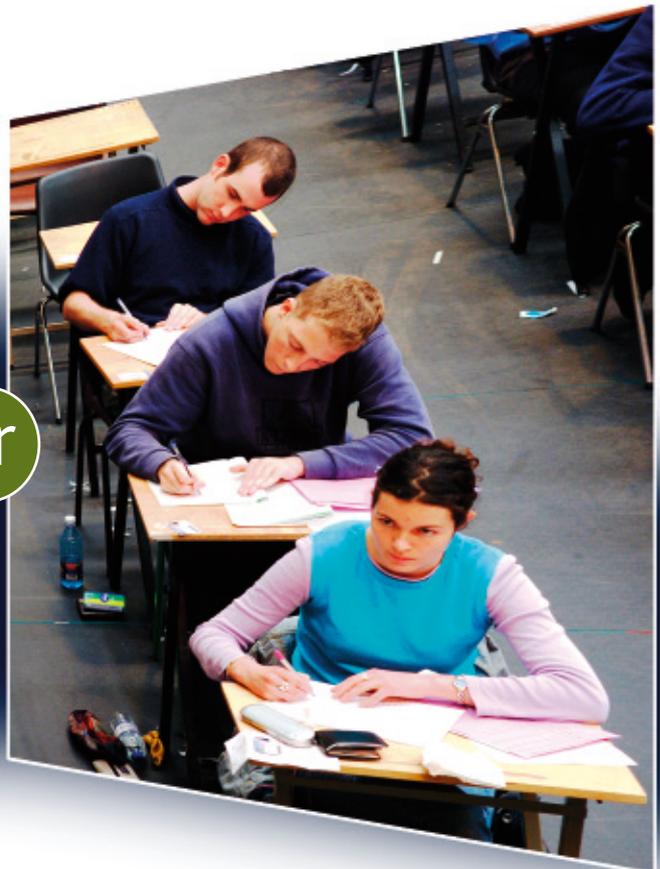# A Practitioner's Guide to Choice of Assessment Methods Within a Module

or

Case Studies from University College Dublin

Edited by
Geraldine O'Neill

UCD DUBLIN

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Note

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Contents

References and Resources for Practitioners Guide

UCD Choice of Assessment Methods: The Project and its Methodology

Geraldine O'Neill and Áine Galvin
UCD Teaching and Learning

Introduction

Encouraging students to take some responsibility in how and what they learn is in keeping with good practices in student-centred learning (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). By extending this decision-making to 'choice of assessment' methods, it allows students to take some control of their learning and to play to their strengths. This approach can be very beneficial for staff and students when there are students with diverse learning needs within a particular module. This diversity may be known to module co-coordinators such as: mature students; international students; students with different prior learning; and students with disabilities. Others are sometimes less obvious, such as: anxious students; students who learn in different ways; students with poor time-management skills; and students who have personal, work or other demands on the flexibility of their time commitment.

Allowing some choice in learning is often described as an 'Inclusive Approach to Learning' and has been linked with the concept of Universal Design for higher education curriculum (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008; AHEAD, 2011). This more inclusive approach to assessment is in keeping with best practice in assessment (Craddock & Mathias, 2009; Quality Assurance Agency, 2003; Francis, 2008). This approach to assessment is not new to higher education (Garside, et al, 2009; SPACE, 2009; Waterfield et al, 2006), but it is not wide-spread. This project aimed to attempt to further embed this practice within the institution (UCD, University College Dublin) and disseminate these practices nationally and internationally.

Inclusive assessment practices can be done by mapping a diversity of assessment across a programme. This allows students to have some choice over the course of a full programme, designed by staff into the learning experience. In the context of this project however, it was de-cided to address this issue at module (course-unit) level where the students themselves had more control in the choice. It was also decided to focus on choice of assessment *methods*, whereas choice can also include other choices such as choice of: assessment questions; assessment criteria; or topics/projects. The most comprehensive version of assessment choice is where students can negotiate their own assessment methods, i.e. learning, or negotiated contracts (Stephenson & Laycock, 2002; Anderson, Boud, & Sampson, 2004). This project, however, focused on choice of assessment methods and, as a starting point, the choice of two assessment methods. The project planning and implementation was very influenced by the experiences of a similar project in Engineering in the University of Plymouth, UK (Easterbrook, Parker, & Waterfield, 2005).

Alignment of this activity with strategic objectives of the University

The *UCD Strategic Plan to 2014, Forming Global Minds*, identifies widening participation and excellence in teaching, learning and student experience among its key objectives. The University recognises that the successful integration of learners from diverse backgrounds is contingent on the development of flexible modes of course delivery, increased student choice and innovation in teaching/learning activity.

> 'UCD will broaden the range of opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds to participate in our educational programmes, and in particular will capitalise on new flexible modes of course delivery to enable more inclusive approaches for learners at different stages of their personal and professional lives'. (UCD Strategic Plan to 2014, Forming Global Minds, p17).

This project, therefore, aimed to explore both a) the outcomes of and b) the experiences of the staff and students on, the implementation of student choice of assessment methods in a variety of modules across UCD (i.e. an Inclusive Assessment approach). The project was carried out by UCD Teaching and Learning, within the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. It was supported by HEA Training of Trainers fund. Ethical permission was sought and obtained to carry out the research to gather students and staff views and to use the student grades for exploratory analysis (Research Number HS-E-09-99-ONeill).

The Planning Process

UCD Teaching and Learning, through the Vice Principals for Teaching and Learning in each of the five UCD Colleges, communicated the availability of a series of small grants to support the development of modules with choice of assessment methods. Seven academic staff received grants to assist in the design and implementation of their modules. Three modules were delivered in 2009/2010 and a further were four were implemented in 2010/2011 (see Table 1). Those completing the three modules in 2009/2010 retained this approach and repeated their modules again in 2010/2011. (see Table 1).

Initially, the project involved module co-ordinators working with the project co-ordinator to design the choice of assessment methods. In all modules there was a choice of two methods. Based on experience of other authors in the development of student choice, all staff involved completed a *'Student Information and Equity Template'* (see Table 2) designed for the purpose of this project. This ensured that students received adequate information to make an **informed choice** and that consideration was given and communicated around equity of student effort, standards and support, as is recommended in the literature (Craddock & Mathias, 2009).

This template is available for use and can be seen in Appendix 3 and a word document version is also available for download on the UCD Teaching and Learning Website: http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/assessment/howdoyouassessstudentlearning/

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Table 1: The Modules in the Project

Modules	Weighting of choice	Method Choice		Timing Choice	Level/Numbers
	Weighting of assessment choice element in the full module	**Individual** assignment method versus **individual** with different format	**Group** assignment method versus **Group** with different format	More **continuous** versus **end of semester** choice	
Development & Advanced Pharmacology (09/10')	20%	-	Group poster v. Group oral	Fixed time	Level: 3 Students: n=65
Environmental Biology ('09/10)	50%	Problem-solving v. Seen exam	-	More continuous versus end of semester	Level: 3 Students: n=50
Human Rights Law and Equality (09'/10)	100%	-	Group presentation v. individual essay	More continuous versus end of semester	Level: 4 Students: n=33
Computer: Data Mining ('10/'11)	20%	Tutorial Assignment v Project	-	More continuous versus end of semester	Level 4 n=66
The making of early modern France ('10/'11)	100%	Essay v Audio Visual	Group Poster v Group Oral	Fixed time	Level: 1 Students: n=40
Forensic Radiography ('10/'11)	50%	Wiki v Applied Essay	-	More continuous versus end of semester	Level: 4 Students: n=24
Research Elective ('10/'11)	20%	-	Group Poster v Group Oral	Fixed time	Level 3 n=2
Development & Advanced Pharmacology (('10/'11)	20%	-	Group poster v. Group oral	Fixed time	Level: 3 Students: n=70
Environmental Biology ('('10/'11)	50%	Problem-solving/Seen exam	-	More continuous versus end of semester	Level: 3 Students: n=60
Human Rights Law and Equality ('10/'11)	100%	-	-	More continuous versus end of semester	Level: 4 Students: n=30

Table 2: The Student Information and Equity Template

Student Information/Equity Template: Description of your Choice of Your Assessment Methods and Equity of efforts, standards and support		
Module:		
Assessment Choice	**Assessment :**	**Assessment :**
Weighting toward Module Assessment		
Details of assessment		
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice…)		
Learning Outcomes to be assessed		
Assessment Criteria used		
Equity in Marking Procedures (examiners, etc…)		
Equity in Teaching and Learning activities to support the assessments		
Equity in Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)		
Student Workload expectations	<table><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>Hours*</td></tr></table> *Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown	<table><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>Hours*</td></tr></table> *Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown
Examples of assessment method available to student beforehand (if unfamiliar)		
Any additional comments for students on this choice or other relevant information: (for example, other assessments and their weighting to module..) **Date for decision and sign-off on assessment choice aspect:** ……………………………………………………………… **For further queries on the assessment choices, please contact:** ………………………………………………………..		

The next step involved the project's implementation and evaluation.

Implementation

In advance of the commencement of the module many staff had put up the *'Student Information and Equity Template'* in the University's VLE system, Blackboard™, therefore, the students could see the details of the assessment choices. In addition, in the first teaching session staff outlined to students: the rationale for this approach; the details of the choices; and further elaborated on why the different approaches might suit the students. Students were informed at this stage that they needed to communicate their choices to staff by a certain date (often around week 3). This was implemented in different ways in each module, for example, by e-mail, signing a form in a laboratory session, etc. Staff also, where possible, put examples of the different approaches up on the VLE or showed examples during class-time. Students were also encouraged to discuss with each other the different choices of assessment, in advance of their choice.

Evaluation Methods

For the purpose of this study a questionnaire was designed in order to gather the students' views. Based on the literature in this area questions were devised under the following themes: a) Empowerment; b) Equity; c) Support from the staff and from other students; d) Diversity; and e) Anxiety. Under each of these areas four statements were devised and of these three were positively, and one negatively, worded (see Table 3). Therefore, a total of 20 questions were devised, creating a scale which was titled *'Positive Experience of Assessment Methods Choice'* (PEAMC). Further Factor Analysis is being performed on this scale. In addition to completing this scale the student were asked further questions, i.e. why they chose this assessment; were they glad they picked it; what were the positive experiences; and what could be improved (see Appendix 4, for full questionnaire). In addition, Appendix 2 is a useful resource that summarises how to design implement, evaluate this approach in 7 steps.

The Results and Dissemination

The results of the first three modules were presented at a number of fora including: at the *'All Ireland Society for Higher Education, AISHE'* in 2010 (O'Neill *et al*, 2010; see also appendix 1); internally to UCD staff in January 2011 (O'Neill, & Galvin, 2011); at the *International Academic Conference* in New Orleans in 2011 (O'Neill, 2011). Further peer reviewed papers are also planned. Based on the evaluation of the first three modules:

– The students strongly agreed with the statement: *'I appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods* (empowerment)' (see Table 3),

– The mature students were more positive of the experience than the younger students,

– The most common reasons for the students choosing their assessment was *'they wanted to try a different type of assessment'*, and the *'timing of it suited their organisation skills'*,

– The students did not appear to be stressed by having to choose, in fact there was evidence that having a choice reduced their anxiety with assessment,

– Staff were very positive of the approach and all said they would use this approach again,

– The staff advocated the importance of the use of the *'Student Information and Equity Template'* to plan the process and to give students an informed choice,

– The staff supported this approach to assessment providing it was rolled out carefully.

Table 3 presents the median for each of the statements in the questionnaire (n=144 students).

Table 3: PEAMC Questionnaire Statements

	6 modules: n= 144 students	
	Statement	**Median**
1	I felt some ownership of the learning experience in this module (empowerment)	**Agree**
2	The module attempted to accommodate my learning style (diversity)	**Agree**
3	I appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods (empowerment)	**Strongly agree**
4	I felt empowered by having some choice of assessment (empowerment)	**Agree**
5	Having a choice of assessment reduced some of the stress I normally experience with assessment (anxiety)	**Agree**
6	Having a choice of assessment method allowed me to play to my strengths (diversity)	**Agree**
7	I felt I was given sufficient information required to choose the assessment method. (support)	**Agree**
8	I found it stressful to have to chose an assessment method (anxiety)	**Disagree***
9	Over the course of the semester, the workload for my choice appeared similar to the other assessment method(s) (Equity)	**Agree**
10	I was satisfied with the level of feedback I had compared to the feedback in other assessment method (Equity)	**Agree**
11	I felt I was given the support required while attempting this assessment method (support)	**Agree**
12	I was satisfied with the examples available of my assessment method compared to the examples of the other assessment method (Equity)	**Undecided**
13	The assessment method I chose was not explained as well as the other assessment method (equity)	**Disagree***
14	I was confident in my choice of assessment method (anxiety)	**Agree**
15	It was a relief to experience some choice in my learning. (anxiety)	**Agree**
16	I would like to have had a wider variety of choices of assessment methods in this module (Diversity)	**Undecided***
17	I felt that the assessment method allowed me opportunity to demonstrate my knowledge in this module. (Diversity)	**Agree**
18	The staff could have been more supportive in the helping me choose my assessment method(s). (Support)	**Disagree***
19	It helped to talk to the other students about the assessment choice (Support)	**Agree**
20	I felt I had should have had more control of my assessment in this module (empowerment)	**Disagree***
*denotes negatively worded statements		

The following extract highlights the discussion based on the results from the first three modules (*extract from O'Neill et al. 2010, appendix 1*).

Similar to the study by Francis *et al* (2008), students were very receptive to being given a choice in assessment methods, with the more mature students being more positive than those under 23 years of age. Students felt that they had been empowered by this process and that having some control in relation to their assessment reduced their anxieties and allowed them to play to their strengths. They strongly agreed that they appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods and, surprisingly many chose assessments because they were a little different to the usual assessments. Therefore, although students were conscious of doing well, it appears they were open to exploring different types of assessments (Nightingale *et al*, 1996). It appears that the process of choosing did not adversely increase the level of anxiety for students; however there does seem to be a limit to how much choice students are prepared to deal with. The choice of two assessments seems to have been adequate and many disagreed with having any additional choice. In contrast, Easterbrook *et al*'s (2005) case study in Engineering, students were satisfied with a choice of three assessments.

