Too much assessment?
An audit of assessment requirements in a selection of 64 First Year Griffith University courses

Project Supervisor: Professor Royce Sadler (Griffith Institute for Higher Education, Griffith University)
Team members: Dr Peter Cassematis, Senior Research Assistant (Griffith Institute for Higher Education, Griffith University)
Sponsor: Professor John Dewar, DVC (Academic), Griffith University
Funding source: $20,000 (Griffith University Executive Group)
Completion date: August, 2007
Further information: Contact Royce Sadler (r.sadler@griffith.edu.au)

Brief history of the Project
The project began with an assertion made at Griffith University’s 2006 Senior Leadership Conference to the effect that, at least in the UK, semesterisation of courses had generally resulted in a doubling of assessment loads for students and staff. Universities tended to turn year-long courses into semester-long courses simply by cutting them in half. For each semester course, however, basically the same amount of assessment has been set as was previously set for year-long courses. A comparable phenomenon has probably occurred in Australian universities, Griffith included. Assessment has featured prominently as a problematic feature in surveys of academic staff and students alike.

It was decided that a study should be undertaken as part of a broad assessment reform agenda and the first scoping meeting was held on 4 September 2006, chaired by Professor John Dewar, DVC (Academic). It resolved to recommend an initial audit of current practice. Completion of the audit would set the scene for strategic action plans to be developed.

Outline of the audit of assessment requirements
An operational decision was taken to audit, wherever possible, assessment requirements across commonly enrolled First Year courses in a single significant program from each Faculty or Group. In all, 64 courses (8 courses x 8 programs) were audited and as much information as possible was obtained from the Course Outlines, as published on the Griffith web site.

Extract from the Executive Summary
1. The amount of assessment in the courses sampled appears to be roughly comparable with the corresponding amounts in selected other universities in Australia and the UK. If anything, the requirements at Griffith may be slightly lower than in the comparison universities.

2. The data from courses in the sample show considerable variation in loads and characteristics, with only a small proportion appearing to be high. However, a judgment as to whether a particular assessment program for a course is ‘appropriate’ should take a number of educational considerations into account, not just quantity.

3. The quality of the specifications for many assessment tasks leaves considerable scope for improvement. These specifications apply to all assessment task types. As part of quality assurance processes in assessment, the University should develop a system in which all assessment items are critically peer reviewed.