory courses. From a program curriculum design perspective these courses work together to provide the pre-requisite knowledge for success in subsequent courses of study. Importantly, Foundation Studies provides students with a multi-disciplinary perspective that is built on later in the various specialist degrees.

These variables, individually and together, create specific demands for learning and teaching as well as good assessment practice. This document details the desired learning outcomes for the course, learning and teaching strategies and the assessment requirements. It then seeks to explain how assessment supports the learning and teaching strategies employed and the ways in which the assessment constitutes good practice.

**Desired Learning Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete this course will:

1. have a basic knowledge and understanding of foundation concepts and theories - the socio-cultural foundations – of leisure industries (specifically: event, sport, hotel and tourism management)
2. understand cultural diversity and inter-cultural communication in the context of the leisure industries
3. be able to demonstrate an understanding of group processes and communication when working in teams
4. be able to critically analyse how leisure related experiences are shaped in contemporary society through applying concepts from key social science disciplines to everyday observations

**Learning and teaching strategies**

This course is delivered via lectures and tutorial exercises that are supported by a textbook and on-line material (delivered weekly via the course website). Its structure is based on the idea that student learning occurs through a combination of reading, participating in lectures and tutorials as well as undertaking assigned work and independent study. Careful consideration has been given to the integration of each of these modes of supported learning and the sequence of content and activities. Accordingly, students need to keep current with the designated readings and complete any preparatory tutorial tasks prior to each week's tutorial. Active participation in each of these modes of learning is encouraged to help students learn to the maximum of their ability. It follows that students are expected to attend all lectures and allocated tutorial
sessions. On average, students should expect to spend around ten hours per week on learning and assessment activities including class and tutorial attendance and participation – a total of 140 hours over the 14 weeks of the semester.

- **Lectures** aim to introduce and explore key leisure concepts and theories that underpin student development of professional practice in the areas of event, sport, hotel and tourism management.
- The lectures are complemented by a one hour **tutorial** during which smaller groups of students engage in a range of experiential learning activities including discussions of issues arising from the lecture, set readings and assessment related exercises.
- At mid semester (approx weeks 8-9), students undertake a **self-organised field trip** instead of tutorials.
- Each week, lecture notes are made available via the course web-site before the lecture. Designated weekly readings are provided in a book of readings that can be purchased from the bookshop or borrowed from the library on open reserve. These readings are essential for students to complete assessments.

**Assessment**

There are four items of assessment in this course, each of which mirrors activities that tourism, hotel, event and sport managers would experience. This variety of assessment tasks provides **authenticity** (Biggs, 2006) and helps students see the relevance of each task, which in turn supports student motivation and engagement (Biggs, 1999). Each item of assessment is linked with the others and has a particular role to play in supporting student learning. In this way the assessment seeks to provide a **constructive learning** experience that not only ensures each item aligns with the others, but also that they are all clearly **aligned** with the achievement of the desired learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996, 2002, 2006).

1. **Tutorial participation (10%): active participation each tutorial week**

Significant learning benefits are associated with meaningful preparation for tutorials as well as active participation in the tutorial sessions. In order to encourage students to fully engage in the tutorials, marks are awarded to students who attend and participate in each tutorial with written preparation notes based on the assigned weekly reading.

This assessment helps students meet Learning Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 of the course and the Graduate Skills of “responsible, effective citizenship”.

2. **Individual reflective journal (25%): DUE-Week 5**

During weeks 2-5 students are asked to submit four concise writing exercises (500 word maximum) on topics related to developing knowledge and understanding of inter-cultural communication and teamwork. Students are required to use the concepts and ideas presented in the readings, thereby creating an incentive to actually have completed the reading. Particularly in first year courses, composing four fun and challenging short entries is considered to be less threatening than writing a single large assignment. It also promotes good study habits in the first year, broadens targeted coverage of content and encourages students to practice over time (rather than cramming). This assessment method helps students reflectively engage with the readings and express thoughts in written form. Thus, these activities promote higher cognitive processes and build knowledge and understanding in a meaningful rather than superficial way (Biggs, 1999).
In addition, the early timing of these assessment items, coupled with the small but significant proportion of marks, motivates participation and provides both students and the teaching team with feedback on learning progress at an early stage (James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002). This helps to prevent learning difficulties from arising later and assists with the early identification of any difficulties so that they can be promptly addressed (in accordance with Griffith's "amber alert" policy).

Marking criteria for the reflective journal are presented in Appendix 1.

This assessment helps students to meet the Learning Outcomes 1, 2 and 3, and enables practise of the Graduate Skills of “problem solving”, “critical evaluation: and “creativity and innovation.”