Giving students empowerment did not seem to affect the standards and/or students achievements, a concern discussed by Ashworth *et al* (2010). Students perceived the assessments to be equitable and their grades confirmed this perception. Some staff, however, did describe how students who would usually achieve poorer grades had gained higher grades than they would have normally achieved. However, the staff involved believed this was a valid outcome as these students were articulate, well-read and engaged students, who often underachieve in a certain style of academic writing. The overemphasis in higher education on certain assessment methods, such as the written examination (QAA, 2003), has disadvantaged many groups of students.

Students with variety of learning needs and styles seem to have been supported in the process. Whereas, it was evident in some of the modules that the need for traditional special accommodations was reduced, the more 'hidden' students needs, such as, poor organisational skills, home-life arrangements or demands from parallel modules, were also accommodated. This view of assessment choice for all students needs is in keeping with the idea of universal design for assessment (Rose & Meyer, 2000; Waterfield *et al*, 2006; Hanafin, *et al*, 2007). It appears to be gaining support as a more efficient, student-centred approach to dealing with the huge diversity of students in higher education. It has a less labelling affect on certain groups of students; it removes 'the need for a sticker' and, in addition, as in other case studies, it appears to benefit the full student cohort (Garside *et al*, 2009; Easterbrook *et al*, 2005).

Staff Recommendations for Practice (extract from O'Neill *et al* 2010)

In this study, the staff involved to date were very positive of the approach, however as one staff highlighted '*it should be rolled out cautiously*'. All staff commented on the need for carrying out the process in a 'fair' and 'rigorous' manner. They gave some recommendations for others considering this approach to assessment:

– The staff recommended both a careful planning of the assessment choices and then articulating these choices clearly to the students. They advocated the use of the *'Student Information Template'* (appendix 1) which also doubled up as an assessment design guide for staff in the planning stage. In addition to such a guide, Easterbrook *et al* (2005) suggested students fill in a form to reflect on the assessment choice at the early stage, to help engage them with the informed choice.

– As in Easterbrook *et al*'s (2005) study, the choice of assessments in this project was introduced early to the students and they then had to sign off on this decision. Some of the staff suggested a 'cooling off period' to allow students to change options. However, this cooling off, or change of mind period, may vary depended on the assessment methods and their timing.

– The staff recommended that consideration be given to having quite diverse assessments, to maximise on student diversity.

– Some staff felt that their examples for some assessment methods could have been improved. For example, the format of communication in a poster is quite different to that of a traditional oral presentation (such as, PowerPoint™). They recommended getting examples for students on these less traditional approaches to improve their familiarity with these approaches.

– Whereas all staff advocated the choice of assessment within a module, they also recommended that choice and variety of assessment could also be considered at programme level.

The students' experiences and staff recommendations, to date, have been on three modules. Further, inferential statistics will be completed as the other modules are rolled out next semester.

In conclusion, both staff and students in these three modules were extremely positive to the experience of, what is often described as, inclusive assessment. This approach appeared to suit many different student circumstances and needs, both known and hidden. Given that this approach benefits such diversity, it might even challenge the use of the word 'inclusion'. Inclusion has connotations of including a 'minority' or 'excluded' group. In considering this debate, we have moved to the use of 'Assessment Choice within a Module' as a means of describing this approach, in our hope that academic staff might challenge their own preconceptions of what is 'academic work' and consider this an approach for **all students**.

Extract from O'Neill et al. 2010, appendix 1.

Final Thoughts

This project was implemented over a two-year timeframe, however, this approach is to be further developed and encouraged throughout UCD as one strategic action to develop a more student-centred and inclusive approach to learning.

Based on the lessons in this project, a quick guide has been designed for those considering implementing this approach and can be seen in Appendix 2: *Seven Steps to Design, Implement and Evaluate Choice of Assessment Methods: A Quick Guide for Lecturers.*

The resources for this approach, and an electronic version of this practitioners guide, are available on UCD Teaching and Learning Website:

http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/assessment/howdoyouassessstudentlearning/

Note: The references for this chapter are placed at the end of the Practitioners Guide.

Acknowledgements

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Case Study 1:

Problem-based learning or end-of-semester exam: allowing students to manage their workload

Dr Evelyn Doyle and Professor Nicholas Clipson
UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science

Module Details

Module Title: Ecological and Environmental Microbiology, ENVB30100

School (or Discipline): UCD School of Biology and Environmental Science, SBES

Level: 3

College: UCD College of Life Sciences

Student Numbers: n=50

Module Learning Outcomes:
Appreciate the role and significance of physicochemical factors in the environment on microbiological processes and diversity.

Describe the concept of cycling in the global environment and appreciate the importance of microorganisms in mediating cycling processes.

Apply concepts pertaining to the physical environment to aquatic and soil ecosystems and to assess how these factors interact with microbial populations.

Describe the methods used for the bacteriological testing of water.

Appreciate how microbial populations can be manipulated for degradation of waste material.

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
1. **End of semester prepared essay exam** *or*

2. **Four problem based learning assignments completed during the semester**

The Rationale for Assessment Choices
The module selected is concerned with the role of microorganisms in the environment. Aspects of this topic frequently appear in the press, for example outbreaks of gastroenteritis associated with water supplies, using microbes to clean up oil spills, etc. Although this is

useful in terms of engaging students with the broad aspects of the module, they often fail to appreciate the depth of the subject matter and answers in end of semester exams were often superficial. We wanted to introduce a problem-based learning approach which would require students to apply their knowledge and allow students display skills other than those assessed in end of semester exams, but didn't want to disadvantage students capable of synthesising material and writing in-depth essays (See Table A.2). To ensure equity between assessments, essay titles were provided before the exam.

In summary the reasons for selecting the 2 assessment types were:

– To improve student engagement with the subject matter by giving them time to collect and consider material.

– To allow students to display skills other than those associated with completing an end of semester exam.

– To improve students' ability to synthesise a wide range of material and use it to write an essay/complete an assignment.

Implementation

During the 1st lecture students were informed of the assessment choice available to them, i.e. an end of semester prepared essay exam or completion of 4 problem-based learning (PBL) assignments during the semester, both comprising 50% of the final grade. This was followed up by an email to all students clearly outlining the choice available to them. It should be noted that as part of the module all students also had to complete lab reports and a poster presentation, and these comprised the remaining 50% of the final grade. The workload expectation and assessment criteria for the essay and the different PBLs were discussed in class (See Table A.1) and a schedule of when essay titles and PBLs would be circulated and when the latter were due for submission was given to students. Examples were provided for the PBLs and students were given 2 weeks to make up their minds. During this time they had a practical lab, so had the opportunity to discuss their choice with the staff and the demonstrators. Of a class of 50, 12 opted for the end of semester exam and the remaining 38 chose the PBLs (see Figure A.1). None of the students asked to change their original choice, but if they had a valid reason for changing from PBLs to essay they would have been facilitated. Once the 1st PBL was submitted it was not possible for a student to switch from the essay choice. One of the main problems that arose was that some students didn't submit the last 2 PBLs, mainly because they had a lot of assignments to hand in for other modules near the end of the

Figure A.1: Students engaging in discussion in PBL groups: Assessment Option 2.

semester when the final 2 PBLs were due. In retrospect, it would have been better if PBLs had been circulated earlier, however PBLs were designed to be associated with the lectures and providing them before the material was covered in class would not make sense. To overcome this problem this year, lecture content has been modified to cover 3 broad areas and students have to complete 1 less PBL. As soon as students completed a PBL, feedback was given in class. This proved very useful and students' performance improved from one PBL to another, even though the later PBLs were designed to be more challenging. A marking scheme was developed for each assignment based very closely on the assessment criteria given to the students (See Table A.1, Page 17). This greatly facilitated efficient and equitable marking of the assignments. A session on essay writing was organised for the students who chose this option but overall this group received less help than those doing the PBLs. This year essay titles are very broad and are provided earlier. A guide to writing an essay has been provided to all students and more than 1 session on essay writing (with particular reference to the titles given) have been scheduled and these will be available to the students that selected the essay option and those doing the PBLs. Similarly all students will be invited to the feedback sessions for the PBLs.

Students reactions

Students definitely engaged more with the module and the standard of the PBLs was higher than expected. The PBLs were designed to test a number of skills and increased in difficulty over the semester and the students definitely rose to the challenge. The most common reason given for choosing either assessment was that it allowed students to manage their own time. Those that selected the PBLs felt they would work better if the workload was distributed across the semester, whereas those that selected the end of semester essay felt they had too much continuous assessment in other modules and the end of semester option meant they could concentrate on other modules during the semester and

this module at the end:

> *'It allowed me to look at my other modules and workload and decide if I had more time during the term or at the end of the term in which to do work for this module'. (Student quote).*

Students felt that the assessment choice allowed them to play to their strengths and one student chose the PBLs so she wouldn't have to have a special accommodation at exam time for the module. One worrying aspect was that some students chose the essay because they didn't like calculations. This skill is however, tested in lab reports so students can't avoid this aspect of the course entirely.

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

Two staff members were involved in this module and both were very positive about the changes implemented. Student interaction with the subject area and the staff involved was much higher than in previous years. Good discussions occurred during the feedback sessions on the PBLs and students considered aspects of the course they wouldn't have engaged with in previous years. Both staff enjoyed teaching the module more than in previous years, as it became a more relaxed discussion of topics rather than a series of lectures designed to transmit knowledge. The workload was increased, particularly in terms of setting everything up, ensuring there was equity between the two assessment choices and designing the PBLs, as these hadn't been done before. However, this is now all in place for subsequent years.

Students are being given a choice of assessment in this module again this year, but some changes have been made. Students now receive more examples of essay titles and PBLs before they make their choice; students complete 3 rather than 4 PBLs and these are more closely associated with lecture content; the number of lectures has been reduced somewhat and the course organised into 3 main areas with staff emphasising the linkage between these areas; the schedule has been revised so that students have more time to complete each PBL; more sessions have been incorporated for the group doing the essays and both groups are encouraged to come to all PBL and essay sessions. Although correcting the PBLs added to the staffs' workload, a tight well designed marking scheme which was closely aligned to the assessment criteria facilitated the efficient and equitable marking of the PBLs. Overall it has been a very positive experience and both staff felt that on completion of the module students had a better appreciation of the breadth and depth of the subject.

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Table A.1: Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria						
Prepared Examination (End of semester)		**Problem Solving (4 short continuous assignments)**				
			1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Reference to Course Material (lectures..)	6	**Reference to Course Material (lectures..)**	10	5	5	10
Presentation	2	**Presentation**	5	5	5	5
Evidence of Additional Reading (Journals, books…)	6	**Evidence of Additional Reading (Journals, books…)**	10	5	5	10
Evidence of exploring concepts/ data from different perspectives	10	**Evidence of exploring concepts/data from different perspectives**	15	5	5	15
Gathering, understanding of breadth and depth of reading in the topic	12	**Calculate, analyse data**		10	10	
Synthesise material to arrive at evidence-based argument	14	**Evaluate/interpret results**		10	10	
		Report in an appropriate manner	10	10	10	10
Total:	**50%**		**50%**			

Note: Late submission of problem-based assignments will incur a penalty of 10% per day.

Table A.2: Equity of Assessment Methods

Module (Programme): Environmental Biology.		
	Assessment 1: *Seen 1 hour examination*	**Assessment 2:** *Problem Solving Assignments*
Details of assessment	*Given 1 (or 2) question where they need to synthesise and illustrate their answers with examples, under examination conditions.*	*Given 4 assignments that include making recommendations on a specific environmental problems to analysing and interpreting a set(s) of data.*
Date for either assessment.	Week 10, semester 2	To be submitted on weeks 6, 8, 10 and 12
Learning Outcomes1 to be assessed	All 5 outcomes	All 5 outcomes
Assessment Criteria used and how adapted to allow for the choice1	Same assessment criteria (which includes synthesis and is individualised to these assignments based on current UCD document). The assessment criteria will be used in class, by students, to assess other work (for both groups of students).	
Marking Procedures1	Same proportion of scripts moderated by other assessor.	
Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable) 1	One opportunity for feedback (answering questions) on assignment in the lab and in addition, space on blackboard for student groups to ask relevant questions. Staff will answer to all students in that assignment group (instructions on blackboard to include what will not be answered or considered). Same support for both assignments.	
Student Workload expectations (and where will this be communicated to students)	**Workload Expectations: Prepared Essay** | Sourcing information	15
Synthesis of information	5
Writing essay	24
Exam	1
Total	70 hours		**Workload Expectations: Problem-solving assignments** | Assessing problem	10
Sourcing information	15
Data analysis & interpretation	20
Preparation of report	20
Total	70 hours	

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Case Study 2:

Rewarding diverse student abilities

Ms Judy Walsh
UCD School of Social Justice

Module Details

Module Title: Human Rights Law and Equality

School: UCD School of Social Justice

Level: 4

College: UCD College of Human Sciences

Student Numbers: n= 33

Module Learning Outcomes:

On completion of the module, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate specialized and advanced theoretical and conceptual knowledge and understanding of critical legal theory.

2. Explain current debates about the role of human rights law in tackling inequalities and the place of legal systems in the architecture of liberal democracies.

3. Apply their knowledge and understanding of critical legal theory to a broader, interdisciplinary context.

4. Make informed judgments about the role of law in promoting or inhibiting positive social change.

5. Reflect on the wider value and limits of human rights discourse.

6. Communicate their conclusions about human rights law, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously.

7. Have the learning skills to be able to continue to study the interrelationship between human rights law and equality in a largely self-directed or autonomous manner.

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
End-of-semester Essay (100%) *or* group presentation (50%) and reflective writing assignment (50%).

Rationale for Assessment Choices
The primary reason I chose these particular forms of assessment was to afford students the opportunity to be assessed on a broader range of skills than conven-

tional academic writing ability. My choice was driven by a perceived need to diversify the assessment strategies employed on the Masters programme as a whole. The skills evaluated under both 'new' modes of assessment feature strongly in the programme learning objectives but there was a heavy bias towards assessing through essays. Arguably then, some students' abilities, in particular oral communication skills, were inadequately rewarded. Additionally, I felt that allowing students to choose their mode of assessment would reinforce the ethos of empowerment and inclusivity we strive to uphold in the School.

Implementation

Detailed written information was provided in the module handbook (i.e. the Equity Template: Table B.1), including the grading criteria for both options, due dates and so on. I followed this up with a 20-minute explanatory session in week 3 of the module, in which I outlined what each mode of assessment entailed. Because both reflective writing and presentations based on group work were not employed elsewhere on the programme, the session focused on those (See Table B.2). In order to allay anxiety students had about choice of assessment I extended an invitation to each student to meet with me to discuss their choice (See Table B.2). This was feasible with 33 students. Since all students participated in the group work and presentations, I met regularly with the entire study body over the course of the module. For all groups, students were encouraged to allocate roles for the group work (Table B.3, Page 26). Those who opted to be assessed by essay were supported to relate the group project to their chosen assessment.

I required students to make a decision on their preferred mode of assessment by week 5 and did not set a 'change of mind' deadline. In the event just one student switched from the essay (Figure B.1) to the group work mode in week 7.

Students reactions

In various evaluation processes the students expressed very high levels of enthusiasm about having a choice of assessment methods. They appreciated the opportunity to try out something different and to develop new skills, especially in the context of the Masters as a whole.

> 'As a student who is dyslexic I appreciated the flexibility in assessment as too much of a focus is on essay format. It allowed me to be more academically expressive.' (student quote)

Most of the qualitative feedback addressed individual assessment methods as opposed to choice per se. At the end of year evaluation of the programme students expressed the view that reflective writing should be introduced into a wider range of modules. The overall

sentiment expressed was that reflective writing was helpful in the context of a programme that students often experience as transformative at a personal level. As anticipated the group work element generated mixed (often contradictory) feelings:

> 'I'm terrified of public speaking, so it was good to face my fear!' (student quote)

> 'The group dynamic was awful, some people were marginalised... We should do more group work.' (student quote)

Figure B.1: Students could chose the individual end-of-term essay.

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

Overall, the experience was very positive although it did entail a significant amount of additional work at the outset in terms of module design, additional reading on pedagogy and assessment strategies, as well as devising grading criteria. Group work and a tied-in presentation was already a feature of the module but I was reluctant to assess that work in a summative manner. There was some anxiety on my part about assessing group work in light of the well-established tensions that can arise between students in the course of joint projects. I was also concerned about the propriety of assessing a module with strong theoretical content through the medium of presentations. The pilot project and extensive support on offer from UCD Teaching and Learning gave me the impetus to move towards summative assessment of group work and introducing reflective writing as an option for assessment. With

that support I was in a position to develop a grading system for the new mode of assessment that addressed the balance between individual and group effort. I am now confident that theoretical material can be validly assessed in less conventional ways. Given the firm student endorsement of assessment choice I will continue that practice. To alleviate some of the difficulties inherent in group work, in future greater emphasis will be put on the processes and ground rules that should be agreed as between students before embarking on such projects.

The experience has provided valuable insights for ongoing work with colleagues on closer alignment of assessment methods with programme objectives. In addition we are in the process of revising core modules on critical thinking and writing skills to incorporate a session on oral presentations.

Contact details

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Table B.1: Equity Template

Student Information/Equity Template: Description of Choice of Your Assessment Methods and Equity of efforts, standards and support			
Module:			
Assessment Choice	**Assessment: Essay**	**Assessment: Group Presentation and Individual Reflective Writing Assignment**	
Weighting toward Module Assessment	Essay 100%	Group Presentation (50%) Reflective Writing Assignment (50%)	
Details of assessment	4,000 word research essay on a specified topic or theme selected by student in consultation with lecturer Due: end of semester	Group presentation based on work conducted for case law project with colleagues: weeks 11 and 12 of semester Individual reflective writing assignment based on experience of working and learning as part of a group: due end of semester	
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice…)	Familiar mode of assessment Conventional academic writing	Entails visual and oral modes of communication Different style of writing based on fusing personal experiences with academic forms of knowledge	
Learning Outcomes to be assessed	All	All	
Assessment Criteria used	Understanding / Originality Structure Use of theory Coherence / Clarity Argument Range/use of reading Relevance Length Presentation	Understanding / Originality Structure Use of theory Coherence / Clarity Argument Range/use of reading and resources Relevance Length Presentation	Understanding / Originality/ Insights Structure Use of theory Coherence / Clarity Range/use of reading and resources Relevance Length Presentation
Equity in Marking Procedures (examiners, etc…)	Same examiner Grading sheets provided following examination for all modes of assessment		
Equity in Teaching and Learning activities to support the assessments	All students required to participate in group work and presentation, developing generic analytic and critical thinking skills		
Equity in Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)	Feedback on draft essays available over course of two weeks	Feedback on individual assignments available over course of two weeks	

Student Workload expectations	Essay		Group project and Reflective writing assignment	
	Lectures	24	Lectures	24
	Specified Learning Activities	100	Specified Learning Activities	100
	Autonomous Student Learning	100	Autonomous Student Learning	100
	Total	Hours*	Total	Hours*
	*Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown		*Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown	

Any additional comments for students on this choice or other relevant information: (for example, other assessments and their weighting to module..)

All students are obliged to **participate fully** in the group project and presentation, but you will not be formally assessed for these activities if you opt for assessment by end-of-term essay. Participation in the group project is a core element of the specified learning activities set for this module. It enables students to apply the formal knowledge disseminated via lectures concerning socio-economic rights and critical legal theory to a concrete case, thereby enhancing the analytic and critical thinking skills required to do well in all forms of assessment.

Date for decision and sign-off on assessment choice aspect: 18th February 2010…………………………………………………..

For further queries on the assessment choices, please contact   Judy.Walsh@ucd.ie……………………………………………

Table B.2: Student Advice Guidelines for the Second Option: Group presentation (50%) and reflective writing assignment (50%)

As an alternative to the end-of-term essay you may opt to be assessed under a continuous assessment model. The two types of assessment activities and their relevant weighting are as follows:

Activities	Percentage
a). Group project and presentation	50%
b). Individual assignment based on group project (reflective writing)	50%

a) Group Project and Presentations

The first assessment component is the 20 minute group presentation that takes place in either Week 11 or Week 12. With your colleagues you will critically analyse a judgment on socio-economic rights, presenting that analysis to the class in a format chosen by the group (e.g. 'formal' oral presentation; debate; performance). Please consult the various guides to the group project and presentation posted on Blackboard.

The group as a whole will be awarded a single grade on the basis of the presentation (your individual contribution is assessed separately – see material under b below). The grading criteria and further guidelines for the presentation are set out in the section below.

b) Individual assignment based on group project (reflective writing)

The written assignment based on the group project should be 1,200–1,500 words in length and be submitted on or before **10th May, 2010**.

In contrast with more conventional academic writing, the individual assignment based on the group project is a reflective writing task. Reflective writing is the expression in written form of mental processes of reflection i.e. reflective thinking. Reflective thinking involves: (1) looking back at an event or process, (2) analysing that event or process, and (3) thinking carefully about what that event or process means for your development as a student, for your activism, other life activities and/or work. We all engage in reflective thinking, it is a vital ingredient in assimilating and making sense of new information, but we are rarely encouraged to step back and record that process. This assignment invites you to do just that because: Reflection on the experience of learning in collaboration with others should enable you to make links between theory and practice, to integrate new knowledge with previous knowledge and to gain insights into how you learn and develop ideas. It is a way of helping you to become an active, aware and critical learner.

Although the writing style is less formal than that used in conventional academic assignments please be careful to organise and structure your writing (bear in mind the grading criteria set out on the final page of this handout). Because this type of writing involves analysis of personal experiences, it is perfectly acceptable to use the "first person" (e.g. at first I believed that human rights law was...).

[This account of reflective writing relies on: Hampton, M. (2010) *Reflective Writing: A Basic Introduction* (Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement: University of Portsmouth): www.port.ac.uk/departments/studentsupport/ask/resources/handouts/WrittenAssignments/filetodownload,73259,en.pdf; Schon, D. A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner* (London: Basic Books); Webb, C. (1992) 'The Use of the First Person in Academic Writing: objectivity, language & gatekeeping', *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 17(6), 747-752.]

For this assignment you are asked to write about:

(A) The *process of learning and working as part of a group* in preparing and making your presentation to the class.

Under this heading please address: the contribution you made to the group's deliberations and to the presentation; the impact that the mutual discussion had on your own perspectives and understanding of the issues addressed (you will need to reflect on the role of other people at this juncture). Please don't simply describe the experience in detail: you should also analyse and evaluate the experiences and thought processes involved. Try to focus on what was most significant about the experience, and relate it to other aspects of your participation on the Equality Studies programme. Please attempt to reflect honestly on what you have noticed about your own strengths and limitations as a learner; would you do anything differently if engaging in a similar task in the future?

(B) The *development of your theoretical insights* over the course of the group project and how those insights related to the module generally and/or the Equality Studies programme as whole. In this second component of the assignment you should focus on your engagement with the theoretical materials you encountered. For instance if your task was to read a particular judgment/article/chapter, you should explain

how you appraised the arguments presented by the writer/s: e.g. what perspective/s was it written from; did the author gloss over any counter-arguments you thought were valid; how did what they wrote relate to what you thought about the issue beforehand? More generally in this section you should demonstrate that you understand the main arguments made in the group presentation and that you have reflected critically on the material presented. Critical reflection does not mean criticizing, but entails thinking carefully about the issues, considering your own position on the points made, attempting to think about the issues from a range of perspectives (e.g. that of the judge/s), looking for deep explanations, and evaluating outcomes and effects.

You can submit a draft of your assignment to me for feedback any time between Monday 19th April and Friday 30th April.

The grading criteria for the reflective writing assignment are set out below.

Assessment Criteria: Individual reflective writing assignment

Understanding / Originality/ Insights	Use of theory	Coherence / Clarity	Structure	Range/use of reading & resources	Relevance	Length	Presentation
Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Acceptable	Excellent
Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good		Very Good
Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Too long	Good
Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable		Acceptable
Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Too short	Weak

Preparation for the group project

When working in collaboration with other people towards a joint presentation it is generally a good idea to start by setting some ground rules as to how you will work together. Ideally you should divide tasks amongst the members of the group and record what each person had agreed to do, and in what time frame. A template for organising tasks that you may find helpful is set out below. The task is relatively contained, in that you just have one judgment to read and have been given suitable materials to prompt your initial engagement with that judgment. You are not expected to read widely beyond those recommended readings but in the course of your discussion you should try to develop a conceptual framework that helps to analyse the manner in which the court dealt with the issues before it. That process may well take you outside the module reading list and into other theoretical terrain that helps illuminate the court's findings.

In order to approach the project in a systematic way it may be helpful to follow the following basic steps.

a. First have a look at the judgments and themes individually; then use the allocated class time to decide which one you will focus on for the purposes of the group presentation.

b. Try to get a general understanding of the chosen judgment by reading it and the associated material on the resource list. You may decide to assign one reading per individual and tackle the judgment jointly or divide up the tasks in some other way.

c. Once you have undertaken that initial research it may be a good idea to share or exchange the material you have come up and then set a date for collectively discussing your findings. During that collective discussion you should formulate a tentative analysis of the judgment in which you identify the central *arguments* you wish to make. Some of these arguments will be derived from the recommended readings; others will be influenced by theoretical material you have come

across in other contexts. Try to decide on the mode in which you will present your findings.

d. Set about drafting the outcome of your discussion – dividing tasks amongst you as appropriate. Set a date for exchanging the draft work and agree a means of finalizing your presentation.

I am available to meet the entire group or designated members of the group throughout this process (and expect to do so several times!) Please e-mail to make an appointment.

Advice on Group Presentation
Engage in analysis rather than pure description.

Try to focus on the 'why' element of your presentation as opposed to the 'what' component. For example, when explaining the judgment try to resist the temptation to supply exhaustive details of the facts (i.e. the individual circumstances of the case). Focus instead on the courts' underlying theoretical approach to the issue (this will usually be 'read in' by you i.e. the ideologies etc. at play in the judgment will often not be explicit).

Use theory explicitly

This point follows on from the previous one about engaging in analysis. A theory is a model of explanation or understanding. We all have informal theories about various patterns of inequality etc. – the trick is to identify (even tentatively) what formal theories match your analysis of a given issue.

Table B.3: Group Grading Criteria and Student Roles

Grading criteria for Group Presentation								
Understanding / Originality	Structure	Use of theory	Coherence / Clarity	Argument	Range/use of reading & resources	Relevance	Length	Presentation
Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Acceptable	Excellent
Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good		Very Good
Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Too long	Good
Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable		Acceptable
Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Too short	Weak

Tick one or multiple roles for each team member (that is a fair division of labour)						
Student	Chair	Scribe	Presenter(s)	Designer(s)	Researcher(s)	Other role...
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
Any notes (for example, to be changed after period of time...)						

Case Study 3:

Assessing Scientific Presentations

Dr Kathy O'Boyle
UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Sciences

Module Details

Module Title: Development and advanced pharmacology of the nervous system

School: UCD School of Biomolecular and Biomedical Sciences

Level: 3

College: UCD College of Life science

Student Numbers: n=65

Module Learning Outcomes: Demonstrate an ability to work in groups and make a scientific presentation

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
Group poster *or* Group oral presentation

Rationale for Assessment Choices
Arising from an audit of assessment practice within the School, it became apparent that there was little formal assessment of two programme objectives: acquisition of communication skills and development of creativity. It was decided, therefore, to introduce a group project into the module whereby the groups would undertake research into a hot topic and then present their work as either an oral or a poster presentation, which would be assessed. These assessment options were chosen because they represent 'real life' choices - the standard way for scientists to communicate their results at conferences is via poster or oral presentations. Putting either an oral or a poster presentation together requires organisation, creativity and good communication skills. However, oral presentations would favour those with strong verbal skills and an aptitude for performances whereas a poster would allow those with strong writing skills and artistic abilities to do well. Having the choice would enable students with different strengths to select the method that would enable them to excel. The choice component of the assessment contributed 20% of the module grade.