3. Group Project Part 1: Group Presentation (30%) Due – tutorial weeks 10-13

In week 5 students are required to form groups of three or four people. In the following week, each member of the group independently organises and undertakes a "leisure observation" that is different from the other members of their group. Structuring the initial team task in this way enables the team to form gradually and helps the fledgling team to ensure each member has a clear task/contribution. This is designed to avoid the anxiety working in a team can sometime produce and increases the likelihood of members contributing equally. A "leisure observation" means going to a tourism, hotel, event or sport management venue to critically observe the behaviours of those working there and the characteristics of the venue itself. Each student then writes a description and preliminary analysis of their own leisure observation. Next the students work collectively as a team to produce a PowerPoint presentation will be used to illustrate a description and preliminary analysis of the three or four leisure observations. At this point the lecturematerial and tutorial exercises from the first five weeks of the course are directly relevant to the formation and functioning of each student’s team. Aligning the learning from the first part of the course with practical, experiential learning activities in the later part of the course is a deliberate "constructive learning" strategy (Biggs, 1996; Meyers & Nulty, 2009). Student teams are asked to outline similarities, differences and key features of what was observed, and to draw upon concepts from three disciplinary perspectives in their analysis of the leisure observations. Each team is allocated ten minutes to present their findings during a tutorial between weeks 10 and 13. Other class members then ask questions and discuss the presentation using the assessment criteria (See Appendix 2).

Written peer feedback component

As each team presents, all other class members use a "peer feedback sheet" (See Appendix 3) to deliver feedback on the presentations. At the end of each presentation and discussion these sheets are collected and given to the presenting team. Teams are required to use the feedback on these sheets to inform their subsequent "group report" (see below).

This process engages students in a learning community (Boud, 1995) and all of its members can benefit by critiquing peers. It allows students to hear the perspectives of others, many of which are inevitably informed by a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. This activity promotes greater inter-cultural awareness and boosts participation from people with different cultural backgrounds. It also helps students to improve their critical reflection skills.

4. Group Project Part 2: Group Report (35%) DUE-Week 14
This assessment asks students working within their teams to reflect on the discussion and feedback received on their group presentation and then write a report that describes and analyses the group's observations of the leisure settings and the behaviour that was observed. The maximum length of this report is 4000 words. The report needs to demonstrate how effectively students use the different disciplinary perspectives to explain the leisure experiences observed (i.e., political studies, economics, geography and/or psychology, sociology and cultural studies).

Full assignment details are provided in Appendix 4 and assessment criteria are provided in Appendix 5.

Work on the report enhances student ability to meet desired Learning Outcomes 1 – 4 and reinforces the development of Griffith Graduate skills related to “effective written communication”, “information literacy”, and “critical evaluation”.

**Principles of Good Practice illustrated by the practice**

Meyers and Nulty (2009) argue that courses should be developed "... in ways that provide students with teaching and learning materials, tasks and experiences which:

1. are authentic, real-world and relevant;
2. are constructive, sequential and interlinked;
3. require students to use and engage with progressively higher order cognitive processes;
4. are all aligned with each other and the desired learning outcomes; and
5. provide challenge, interest and motivation to learn." (p.3)

A number of these principles have been mentioned throughout the assessment section of this case study. First was that of "authenticity" (Biggs, 2006), the idea that assessment is more engaging, 'aligned' and purposeful in respect to supporting desired learning outcomes when it is comparable to tasks graduates of the program may be expected to undertake. Alignment (Biggs, 2006) is the idea that assessment items should involve students in tasks that are likely to lead to desired learning outcomes. The technique is therefore motivational and results in students spending more 'time on task' (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) than they might do otherwise.

Another principle is that of constructive learning (Biggs, 2006), based on the idea that learning is more effective if students can build upon their existing knowledge. Thus, learning should be sequenced in a way that progressively develops student knowledge, understanding and skills.

"Constructive alignment" (Biggs, 2006) is the combination of the previous two ideas. The collection of assessment items in this course provide a good illustration of how multiple assessment items can be linked together in a constructive sequence that is aligned with participation in activities to improve student learning and the achievement of specific learning outcomes. In addition, the constructive nature of the assessment gives students repeated opportunity to develop an increasingly sophisticated internalised understanding of the criteria by which their work will be judged and therefore an increased ability to perform accordingly.

The inclusion of peer and self assessment activities enriches learning through exposure to, and valuing of, multiple perspectives (Boud, 1995; Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001),
by forming a collaborative cooperative culture (Boud et al., 2001) as a member of a community of scholars.

Bowden and Marton (2003) have written about the importance of exposing students to variation in their experiences when learning. At it's simplest they explain that if everything in the world was brown (i.e. there was no variation in colour), then one would have no concept of 'brown', nor of 'colour'. For these concepts to exist and have meaning one must be able to discern different colours. In other words, there must be some variation. Through the peer and self assessment in this course, students repeatedly witness and reflect upon the different ways in which they and their peers view real-life situations in a wide range of industry settings. By doing so they learn to notice these differences and learn concepts that are important to the discipline.

Student learning is enriched by this blend of multiple exposure, guidance and self-direction, leading ultimately to the development more autonomous professionals Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary (1994) and Justice & Marienau (1988).
Appendices

Marking criteria for the reflective journal are presented in Appendix 1.
Presentation assessment criteria Appendix 2.
Peer feedback sheet Appendix 3.
Full assignment details for the group project Appendix 4.
Group project assessment criteria Appendix 5.
References