Implementation
The first, and arguably the most difficult, task was to develop standards which would ensure that the assessment choices were equitable. In order to achieve this, two aspects of the choice had to be considered: an equity template, which included student workload expectations (Table C.1, Page 31) and assessment criteria (Table C.2, Page 32). Of these, the former was less challenging since much of the work involved in preparing either a poster or an oral presentation was associated with the background research, and was

not influenced by the choice. Developing equity in the assessment methods involved identifying assessment criteria that would align with relevant learning objectives of the module. In this regard the key learning objective was 'Demonstrate the ability to work in groups and make a scientific presentation'. Three components to the assessment were thus identified: (1) presentation skills. (2) Knowledge demonstrated and (3) group's ability to reflect on its own performance and to give constructive feedback to other groups (see Table C 3, Page 33, for feedback form). The second task was to allocate the class into 11 groups of 5-6 students. Each group was balanced for student subject major, ability (based on previous year's GPA) as well as for laboratory class assignment (to facilitate groups getting together for their project work). The groups were coached about the complexities of working well in groups, both in class and via provision of reading material. Each group was required to assign group members to various roles and to agree a code of conduct for itself. The implications of the assessment choice were explained to the groups and the templates regarding assessment criteria were provided from the start (Table C.2). Groups had two weeks to decide on their assessment choice. The students appeared to have no difficulty in making the choice and no group changed its mind (Figure C.1).

Figure C.1: Discussing example posters can assist students in the choice.

Each group had an academic mentor and two sessions for groups to meet with their mentor were scheduled in the timetable. Outside of these sessions, groups were free to contact their mentor but were expected to work largely in a self directed manner. Groups made their scientific presentations in week 8 of the semester and these were assessed by two academic staff.

Of the 11 groups, 10 opted to be assessed by presenting an oral communication; only 1 group chose a poster presentation. An unanticipated consequence of this was the poster group was somewhat isolated within the class and this was further compounded by the fact that on the assessment day, small but important differences emerged between how the examiner conducted the assessment and what the poster group expected to happen. It is likely that this difference contributed to the poster group having lower level of satisfaction within the amount of support it received. Comparison of results for the two assessment groups tended to confirm that the choice was fair since the result for the poster group fell within the range of grades for the oral groups.

Students reactions

The reaction of the students to the assessment choice was evaluated using the questionnaire developed by Geraldine O'Neill, UCD Teaching and Learning (see Appendix 2 of this Practitioner's Guide). The students were overwhelmingly positive about being given a choice in how they were assessed. The felt empowered by having a choice and did not find it stressful to have to choose. They agreed that it allowed them to play to their strengths and that the choice gave them ownership of their learning experience. 27 of the 29 students who completed the evaluation were satisfied with their choice. The two students who were not satisfied both belonged to the single poster group. Because there was only one poster group it was not possible to make an definitive comparison between the student experience according to assessment choice. However, there was a clear trend for the poster group to consider that they were less well supported than were the oral groups. Because the assessment choice was associated with the introduction of a novel, group-based project, the students did not always distinguish between what they thought of working in groups versus what they thought of the assessment choice when adding comments. However, several of the students expressed the view that having to give a scientific presentation had '*improved their presentation skills*' and they had '*learned a lot from working in a group*'. In addition, some students mentioned that, the choice allowed students to play to their strengths:

> '*It was nice to have some choice to play to the group's strengths'.* (student quote)

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

Although I was interested in, and supportive of, the idea that students could be allowed to choose at least

some of their assessment methods, my concern at the outset was whether this could be done without undermining the integrity of the assessment process: would the choice of assessment give one group an unfair advantage over the other? Would the assessment be valid? A considerable amount of time was required to develop the equity template (Table C.1) and to tease out the criteria by which different components of the assessment would be evaluated (Table C.2). However, as a direct result of careful development of the equity standards, it became clear that the choices could indeed be assessed equitably. Furthermore, having developed the equity standards, the staff workload required to run the module on subsequent occasions will not be increased because of the assessment choice. As mentioned above, the poster group was less satisfied with the level of support it received. This will be addressed next time round by developing clearer guidelines about how the assessment will be conducted (as opposed to the assessment criteria) for students and examiners. It was also evident that a particular assessment is chosen by only a small number of the class then that cohort are likely to need additional support.

From the staff perspective, the introduction of the group project with assessment choice in this module has allowed key module objectives to be achieved and at the same time has improved the alignment between the overall programme objectives and assessment strategies. It was evident from the outset that students reacted very well to having a choice and, having made a choice, their level of commitment to, and engagement with, the module was enhanced.

Contact details

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Table C.1: Equity Template

		Assessment 1: Group Poster	Assessment 2: Group Presentation:
	Details of assessment	**Group poster: students also need to answer questions on the poster.**	**Oral presentation (based on groups' work) to include presentation aids (i.e..Power-Point,..)**
Differences	Why this might suit you	– More **visual** representation, with less on verbal – Give you skills to present a **poster** at a scientific meeting	– More weighting on verbal, less on visual – Give you skills to present a paper at a scientific meeting
Same	Learning Outcomes to be assessed	– No 6: 'Demonstrate the **ability to work in groups** and make a scientific presentation'. – To also include the content from other learning outcomes in module descriptor.	– No 6: 'Demonstrate the **ability to work in groups** and make a scientific presentation'. – To also include the content from other learning outcomes in module descriptor.
	Assessment Criteria used	Same as used in other method (see handout)	Same as used in other method (see handout)
	Marking Procedures	Two staff marker for the poster	Two staff marker for the poster
	Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable) 1	Verbal, based on written, formative student (peer) feedback during the assessment presentation time. (see Peer Feedback Template)	Verbal, based on written, formative student (peer) feedback during the assessment presentation time. (see Peer Feedback Template)
	Student Workload expectations	Poster design — 5 Group meetings — 5 Researching content — 15 Total — 25 hr	Preparing and rehearsing oral presentation — 5 Group meetings — 5 Researching content — 15 Total — 25 hr

Module: Development & Advanced Pharmacology of the Nervous System

The Student Workload expectations tables:

Assessment 1:

Poster design	5
Group meetings	5
Researching content	15
Total	25 hr

Assessment 2:

Preparing and rehearsing oral presentation	5
Group meetings	5
Researching content	15
Total	25 hr

Table C.2: Assessment Criteria

Assessment Criteria For Poster And For Oral Presentation: Development & Advanced Pharmacology 2010		
Scientific Presentation Skills	**Score out of 5%**	**Staff Comments**
– Structure and organisation of poster/oral presentation – Visual enhancement to assist in communication – Verbal delivery : clarity and coherence – Other (please note………………………………………….. ………………………………………………………………		**Positive:** **To be improved:**
Development & Advanced Pharmacology knowledge	**Score out of 10%**	**Staff Comments**
– Evidence of appropriate depth and breadth of research onto topic – Evidence of groups' comprehension of this topic. – Other (please note………………………………………… ……………………………………………………………… ……		**Positive:** **To be improved:**
Suggestions For Improvement of group-Work and group Peer feedback.	**Score out of 5%**	**Staff Comments**
– Ability of group to respond, based on group evaluation, to: *'What ideas would you have for improving the ability of your group, next time round, to be a better team?'* (3 %) – Ability of your group to **give 'constructive'** (**positive** and **ideas for improvement**) feedback to other student group(s). (2 %)		**Positive:** **To be improved:**
Total (0-20%)		

Table C.3: Feedback Form

PHAR30040	Section 2. Peer feedback

Group work and peer feedback

NB: This information will be shared with the other groups but **will not** contribute to their grades

Section 1. Suggestions for improvement of group work

Group providing feedback: _____

What ideas do you have for improving the ability of your group to be a better team?
Note: all members of the group must sign this section

Group No	Poster or oral	Positive comment(s)	Ideas for improvement

Group No:

Signature 1: _____
Signature 2: _____
Signature 3: _____
Signature 4: _____
Signature 5: _____
Signature 6: _____

Case Study 4:

Using choice to assess students in different contexts: Working or full-time students

Dr Tahar Kechadi
UCD School of Computer Science and Informatics

Module Details

Module Title: Data Mining: Concepts and Models

School: UCD Computer Science and Informatics

Level: 4

College: UCD College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences.

Student Numbers: n= 66

Module Learning Outcomes: that student should to able to integrate the theory and practice of data mining with many references to real-world problems and cases to illustrate the concepts.

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
The students have the choice between **continuous assessment** *or* **major project work**.

1. **Continuous assessment** consists of a set of weekly home works, practical work submissions, and some quizzes.

2. **Major project work** consists of selecting a major piece of work, by the second week of term, and submitting an abstract. Then, based on the project objectives, students should: implement the project; submit an interim report and results by week 8; and then submit the final report and give a presentation in front of all students.

Rationale for Assessment Choices
The students taking this module are not only from computer science stream, they can be commerce, engineering, mature, full-time or part-time working students. They don't have common backgrounds or prior learning and/or even the same expectations from the module. The main motivations for choosing this method of assessment are,

– I believe that the students must play a primary role in their learning and therefore the way they should be assessed,

– The choice of assessment is based on the students' learning methods and also on their expected outcomes, and

– Finally, the main reason of proposing *continuous*

assessment or a *major project* is that the former is more suited to full time students with more academic career and less business exposure. In the case of this module asking these full-time students to do a major project without providing them the data on which they should apply some data mining techniques may not motivate their learning and enhance their skills in dealing with real-world applications. While the *major project* fits perfectly well with the students who are already working in companies, in which there is a need for data analysts and data miner experts.

Implementation

While we can acknowledge the benefits to students of a choice assessment method, its implementation is not straightforward. First of all I wanted to have the same target for the performance of assessment (See Equity Template: Table D.1, Page 36). In the case of this module assessing the **process of doing** is very important. Both choices reflected that. Secondly, the assessment process has to be fair for both. The continuous assessment components were well thought out and prepared in advance and the workload was estimated correctly. The major project outcomes were also well defined with a set of deadlines for submissions; abstract, dataset validation, progress report, final report and project presentation at the end (See Table D.2, Page 37).

Students' reactions

We had some difficulties in the beginning in having some students not able to choose one or the other. It was a difficult decision for them as we have always chosen the method of assessment for them. This had created a small problem in the beginning that we had to deal with on a case-by-case basis.

At the end the feedback was excellent and all students liked it very much.

The students scored highest (i.e. they strongly agreed) on the statement: *'I appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods'*, and they also strongly agreed that *'the module attempted to accommodate my learning style'*.

One student who picked the more work-oriented *Major project*, noted he was glad with his choice as *'Data min-*

ing is my future job', another student chose the project because he *'liked projects'*. The project also, as one student noted, suited him because he was *'a part-time student'*.

The more continuous assessment home-works were chosen because, as a few students noted, they were *'very familiar with this method'*.

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

In this project, I have tested a different method of assessment, which is choice of assessment, and it is proven to very effective. The students liked it, enjoyed working on the module material, and did very well in it. More importantly, they learn something and understand how this can be used in their careers.

This helped me to reflect on our current practice with regard to assessing our students in a particular module. Currently the assessment is directly linked to the curriculum or the content of the module only. Basically, the body of knowledge that has been identified to constitute the curriculum is the driving force towards the development of assessments in order to determine whether the acquisition of the curriculum occurred or not, i.e. the focus has been on the **demonstration** of knowledge

I believe we need to think outside the box, we need to link with the student careers. Rather assessing the students on a very specific knowledge identified within the curriculum, we may need to assess them on the **application** of that knowledge in real world. For instance, some of my students are working and performing some tasks that are related to the module, such as data analysis. One way of assessing them (current methods) is to exhibit the data analysis techniques and then assessing the students directly on these techniques to see whether they learn them. However, in my view the best way to see whether these students learned the material of this particular module is to assess them on the application of these techniques to their work placement or real world task. As there are some students are in a better position to apply this knowledge, the option for a choice of assessment will be the method I adopt for this module for the future. It will definitely be more effective for both the students and their learning skills and careers.

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Student Information Template: Equity and Description of Choice of Your Assessment Methods		
Module: Data Mining 1 (COMP 40370) Sept 2010		
Assessment Choice	**Assessment A: Continuous Assessment Homework Tutorials**	**Assessment B: Major Project (including in-class presentation)**
Weighting toward Module Assessment	20%	20%
Details of assessment	A series of 10 homework assignments, based on specific questions	A real-world project, based on a student's choice of data and analysis tool. Three deadlines throughout the semester: a) Describe data set to be used, b) Interim progress report, c) final project. Includes a short in-class presentation
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice…)	Focused weekly submissions	Application to a student chosen data set. More self-directed
Learning Outcomes to be assessed	Addresses modules learning outcomes	Addresses modules learning outcomes
Assessment Criteria used	Available on Blackboard	Available on Blackboard
Marking Procedures	Assessed by module tutors	Assessed by module tutors
Teaching and Learning activities to support the assessments	Links with lecture materials	Links with lecture materials
Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)	In-class feedback; Solutions discussion in class	Opportunity to seek individual feedback; Feedback shortly after hand-in points
Student Workload expectations	10 home-works x 5 hours — 50 / **Total** — **Hours*** / *Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown	Continuous project work — 50 / **Total** — **Hours*** / *Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown
Examples of assessment guidelines available to student beforehand (if unfamiliar)	Specific individual questions set out for each homework	Project guidelines available

Any additional comments for students on this choice or other relevant information: Student must chose either Assessment Option A (Homework Tutorials) **or** Assessment Option B (project). It is highly recommended **NOT** to do both options. In the case of students doing both Option A and B, the marks will be averaged across the two options.

Date for decision and sign-off on assessment choice aspect: 24th September 2010.

For further queries on the assessment choices, please contact: Module Co-ordinator, Tahar Kechadi.

Table D.2: Assessment Criteria Project (Option B)

Project Group		
Student Names:		
Project Name:		*Type*
Due Date:	**12/12/2011**	

Instructions		

1. Project Goals: produce a project report describing the data set application being studied. This report should contain the following items:

    a. Application overview.

    b. Objectives: Briefly describe each goal/objective of your project in relation to the dataset you've collected.

    c. Describe the problem and the collection of the datasets.

    d. Explain the technique used to solve the problem.

    e. Give a worked example.

    f. Discuss the suitability of the tool being used to solve the problem.

    g. Conclusion.

    h. References.

2. Presentation: a seminar session will be organized at the end of the project (due date) to let the students present their work. This consists of a set of short presentations organised as follows:

    a. Each student will be asked to give 10 minutes presentation for the class.

    b. Extra 5 minutes will be allocated for questions and comments.

Case Study 5:

Trying group and individual choices with First year students

Professor Jean-Michel Picard
UCD School of Languages and Literature

Module Details

Module Title: The Making of Early Modern France

School: UCD School of Languages and Literature

Level: 1 College: College of Arts and Celtic Studies

Student Numbers: n=24

Module Learning Outcomes:

- Understand content related discourse in French

- Engage in critical reflection on the concept of national identity by applying the knowledge of historical and cultural elements acquired in the module

- Research as individuals and as members of a group for material relevant to the course

- Communicate specialist knowledge to fellow students and staff

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
Week 6-7: Group Presentation or **Group Poster**

and

Week 12-13: Individual Essay or **Individual Audiovisual assignment**

Rationale for Assessment Choices
I decided to use these assessments in order to give students the opportunity to present the results of their research and reflection in different types of media, according to their tastes and abilities. All types were suitable to evaluate the learning outcomes. The first assessment (weeks 6-7) is part of the peer learning approach used in this module. It allowed students to do group work and to present two types of output depending on the abilities and leanings of different groups, with more emphasis on discourse and oral communication for the *Group Presentation* and with more emphasis on visual display for the *Group Poster*. The second assessment (weeks 12-13) was individual, with a choice between a traditional *Individual Essay* or an annotated Powerpoint presentation (*Individual Audiovisual Assignment*), both submitted electronically. The annotated Powerpoint presentation was offered as an alternative to students who felt they could convey the results of their analysis better with the use of a visual element.

Implementation

The course content and assessment methods were presented in week 1. Students, randomly divided into 4 groups, had until the end of week 4 to decide on their mode of assessment. During the period of weeks 1 to 4, they also had the opportunity to change group if they wished. A few of them did. Three groups chose to do an oral *Group Presentation* while one group chose to present a *Group Poster*. Grading of week 6 assessment went smoothly, facilitated by the group peer feedback in week 7, which allowed students to reflect on their performance as a group and within the group (See Table E.3, for Assessment Criteria). In the end of semester assessment, the same proportion (25%) of students took the alternative, less traditional assessment and opted for the annotated Powerpoint submission, i.e. the *Individual Audiovisual Assignment* (See Table E.4, for Assessment Criteria). In summary, there were two opportunities for choice in this module and given that there was no other form of assessment, this module quite uniquely in this project had a 100% choice of assessment (see Table E.1). In addition, it was a first year module.

Table E.1: The two choices of assessments in the module: Group and Individual choices.

1
2 Group Work in T & L Activities
3
4
5
6 | Group Oral Presentation | or | Group Poster |
7
8
9
10
11 | Individual Essay | or | Individual Audio Visual |
12

Students' reactions

There was a very positive reaction from the first year students. The most common reason for choosing the assessment method was that they '*were familiar with this method*'. This emphasised that students in their first year were choosing what they were more comfortable with. The students were very positive towards the idea of group work (Figure D.1), the first option, for example students commented:

> '*It allowed for lots of group work which meant there was less pressure in individual students and meant that the time spent working on the assessment was enjoyable*' (student quote)

The same student advocated even more marks for the group work as :

> '*working in a team sometimes requires more effort and cooperation than individual work and requires skills that are useful in working life*' (student quote)

The students were also very positive to the assessment choice and one student noted that: it

> '*allows the individual to find their strengths or chose something different to usual*' (student quote).

Figure D.1: Students Often Enjoy Group Work

Similarly another student noted that one of the positive aspects of the approach was that there was:

'a wide range of choice, which empowers the individual student to play to their strengths and feel involved in the learning process which is somewhat unusual and as such, appreciated' (student quote)

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

Alternative assessment involves more preparation and more feedback input than single assessment, but it is more rewarding in terms of student involvement and work satisfaction from a staff point of view. The general consensus in the class was that the pilot was a success. The only thing I would change in the assessment of group work is the introduction of an individual journal, recording personal involvement in the group work project, as a preparation for the Group feedback of week 7.

Contact details

Professor Jean-Michel Picard   Tel.: 00-353-1716-8620

Email: jmpicard@ucd.ie

Table E.2

Student Information: Equity and Description of Choice of Your Assessment Methods		
Module: Making of Early Modern France		
Assessment Choice Week 7	Group Poster	Group Presentation
Weighting toward Module Assessment	**35%**	**35%**
Details of assessment	Two A2 posters, to be put up at beginning of session; other students and staff allowed to circulate and ask questions.	12 minutes oral presentation, with or without visual support, followed by questions and answers.
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice...)	– more visual – random exchange with public – immediate support of team members	– more formal – expression of logical discourse – possibility of visual help (Transparencies, PowerPoint)
Learning Outcomes to be assessed	– Communication of specialist knowledge to fellow students and staff. – knowledge of historical and cultural elements relevant to the chosen topic. – Successful engagement in critical reflection on the chosen topic.	– Communication of specialist knowledge to fellow students and staff. – knowledge of historical and cultural elements relevant to the chosen topic. – Successful engagement in critical reflection on the chosen topic
Assessment Criteria used	– Structure and organisation of poster. – Enhancements to assist in communication (visual/audio/physical) – Verbal delivery : clarity and coherence – evidence of appropriate depth and breadth of research onto topic – evidence of group's comprehension of this topic. – ability of group to suggest improvements for future work and for being a better team – ability of group to give 'constructive' feedback to other student group(s).	– Structure and organisation of oral presentation. – Enhancements to assist in communication (visual/audio/physical) – Verbal delivery : clarity and coherence – evidence of appropriate depth and breadth of research onto topic – evidence of group's comprehension of this topic. – ability of group to suggest improvements for future work and for being a better team – ability of group to give 'constructive' feedback to other student group(s).
Marking Procedures (examiners, etc...)	Single marker (Module coordinator)	Single marker (Module coordinator)
Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)	In class	In class

Table continued on next page

Student Workload expectations	Poster preparation	15	Poster preparation	15
	Total	Hours*	Total	Hours*
	*Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown		*Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown	
Examples of assessment method available to student beforehand	On Blackboard		On Blackboard	

Assessment criteria for *Group Poster and for Group Presentation* (week 7)		
Presentation Skills	**Score out of 15**	**Staff Comments**

– Structure and organisation of poster/oral presentation
  – Enhancements to assist in communication (visual/audio/ physical)
  – Verbal delivery: clarity and coherence
  – Other (please note……………………….
		Positive:
		
		To be improved:

Discipline knowledge	**Score out of 15**	**Staff Comments**

– Evidence of appropriate depth and breadth of research onto topic
  – Evidence of group's comprehension of this topic.
  – Other (please note……………………….
    …………………………………………….
		Positive:
		
		To be improved:

Suggestions For Improvement of group-Work and group Peer feedback.	**Score out of 5**	**Staff Comments**
– Ability of group to respond, based on group evaluation, to: *'What ideas would you have for improving the ability of your group, next time round, to be a better **team**?* ' (3 %) – Ability of your group to **give 'constructive' feedback** (**positive** and **ideas for improvement**) to other student group(s) (2 %)		**Positive:** **To be improved:**
Total (0-35%)		

Assessment criteria for Individual Essay and Audio-visual Presentation (week 12)		
Skills	**Score out of 15**	**Staff Comments**

– Structure and organisation
   – Shows a plan
   – Maintains relevance
– Presentation
   – Spelling, punctuation, quotations
   – Presentation of bibliography/
    primary sources
		Positive:
		
		To be improved:

DISCIPLINE knowledge	**Score out of 25**	**Staff Comments**
– Full coverage of appropriate material – Knowledge of primary sources (bibliography, electronic resources) – Evidence of intellectual complexity – Evidence of critical/analytical skills		**Positive:** **To be improved:**
Originality	**Score out of 10**	**Staff Comments**
– Evidence of intelligent use of secondary sources – Evidence of an individual approach		**Positive:** **To be improved:**
TOTAL (0-50%)		

Case Study 6:

Developing Research skills

Dr Amanda McCann
UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science (SMMS)

Dr Amanda McCann
UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science (SMMS)

Module Details

Module Title: SMMS Research Elective II

School: UCD School of Medicine and Medical Sciences (SMMS)

Level: 3

College: UCD College of Life Sciences

Student Numbers: n=2

Module Learning Outcomes

1. Adhere strictly to designated guidelines for completion of application forms for project selection.

2. Adopt rigorous documentation of their day to day research activities in a research/reflective journal.

3. Display an authoritative understanding of the question in hand and design a coherent experimental strategy to critically evaluate the research question.

4. Understand why particular experimental approaches have been used to address the research question in hand.

5. Demonstrate an understanding of the requirement of ethical approval if appropriate to the project.

6. Present the research findings as a PowerPoint oral presentation **OR** Oral poster presentation. The Oral presentation will be assessed on clarity of presentation, interpretation of data and salient findings. In addition to the assessment criteria detailed for the Oral Presentation, those students that undertake to do the ORAL/POSTER presentation will have the poster assessed for content, visual impact and research conference quality.

7. Demonstrate an understanding of the statistical tests used in determining the significance of the findings if appropriate.

8. Understand the issue of copyright in relation to the use of images for presentation.

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
PowerPoint Oral Presentation *OR* Oral/Poster presentation (50% weighting to module).

The Rationale for Assessment Choices

These assessments were chosen as they reflect the type of presentations that are routinely required at both national and international conference platforms.

These assessments also suit different types of individuals. Those that are possibly more outward going might favour the *Oral/Poster presentation* (Figure E.1), where as those that might just want to make the presentation uninterrupted and then answer questions may find this an easier way of presenting in a stressful situation, i.e. the *PowerPoint Oral Presentation*.

Figure E.1: Oral presentation to give experience for conference presentations

Overall these research electives have been structured both in their execution and assessment, to give our students the tools to be in a position to present at conferences in the future and to be able to structure posters and oral presentations to the required standard and expectations of these research opportunities.

Implementation

Prior to the students making a decision on which assessment to choose, they met with the module coordinator to discuss the implications of their choice and the possible outcomes.

This year was the first year that this inclusive assessment was offered which is reflected in the small number of students (n=2) who opted to make a choice. Neither changed their mind having made their assessment choice.

There were no issues following grading and both students seemed delighted with the outcome.

Students' reactions

One of the student, who had picked the oral presentation was glad he picked this option as:

> *'Being already familiar with the format and having done a few of them before (I had never done a poster presentation and didn't know what that would entail) gave me confidence going into the assessment.'* (student quote)

The student greatly appreciated having the opportunity to have a choice of assessment and suggested one improvement to the module;

> *'there were templates provided on blackboard which showed what the posters were expected to look like. This was of great help in preparing the posters, however no equivalent existed for the oral presentations so perhaps some sample power-point presentation could be put up.'* (student quote).

The assessment appeared to supported the development of research skills as one of the students noted:

> *'The more structured nature of the oral presentation meant I did more research on what I was going to say and this information help me enormously not only in the presentation itself but when answering subsequent questions.'*

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

My initial reactions are very positive and I will definitely implement this for the next years students exemplified by the fact that this is now written into the module descriptor. There was no significant increased impact on my workload as I me*et al*l of our undergraduate research students both in groups and individually irrespective of the type of assessment that they will be engaging with. For the moment nothing will be changed as we have only run this out for one year. However, feedback from one of the participating students referred to the fact that while there were templates available on blackboard to assist in the construction of *posters*, a similar template for the *PowerPoint Oral Presentation* was not available. This was a very valuable input and will be in place for the next set of research students.

Contact details

Dr Amanda McCann
Chair Summer Student Research Awards (SSRA) Committee 2007-PRESENT

Email: amanda.mccann@ucd.ie

Ms Yvonne Barry: Senior Administrator, SSRA programme.

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Dr. Paula Byrne: paula.byrne@ucd.ie

Table F.1

Student Information Template: Equity and Description of Choice of Your Assessment Methods		
Module:		
Assessment Choice	**ORAL Assessment**	**POSTER Assessment**
Weighting toward Module Assessment **Research Elective II (5 Credits) PATH 30090 SMMS**	**50% For the ORAL Presentation** **50% for the Quality and Content of your reflective daily Research Journal.**	**50% For the ORAL-POSTER Presentation** **50% for the Quality and Content of your reflective daily Research Journal.**
A similar larger module is also being developed with the following weighting: *MDSA 30180 (10 Credit Version)*	*40% For the ORAL Presentation* *50% for the Quality and Content of your reflective daily Research Journal.* *10% for submission of your abstract in the template of the Irish Journal of Medical Science (IJMS)*	*40% For the ORAL-POSTER Presentation* *50% for the Quality and Content of your reflective daily Research Journal.* *10% for submission of your abstract in the template of the Irish Journal of Medical Science (IJMS)*
Details of assessment	In consultation with your Principal Supervisor and Co-Supervisor, you will be required to present a Power-Point presentation totalling 6 slides in 7 minutes. • This presentation will be seen by the examiners prior to your assessment. • This presentation will be to a board of assessors (a minimum of 4 examiners) who will subsequently ask questions about your presentation. • If applicable to your research you will be expected to speak authoritively on any statistical issues relating to your work, in addition to any issues concerning ethical approval for the study. • If you are using images from alternative sources for your presentation you must obtain copyright permission to use these and all acknowledgements of funding should be made.	In consultation with your Principal Supervisor and Co-Supervisor, you will be required to produce and submit an electronic A4 PDF poster of your 8 week summer research experience. • These posters will be distributed to the board of examiners prior to your formal assessment. • You will then need to send your poster by e-mail to John.murray@ucd.ie, who will print this poster to Conference A0 size on your behalf with no expenses to be incurred by you. • You will have this poster to work with until the morning of the assessment where you will have to place it on the designated poster boards. • At your formal assessment the examiners will stand by your poster and ask you to bring them through the main findings of your research and you will be asked questions throughout this process.

Table continued on next page

Details of assessment (continued)	48	• If applicable to your research you will be expected to speak authoritively on any statistical issues relating to your work, in addition to any issues concerning ethical approval for the study. • If you are using images from alternative sources for your presentation you must obtain copyright permission to use these and all acknowledgements of funding should be made.
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice...)	**Picking an Oral Presentation might suit the following:** • Students who would like to present their data uninterrupted and only be asked questions at the end of their presentation. • Students who have undertaken a qualitative body of research that may lend itself better to an oral rather than a poster presentation. • Students who feel a video clip or patient interview would form part of their presentation. • Students who have already undertaken research previously and feel that they are better at giving oral presentations rather than poster presentations.	**Picking an ORAL-POSTER Presentation might suit the following:** • Students who would prefer a more informal assessment process and who are happy to engage with questions throughout their presentation. • Students who would be confident in dealing with challenging questions at the start of their presentation without it affecting the rest of their assessment. For example a student may feel rightly or wrongly that the question they have just answered could have been better or indeed they may not have been able to answer it. In this situation the student needs the confidence to continue and not let it phase the remainder of the assessment process. • Students who have already undertaken research previously and feel that they are better at giving poster presentations rather than oral presentations. • Students who may get very nervous giving an oral presentation where they have to speak continuously for the 7 minute time frame.

Learning Outcomes to be assessed	• The quality and clarity of your ORAL presentation. • Your ability to keep strictly to time. • Your ability to handle your questions authoritively and to be aware of the fact that you may not be able to answer all of them (which is fine!) • Your ability to describe the statistical tests used in your study if appropriate and to show an understanding of why certain tests were used. • To comment on any ethical issues pertaining to your research activity. • To show a background understanding of the research over and above the specific focused information covered in your 8 week endeavour.	• The quality and clarity of your presentation. • The visual impact of your poster. In other words how engaging is the poster to the reader. Does the poster make a good visual impact? Is the structure visually impressive? Is there good use of images and data? Is there just the right amount of text or does the poster look too cluttered? • To be sure that you have received permission to use any of the images in your poster. • Your ability to handle your questions authoritively and to be aware of the fact that you may not be able to answer all of them (which is fine!) • Your ability to describe the statistical tests used in your study if appropriate and to show an understanding of why certain tests were used. • To comment on any ethical issues pertaining to your research activity. • To show a background understanding of the research over and above the specific focused information covered in your 8 week endeavour.
Assessment Criteria used	Students will need to present their research as an oral presentation to a board of examiners.	Students will need to stand by their poster with 3–4 examiners and present their data allowing interruption from the examiners.
Marking Procedures (examiners, etc…)	Examiners will be asked to mark/comment on the following. Following discussion a consensus mark will be assigned. • Content • Clarity of presentation and timing • Research conference quality. • Understand the issue of copyright in relation to the use of images for presentation. • Understand why certain statistical approaches were adopted and the importance of ethical considerations in the study as appropriate. • How well the candidate fielded their questions.	Examiners will be asked to mark/comment on the following. Following discussion a consensus mark will be assigned. • Content and quality • Visual impact • Clarity of presentation • Research conference quality. • Understand the issue of copyright in relation to the use of images for presentation. • Understand why certain statistical approaches were adopted and the importance of ethical considerations in the study as appropriate. • How well the candidate fielded their questions.

Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)	Feedback will be given following the assessments and ratification of the marks at the appropriate examination board. Students will meet individually with the module coordinator to review their presentation.	Feedback will be given following the assessments and ratification of the marks at the appropriate examination board. Students will meet individually with the module coordinator to review their presentation.
Student Workload expectations	3 days To include: Preparation of the 6 PowerPoint slides. The review of these slides with the Principle and Co-Supervisor Practicing the timing of this presentation not to exceed 7 minutes. Incorporation of any relevant video or patient interview clips. Practicing voice projection with colleagues and asking colleagues to ask questions to give the candidate a chance to filed and answer questions clearly and concisely.	3 days To include: Preparation of an electronically submitted A4 PDF poster which will subsequently be printed to A0 conference size for the assessment. The review of this poster with the Principal and Co-Supervisor Practicing the delivery of this poster to a small group of individuals and the ability to handle questions concisely. Rigorous attention to typographical errors and alignment issues in poster construction.
Examples of assessment method available to student beforehand (if unfamiliar)	Students will have been given the opportunity to attend the Annual SSRA Research Symposium where students compete for the SSTA Gold medal for Excellence in Research. In the absence of seeing these presentations, it is intended with the permission of previous students who have engaged with the programme to show video clips of their presentations.	Posters from previous students who have undertaken both qualitative and quantitative based research projects will be available for review on the designated Blackboard site. Full Conference Size posters from previous students will also be available and students are encouraged to view the constant gallery of posters on view in the UCD Conway Institute.

Any additional comments for students on this choice or other relevant information:

 The ORAL presentation is specifically designed to give you the skills in delivering:

1. A presentation that would not look out of place at a national or international conference.

2. The ability to deliver your presentation in a succinct clear format within a required period of time

3. To give you the confidence to speak authoritively about your work and to take questions following your presentation

Table continued on next page

4. To learn that it is ok not to know the answers to everything and to build up your confidence in how you respond to examiners question

5. To enhance your skills in the use of PowerPoint and video clip inserts if appropriate.

The POSTER presentation is specifically designed to give you the skills in delivering:
1. Designing a poster that would not look out of place at a national or international conference.

2. The ability to engage your examiners at the very outset of your presentation with your research, for example asking them specifically what aspects they would like to hear about or alternatively do they want you to give a brief overview and then start into the specifics.

3. To let you find out what works and what doesn't work in posters. For example, font size, background colour, the size of images ensuring that they are legible, the fact that typographical errors appear far more evident in the conference sized version of your poster.

Date for decision and sign-off on assessment choice aspect:

This can be no later than one week before the designated assessment date. In 2010 this was August 27th .

For further queries on the assessment choices, please contact: amanda.mccann@ucd.ie

Case Study 7:

A forensic investigation into assessment choice

Mr Jonathan P McNulty
Diagnostic Imaging, School of Medicine and Medical Sciences

Module Details

Module Title:	**College:** Life Sciences
RDGY40870: Forensic Radiography	**Student Numbers:** n= 21
School (or Discipline): Diagnostic Imaging, UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science	
Level: 4	

Module Learning Outcomes:

Knowledge Outcomes:

On completion of this module, students should be able to :

1. Provide an introductory theoretical background for radiographers to undertake forensic radiography examinations.

2. Consider the application of this theory to practice.

3. Discuss the legal issues surrounding the practice of forensic radiography in Ireland.

4. Provide radiographers with the basic skills required to deal with ante and post mortem cases.

This module builds on the students existing knowledge. The module allows the students to develop a wider ap-preciation and understanding of forensic imaging and its current applications.

Professional Skills Outcomes

On completion of this module students will be able to gather, analyse and critically evaluate information from a wide range of sources. Students should also be able to critically reflect and evaluate their individual professional practice and knowledge base in order to recognise their need for continuous professional development and lifelong learning.

The Choice of Assessment Experience

The Assessment Choices
Students must submit a Clinical Practice Report/ Reflective Essay based on specified aspects of forensic radiography or make contributions to a wiki on specified aspects of forensic radiography.

Rationale for Assessment Choices
This module is an option module in stage 4 of the BSc Radiography and is also available to graduates as a Professional Certificate. There exists the potential for a significant difference in the levels of practical experience of forensic examinations between both cohorts. While it is unlikely that the undergraduates will have gained practical forensic experience throughout their clinical placements, it is also likely that there will be similar differences in practical experience levels among graduates. There will also be a number of visiting Erasmus students from across one of our 16 partner institutions taking this module.

It was on this basis that it was felt this module was amenable to a choice of assessment approaches. The two assessment choices should give those students with practical experience (graduate or undergraduate) the opportunity to produce an essay or report based on experience in their own institutions that will allow them to critically evaluate local practice and potentially lead to improvements in local forensic radiography service delivery. Alternatively, those with limited or no experience (graduate or undergraduate) could develop their knowledge by combining their experience in this area on a *group wiki* submission (Figure G.1). It should be noted that both options were structured in such a way that they were an option to all, independent of their level of practical experience. As there are a lack of resources available to the Radiography community as a whole in this area it is also hoped that some of these wikis may become resources for the profession nationally and internationally.
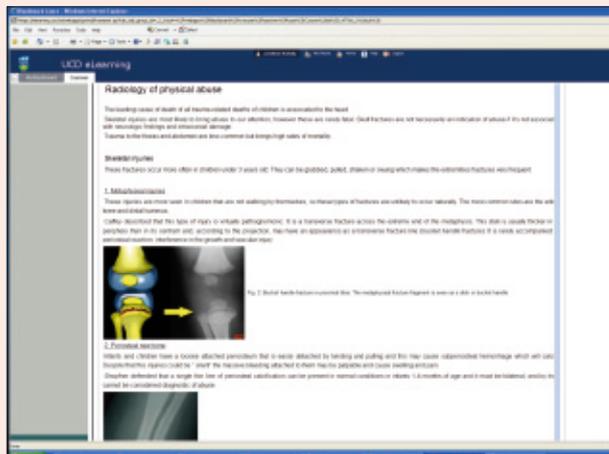

Figure G.1: Students contributed to on-line group wiki.

Implementation
This module is designed to fit in between clinical placement weeks that form part of the undergraduate programme and also to facilitate graduates in terms of release from work. It thus runs over 6 days. At the beginning of day one (Monday 21st January 2011) as part of the module introduction session an hour was spent with the group discussing the rationale for providing a choice of assessment and the two available. All assessment information was made available on day one and students were directed to the assignments area of blackboard where each choice had its own folder. The Clinical Practice Report / Reflective Essay guidelines on the structure and format were made available along with the grading criteria to be employed. For the group wiki assignment a series of student focussed step-by-step guides on all aspects of contributing to and editing wikis, identifying individual contributions to date, along with a practice wiki, open to all students, and the wiki grading criteria were provided. Examples of previous assignments were not provided for either assessment method.

Students had until Monday 14th February 2011 to confirm their choice and discussion fora were created for each choice to allow students and academic staff to discuss any aspects of the two in advance of the decision date. These fora were also introduced due to the fact that the undergraduates had a 3 week clinical placement block from January 24th–February 18th which spread them across 5 clinical teaching sites. The graduates were also back in the workplace during this period. Despite being encouraged to use the fora to help them in making their choice through peer discussion and staff input very few questions materialised. As some students had not made a decision by the 14th this deadline was extended to Monday 21st February. Several students who chose the wiki wished to create their own groups and also to identify their wiki topic in advance of the groups being formulated. It was explained to them that this would not be possible as each small group would be selected based on their cohort (UG, Erasmus, Graduate) and their levels of forensic experience. Of the 21 students in the class only 4 selected the small group wiki, all of whom were visiting Erasmus students. Two of these students were very familiar with wikis as an assessment tool and this may have influenced their choice. For all four English is not their first language so this also may have influenced this decision.

On Monday 21st and Tuesday 22nd one hour was spent with the group as a whole discussing the assessment choice in more detail and time was spent with the subgroups (1 hour with each) discussing their particular assessment choice. Three of the four wiki students wished to cover a particular topic with the fourth

wishing to cover a completely different topic. Despite some counselling they could not come to an agreement to work as a group of four on one topic or as two pairs. Thus one student decided to stick with their topic as an individual reflective essay leaving one group of 3 taking the wiki option.

Students reactions

Students informally indicated that they like the idea of having a choice. Some also indicated that they are slightly more uncomfortable with the less familiar wiki methodology.

While a survey to establish student feedback on assessment choice is still open for this module the majority of respondents to date have indicated that they were most familiar with the Clinical practice report / Reflective Essay option and most respondents to date indicated that their reason for selecting this assessment method was:

'I knew I could do well on this method'.

Reasons for selecting the Clinical practice report / Reflective essay were:

'I thought it was the best method for me in terms of getting a good grade'.

and

'it's what I know'.

In terms of how the assessment choice could be improved, student suggestions included:

'The normal reflective essay was the easy way out for most people. If the people needed to work on the reflective essay in little groups as well, the wiki would have been chosen more'.

and

'Maybe introduce another assessment choice eg, practical session'.

In terms of the small group wiki option one student felt that students should be given more information on the wiki:

'The organization and the information given to the student in how to handle all of the tools to build a wiki'.

while another felt the opposite:

'I think the wiki was explained in more detail than the reflective essay so maybe improvements here could be done'.

Staff reflections and suggestions for change

My main thoughts on this so far are the lack of engagement the students had with both the discussion fora and practice wiki, both of which were there to help them make a choice. I was also extremely surprised that all of the UCD undergraduates on the module avoided the wiki despite the fact that they have a significant volume of written coursework to submit from early April to early May. I had thought that the ongoing wiki contributions would be more appealing to them on this basis.

Contact details

Jonathan McNulty

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Tel.: 00-353-1-716-6530

Student Information Template: Equity and Description of Choice of Your Assessment Methods		
Module: RDGY40870 Forensic Radiography		
Assessment Choice	**Assessment : Group Wiki**	**Assessment : Clinical Practice Report**
Weighting toward Module Assessment	50%	50%
Details of assessment	See assessment document	See assessment document
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice...)	– Like to be on top of tasks – Like to learn online – More continuous form of assessment to suit your organic style	– Interest in applying theory to practice and identifying /understanding my role in it. – Prefer end of module type assessment
Learning Outcomes to be assessed	– Provide an introductory theoretical background for radiographers to undertake forensic radiography examinations. – Discuss the legal issues surrounding the practice of forensic radiography in Ireland. – Aspects of: Consider the application of this theory to practice.	– Provide an introductory theoretical background for radiographers to undertake forensic radiography examinations. – Consider the application of this theory to practice. – Aspects of: Discuss the legal issues surrounding the practice of forensic radiography in Ireland.
Assessment Criteria used	– Wiki definition – Contribution – Discussion of discipline knowledge	– Role (student versus practitioner) – Theory to practice – Discussion of discipline knowledge
Marking Procedures (examiners, etc...)	Single and second marker (top, middle and bottom)	Single and second marker (top, middle and bottom)
Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)	Opportunity for wiki groups to seek general advice and guidance on their approach to their wiki throughout the process.	Opportunity for students to seek general advice and guidance on their approach to the clinical practice report throughout the process.

Table continued on next page

Student Workload expectations	Discussion sessions	2	Discussion sessions	2
	Background research	4	Background research	4
	5 x 2hr equivalent wiki contributions	10	Report write-up	10
	Total Hours*	16	Total Hours*	16
	*Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown		*Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown	
Examples of assessment method available to student beforehand (if unfamiliar)	Yes		Yes	
Teaching and Learning activities to support the assessments	Face to face discussion on wikis (after informed selection of assessment) – time for those doing Wikis to discuss approaches to it. Discussion sessions open to both groups of students.		Face to face discussion (after informed selection of assessment) – time for those doing Report to discuss practices, roles, integration of theory and practice. Discussion sessions open to both groups of students.	

Any additional comments for students on this choice or other relevant information: (for example, other assessments and their weighting to module..)

Other components of module assessment:

Attendance at specified lab, small group and teaching sessions: 10%

MCQ: 40%

Date for decision and sign-off on assessment choice aspect: 14th February 2011

For further queries on the assessment choices, please contact: Jonathan McNulty

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Fostering an Inclusive Education Environment for Students with Disabilities in UCD: Legal, Moral and Structural Considerations

Anna M. Kelly
Director of UCD Access and Lifelong Learning

Introduction

People of different abilities are found in different societal groups and in different circumstances that should not impede their ability to succeed. Notwithstanding significant progress in recent years, many groups, including those with disabilities continue to encounter barriers in education, in the work place and in civic society generally. The Choice of Assessment project is an exemplar of this university's commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment, which seeks to embrace the needs, strengths and preferences of a diverse student group. We warmly welcome this initiative and acknowledge the foresight, endeavour and accomplishment of those colleagues who are participating in this innovative project.

Section 1 of this Chapter outlines the legal and moral obligations, Section 2 contextualise the approach to widening participation in UCD, while Section 3 details issues surrounding the assessment of students with disabilities.

1. Legal and Moral Obligations

Meeting the needs of excluded groups has been at the heart of UCD's mission since its inception in the mid nineteenth century, when in 1854 John Henry Newman succeeded in opening the doors of a new university, which would make higher level education accessible to a broad sweep of Irish people who until then, found themselves excluded from university. In taking this bold step in the 19th century, Newman laid the foundation for the creation a new class of educated Irish who would lead, shape and influence society.

Today, UCD is Ireland's largest university, and continues to play a central role in Ireland's economic, social and cultural development and as such, this university is well positioned to influence, shape and lead the diversity agenda. Notwithstanding the achievements that have been made, Newman's vision is not yet fully realised however. Significant disparity remains in the level of take up of higher education among different groups, despite the range of initiatives to incentivise access and support participation, as well as the considerable legal imperative.

Higher education in Ireland is governed by a range of legislation, which provides the backdrop for the development of inclusive policies and approaches. UCD is legally required to ensure that appropriate adjustments to the learning environment are made to enable students with disabilities to participate in education on the same basis as those without (Universities Act 1997, Equality Act 2004, Disability Act 2005). These requirements apply not only to physical access barriers and the provision of support services, but also to teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods and administrative policies.

The sector is also provided with a framework for shaping equality of access and lifelong learning strategies in higher education institutions (HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2008-2013). The fundamental objective of this Plan is "*to mainstream our approaches to improving access to higher education*" (p7) and to do this five key objectives are specified, i.e.

- Development of institution-wide access plan

- Enhanced access through lifelong learning

- Investment in widening participation in higher-education

- Modernisation of student supports

- Widening participation in higher education for people with disabilities

Despite all of these measures and initiatives, our challenge remains: UCD's learners of today—our future leaders—need to be representative of our diverse society, where people find themselves in different circumstances—rich or poor, urban or rural, employed or unemployed, disabled or members of ethnic communities.

2. Contextualise the Approach to Widening Participation in UCD,

Widening Participation in UCD

The university's specific commitment to broadening the range of opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds is embedded in our Strategic Plan 2014—*Forming Global Minds*, which contains ambitious targets for increasing participation: specifically, the percentage of non-traditional students on undergraduate degree programmes is to increase from 17% to 25% by 2013/14. This Plan also undertakes to "*broaden the range of opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds to participate in our educational programmes, and in particular will capitalize on new, flexible modes of course delivery to enable more inclusive approaches for learners at different stages of their personal and professional lives*" (p17). In order to help realise these ambitious goals, the university has reshaped its organisational structure and—uniquely among Irish universities—has opted to integrate the continuum of access-related strands, resulting in the establishment of UCD Access & Lifelong Learning. This Unit—falling within the remit of the Registrar and Vice-President for Academic Affairs—brings together the previously stand-alone strands of access and adult education-related activity, including disadvantaged students, those with disability, mature learners, as well those wishing to study part-time. For further details of the role and structure of the unit see: http://www.ucd.ie/access/

Strategy for Mainstreaming Equality of Access and Lifelong Learning

The University reviewed arrangements for meeting our obligations arising from disability-related legislation, which requires that appropriate adjustments are made to the learning environment to enable students with disabilities to participate in education on the same basis as those without (Universities Act 1997, Equality Act 2004, Disability Act 2005). These requirements apply not only to physical access barriers and the provision of support services, but also to teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods and administrative policies. The University's (draft) Strategy for Mainstreaming Equality of Access and Lifelong Learning aspires to develop an inclusive education environment that is attractive and receptive to a diverse student group. The cornerstone of our approach is to embed access and lifelong learning issues in the institution's mainstream policies and practice; thus enabling discourse on the quality of scholarship, teaching and learning to address issues of inclusion and equity sooner rather than later. Our vision for the university is one in which our systems and processes are a blueprint for "*extending the opportunity to participate and progress and using all possible, ethical sound means*

to do so" (Skilbeck and Connell, 2000).

Entry Routes for Students with Disabilities to UCD

The number of students with disabilities in higher education has increased in recent years, which reflects the positive admissions policies, as well as provision of academic and personal supports, which enable students to reach their full educational potential. UCD is one of the higher education institutions that jointly developed a supplementary admission route called Disability Access Route to Education (DARE). This higher education admissions scheme offers places on a reduced points basis to school leavers with disabilities and was established as the evidence shows that disability can negatively affect educational attainment, which may in turn, constrain opportunities of higher education. Hence, the DARE scheme is for school leavers with disabilities who want to be considered for entry to higher education under reduced CAO points.

Applicants' disability or Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) is assessed to determine the level of impact on their academic studies. If an applicant is deemed to have been significantly affected by their disability or specific learning difficulty they are eligible (based on sufficient evidence, personal statement, academic reference etc). Each higher education institution determines the level of points reduction offered, while the decision of whether the applicant is eligible is a national decision.

UCD's Supports for Students with Disabilities

UCD's participation rate of students with disabilities (of all types) in 2008/09 was 3.4% at bachelor level and 1.7% at graduate level, respectively. While the HEA (2008) has set a national target to double the number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities, this university is seeking to increase the number of these students by 50%. Taking 2008/09 as the base year, when 119 such students attended, our goal is to attract an additional 50 such students by 2013.

In 2009/2010, a total of 679 undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities availed of services and support of the UCD Access Centre. Students with disabilities who choose to register with the service do so by undergoing an Educational Needs Assessment, which is carried out by the Disability Adviser. This process identifies the particular supports and accommodations required to enable them to participate fully in their studies. The supports available include assistive technology, e.g. radio aids, scanners, voice recognition software, texthelp, etc. Students may also require Alternative Formats, which converts printed text to electronic text, Braille or audio. Information and Library supports are also provided, and learning support is available to particular student groups, including those with dyslexic, dyspraxia, and Asperger's syndrome. These students undergo initial screening, attend advisory interviews, and supports such as study skills and note taking are available.

3. Assessment for Students with Disabilities in UCD

Assessments and examinations are a vital part of a student's university experience and UCD is committed to ensuring that students with a disability do not experience disadvantage during assessment. There are different approaches in the practice in the approaches to assessing students with disabilities. The approaches most often used in UCD are:

– *A Contingency Approach* (or Special Accommodations—such as extra time, own room etc.) 'which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system', SPACE (2011).

– *An inclusive approach*—(e.g. a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all) capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways (SPACE, 2011).

A Contingency Approach

Currently, the assessment needs of students with disabilities are addressed primarily though the provision of examination accommodations (i.e. A Contingency Approach). Thus, accommodations are also provided in order to give candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment, while ensuring that any special arrangements will not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination. Examination accommodations include extra time, amanuenses, reader and alternative format papers. Students' needs, including any examination accommodations required, are identified through the Educational Needs Assessment. Supporting documentation from a relevant Medical Consultant or Educational Psychologist is normally required. One or more examination accommodations may be granted and may include for example, a student with Dyspraxia who may be unable to complete their examination in the given time, may be given extra time, and in some situations, the use of a computer. Students with a visual or hearing impairment may require a reader or assistive technology. Students who have mental health difficulties may find undertaking their examinations in the RDS location causes additional anxiety and stress, and so may be facilitated in the smaller examination environment.

The following Table (Table H.1) details the five most commonly granted examination accommodations in UCD and the number of students currently using them.

Table H.1: Frequency of Special Accommodations in UCD

Examination Accommodations	Number Students
Alternate Location	522
Extra Time	465
Spelling and Grammar Waiver	237
Separate examination room	116
Use of a computer	76

While such provision is likely to remain for those students with high support needs, the approach advocated by this '*UCD Choice of Assessment Project*' calls for the recasting of the university's systems and structures, in order to take account of diverse needs, thereby avoiding the need to 'retrofit', i.e. a more inclusive approach. Students with disabilities will benefit from such an approach, but so too will our other under-represented groups, including mature students, as well as those with different prior learning. "*Good practice for access becomes good practice for all learners throughout the institution*" (Higher Education Authority, 2006 p20).

An Inclusive Approach

UCD's policy and approach to supporting students with disabilities is to empower students to participate fully in university education, both academically and socially. Until now however, supports for underrepresented students, including students with disabilities, have traditionally been shaped by points of entry and exit (examinations) concerns. However, there is an inextricable link between module or programme design and the design and process of assessment and examinations, and their implications for supports and accommodations for students with disabilities.

Assessment and examinations are and will remain a vital part of university life, and students with disabilities will require a range of available accommodations. However, in tandem with supporting the principle of accommodations, we also need to consider these as a final option for students with disabilities, particularly those with specific high support needs that may not be amenable to alternative strategies. To actively include students with disabilities, our first option requires that we consider the module/programme and assessment design process. A well designed module and assessment should be sensitive to the challenges and needs of all students. If in spite of an inclusive approach to module and/or assessment design, students with disabilities are unable to access the assessment, modification of the test item or the provision of alternative modes of assessment should be the next consideration.

Hence, this *UCD Choice of Assessment Project* (an Inclusive Approach) is a very significant milestone on the road

to the development of inclusive education environment in UCD. This approach has drawn together the expertise of both *UCD Access and Lifelong Learning* and *UCD Teaching and Learning*. The approach used in this project is complementary and integral to this university's ambition and commitment to widen participation and broaden the range of opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. The academic staff members taking part in the first phase of this project are the standard bearers for the creation of a learning environment that is sensitive and has regard for the needs of all students.

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Appendix 1:

Paper Presented at AISHE International Conference Series (2010), Dublin, 26th/27th August 2010

http://ocs.aishe.org/aishe/index.php/international/2010/paper/view/155

Choice of Assessment Methods within a Module: Students' Experiences and Staff Recommendations for Practice.

Geraldine O'Neill, Evelyn Doyle, Kathy O'Boyle, Nicholas Clipson
University College Dublin

Introduction and Literature review

Encouraging students to take some responsibility in how and what they learn is in keeping with good practices in student-centred learning (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). By extending this decision-making to 'choice of assessment' methods, it allows students to take some control of their learning and to play to their strengths. This is often described as an inclusive assessment approach. An inclusive approach (e.g. a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all students) is capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways (Waterfield &West, 2006). This inclusive approach can be very beneficial for staff and students when there are students with diverse learning needs within a particular module. This diversity may be known to module co-coordinators such: as mature students; international students; students with different prior learning; or students with disabilities. Alternatively the diversity may be less obvious, such as: anxious students; students with different learning styles; students with poor time-management skills; and students who have personal, work or other demands on the flexibility of their time commitment. An inclusive approach to assessment can address this issue of diversity by embedding the choice of assessment methods in a programme and/or a module, often reducing the need for special accommodations required for certain groups of students (Healey *et al*, 2008). '*Inclusion is conceptualised as a response to an increasingly diverse student population*' (Ashworth *et al*, 2010, p210).

Giving students experience and opportunity to be assessed in different ways across a programme is in keeping with best educational practice internationally. In the UK, Craddock and Mathias (2009, p128) maintain that '*offering a variety if assessment methods is often recommended as good practice….*' Fowell *et al* (1999), also in the UK, recommend that student should be exposed to variety of assessment modes. Nightingale *et al*'s (1996) Australian publication, on different assessment methods for assessing different learning outcomes, has been a much referenced resource over the last decade. This approach is also strongly support from the widening participation literature (QAA, 2003; Healey *et al*, 2008; Hanafin *et al*, 2007) and is often described as a 'Universal Design' approach to assessment (Rose & Meyer, 2000). In addition to a programme approach to assessment diversity, recent case studies are emerging on developing this to **within module** choices, for example, in Nursing (Garside *et al*, 2009) and in Engineering (Easterbrook *et al*, 2005) modules. However, this approach is not without its challenges and academic staff and students have concerns about issues such as: perceived equity of assessment choices; maintaining standards; student comfort and receptivity to empowerment.

In developing an inclusive assessment approach, therefore, care must be taken to ensure equity in assessment methods and it is important that the assessment choices both have coherent alignment between learning outcomes, assessment criteria, marking procedures, and feedback mechanisms (Craddock & Mathias, 2009; Francis, 2008). There is a need to give students adequate information on the equity of effort required, the assessment criteria and, where possible, examples of the different assessment methods. Both Craddock & Mathias (2009) and Easterbrook *et al* (2005) highlighted the importance in their projects of considering the issue of parity between the assessment methods in the module.

There has been an ongoing perception among some academic staff that introducing alternative assessment for particular groups of students may lower academic standards, and potentially give unfair advantage to this group (Ashworth *et al*, 2010). Whereas, developing choice for **all** students could be less open to this perception, it still 'may not stand up to scrutiny' on this issue of standards

(Ashworth *et al*, 2010, p212). Some studies show that where assessment choice is given, students perform better according to their first choice assessment format (Jackson & Williams, 2003; Entwistle & Tait, 1990; Cassidy, 2007). Therefore, in developing assessment choices within a module, achievements and standards should be carefully monitored.

Francis (2008) explored the student receptivity to assessment empowerment. He describes that students' receptivity to empowerment related to students' perception of 1) the role of the lecturer and confidence in the lecture as assessor, 2) their personal understanding of the assessment process and criteria, 3) the potential for empowerment to take place at community rather than individual level. He also found that the 3rd year students were more open to choice in assessment methods than students in earlier years.

Our research carried out in University College Dublin, therefore, aimed to explore some of these issues for both students and staff, of 'within-module' choice of assessments. It also aimed to develop some guidelines for practice based on the staff and students' experiences. The project was carried out by UCD Teaching and Learning, under UCD's Registrar's Office, and was supported by HEA Training of Trainers funding (see O'Neill, 2010 for further details).

Methodology

Deciding on the choice of assessment methods within the module was the first step for module co-ordinators who volunteered for this project (Table 1, Page 66). This process was supported by UCD Teaching and Learning. The modules had different weightings for the assessment choice aspect of the module, as some still had a mandatory second assessment. One module had 100% weighting for the assessment choice aspect, i.e. Humans Rights, Law and Equality Module, whereas one had 20% weighting for the choice element in the module (Table 1). In addition to choice of assessment methods, some modules had a choice of timing of the assessments (Module 1 and 2), some had a choice of individually marked assessments (Module 2) or group-marked assessments (Module 1), whereas Module 3 had a choice of getting a 'group mark, which included a small individual mark' versus getting an 'individual essay mark' (Table 1).

The module co-ordinators completed the '*Student Information Template*' designed, by the project co-ordinator, for the purpose of this project (Appendix 1). This ensured that staff carefully considered the equity and diversity issues of the assessments as mentioned in the literature review and that students received adequate information to make an early informed choice. All students were given this template and had to choose their assessment choice early in the module (i.e. week 2-4). Following implementation of the three modules, the experience of assessment choice was evaluated using a student questionnaire and staff interviews.

Table 1: Description of Modules and Assessment Choices (2009/2010 only)

Modules & Schools	Student Level/ Numbers	Weighting of assessment choice element in the full module	Method Choices (Choose A or B)	Group v Individual Choices	Timing Choices: More continuous versus end of semester choice
Module 1. Development & Advanced Pharmacology	Level : 3 UG Students: n=60	20%	A. Group poster (N= 1 group) B. Group oral (N= 10 groups)	Group only	Both same time
Module 2. Ecological and Environmental Microbiology	Level : 3 UG Students: n=56	50%	A. Problem-solving (N=42 students) B. Seen exam (N=14 students)	Individual only	More continuous versus end of semester
Module 3. Human Rights Law and Equality	Level : 4 (Masters) PG Students: n=33	100%	A. Group project/individual (N=28 students) B. Essay (N=5 students)	Group (with the individual aspect) assignment versus Individual	More continuous versus end of semester

A further role out, of an additional eight modules using assessment choice, is planned for 2010/2011. See http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/projects/choiceofassessmentmethods/

Based on the literature, a student questionnaire was designed for the project. In the questionnaire, questions were designed to ask students' views on: reasons for choice of assessment; their satisfaction with their choices. In addition, a 20 statement scale was designed to measure students' experience of the assessment methods choice. This included subscales that addressed: level of anxiety in choosing assessment; equity between assessment methods; the diversity of choice; sense of empowerment in choosing; and support given during the process. The total score is described as a scale that measures the '*Positive Experience of Assessment Methods Choice' (PEAMC).* Factor analysis is currently being performed on this scale.
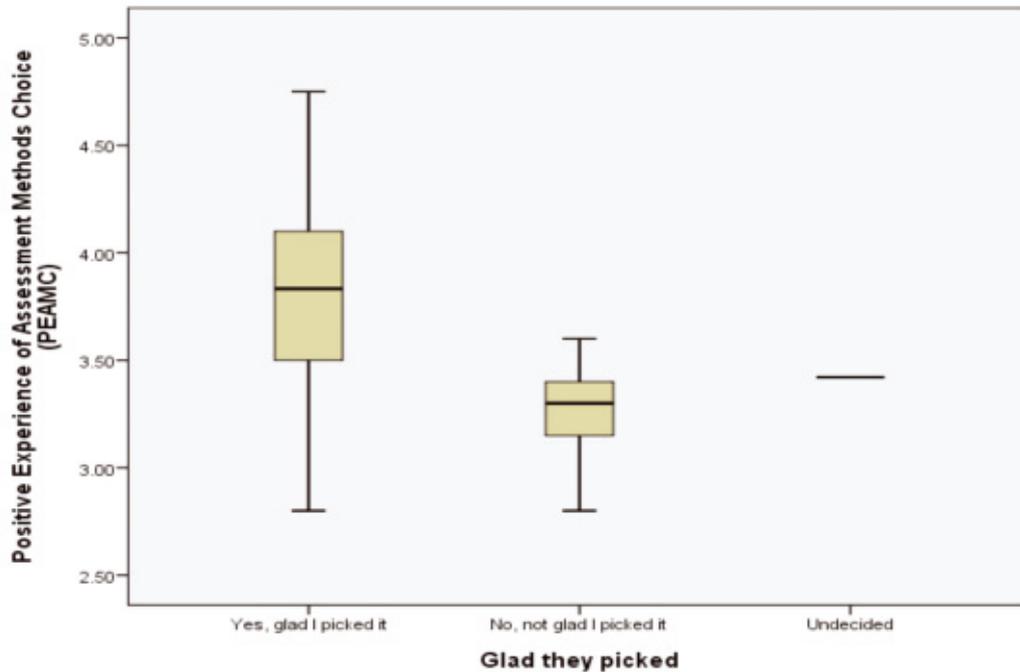
The Results: Students and Staff views

The student questionnaire was handed out at the end of the semester to the students on the three modules (n=149). 97 students returned the questionnaire, a response rate of 65%. 27 were male (27%) and 67 were female (68%). 17 identified themselves as mature students, i.e. over 23 years of age (17%).

The majority of student (82%) were glad with their choice and those students not satisfied (9%) with their choice noted that the workload on the assessment should be slightly reduced for that assessment. Those that were glad they picked the assessment had a higher score on the *'Positive Experience of Assessment Methods Choice' (PEAMC)* scale (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Box-plot of Satisfaction with Assessment Method and Score on the PEAMC

The mature students in the sample group were statistically significantly more positive towards the experience of assessment methods choice, as measure on the PEAMC scale (t=3.55, df=89, p<0.001).

All staff interviewed were very positive of the experience and said they would consider rolling it out to other modules.

Reasons for choice of assessment

It was interesting that the most frequent reason why students chose an assessment method was that they *'wanted to try a different type of assessment'*. This appeared to demonstrate a willingness on their part to undertake something a little different (See Figure 2). However, many also chose assessments that they knew *'they could do well on'*. Some of the modules had a choice of more continuous versus end of semester focus and these
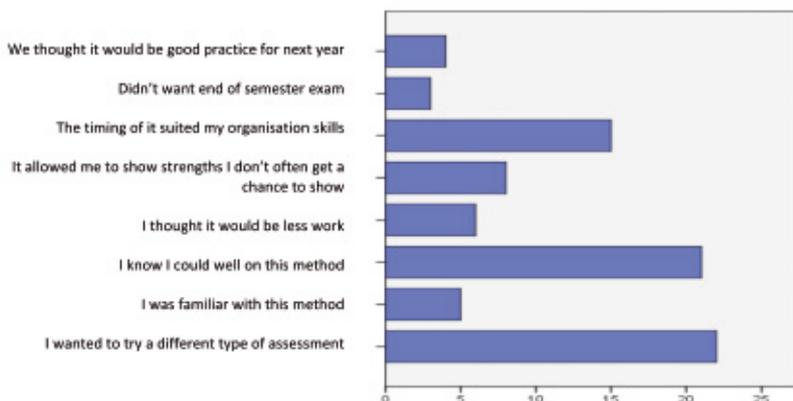
accounted for the frequently of students noting that *'the timing of it suited my organisational skills'*. For example, in the open-ended comments one student noted that:

> *'The choice was good to have, as some people don't do well with just one final exam and are better suited to continuous assessment (S20).*

In addition, some students used the choice of continuous versus end of semester assessment to plan their overall approach to study in the semester, particularly in relation to the assessment of other parallel modules:

> *'..it allowed me to look at my other modules and workload and decide if I had more time during the term or at the end of the term, in which to do work for this module'. (S6)*

Figure 2: The eight most popular reasons for choice of assessment methods.

Perception of Empowerment

A significant aspect of this project was the concept of empowering students in having some control over how they were assessed. As in all the themes in the questionnaire, there were four statements that addressed this theme. One statement in this theme had the strongest level of agreement of all statements in the questionnaire with 93% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: *'I appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods'* (Median= Strongly Agree). The students agreed that they had both ownership and had felt empowered by being given this choice. They were all given a choice of two assessments to choose one, however as noted in the one of the statements they disagreed with having more control than the existing level of control given in these modules. Staff in the interviews, also noted the positive reaction of the students to the idea of being given choice. Staff described the students' reactions as *'very positive'* and that this had made the modules more enjoyable and students were, in general, more engaged with the module than they had been in previous years.

Level of anxiety in choosing

UCD students have some choices around what modules they choose, with the choice of elective modules built into the modularisation system. However, students are less familiar with having assessment choices within a module and this has potential to be stressful for students. To explore this further, four statements were also asked around this theme of anxiety. It appeared from the mixture of positively and negatively worded statements that the students in these modules appeared not to have been stressed by the process of choosing assessment methods. In fact, it appeared to have reduced the stress they normally experienced with assessment, for example one student mentioned that: *'It was less pressure than a final exam with the same amount of learning'.*

Opportunity for assessment of diverse learning styles/approaches

The concept of inclusive assessment is that **all** students can play to their strengths and not solely those that may have been identified as needing some special accommodations, such as, students with disabilities. However, to what extent did these assessments allow students to play to their strengths? The median scores on the questionnaire demonstrated that the students 'agreed' that the modules had attempted to accommodate their learning styles and had allowed them to play to their strengths. However, similar to the issue of empowerment, there was a limit to their comfort with increased diversity and the students were 'undecided' about whether there should be more assessment diversity in the module. It may be that a choice of approximately two assessments is adequate and more choices are not necessarily beneficial. In the students' open-ended comments, the diversity of needs was apparent in students' preference. For example, their mixed preferences for the end of semester examination:

– Personally, I prefer end of semester exams.(S35)

– Don't do well under exam circumstances.(S15)

In addition, students had some opportunity to play to their strengths in relation to particular skills:

– I struggle with calculations sometimes, so thought the essay would give me a better chance to show other strengths (S6)

Staff also described how the choice has accommodated a range of student diversity. One module co-ordinator described how the oral format had suited a range of excellent students who traditionally have not performed well in the written format. It challenged her to think about her pre-conceptions about: what is academic work?. She was now considering, that is it possible that: *'You can talk about theory..It doesn't have to be in the written format, all the time. We have exclusively assessed by written work'.* One module co-ordinator noted that one of her students, who usually required special accommodation did not require it within the module's assessment choices, as it used a more visual than written format. Another module co-ordinator highlighted that one of the students, who requires 'special accommodation' for an examination format, chose the continuous assessment option and reduced the need for organisation of this 'special accommodation'. The student herself also remarked on the benefits of not having to have this organised especially for her. For different reasons, another student, also in this module, chose the end of semester examination option as the continuous assessment option did not suit her home-life arrangements. Therefore, both of the assessment methods in this module allowed students to play to their strengths for different reasons.
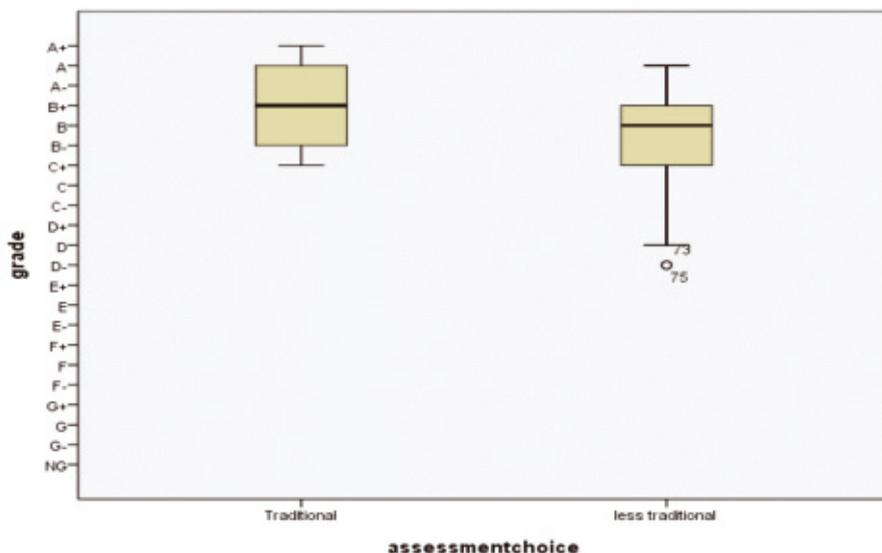
The equity of assessment choices

One barrier to assessment choice, elaborated on in the literature, is the effort required to ensure that assessments are relatively equal for students. In an attempt to address this, efforts such as the use of the *'Student Information Template'* (Appendix 1) were built into the module design. However, it was important to seek students' views on the success of this. It appeared that the explanation of both the assessment methods was equally communicated to the students ('Disagree' with negatively worded statement). The level of workload and amount of feedback was also equitable between the assessment methods. However, there was less agreement with equity of examples available for both assessment types. Less familiar assessments in some modules, such as, poster presentations, problem-solving assignments, or seen examinations, may need to have more examples developed for students to be able to make informed choices. However, these three modules now have the current set of student examples to use for the following year. Staff commented on the importance of building this equity into the design of the module and into communicat-

ing this early to students. All staff felt that the students had equity of achieving good grades in the two options, and this has been borne out by the similarity in grades between the two options across all three modules. The more traditional option choices (Options B, traditional, in Table 1) had a median grade of **B+**, while the less traditional options (Options A, less traditional, in Table 1) had a median grade of **B** (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Box-plot of Differences in Grades between Two Options Across 3 modules.

Discussion and Conclusion

Students' Experience

Similar to the study by Francis *et al* (2008), students were very receptive to being given a choice in assessment methods, with the more mature students being more positive than those under 23 years of age. Students felt that they had been empowered by this process and that having some control in relation to their assessment reduced their anxieties and allowed them to play to their strengths. They strongly agreed that they appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods and, surprisingly many chose assessments because they were a little different to the usual assessments. Therefore, although students were conscious of doing well, it appears they were open to exploring different types of assessments (Nightingale *et al*, 1996). It appears that the process of choosing did not adversely increase the level of anxiety for students; however there does seem to be a limit to how much choice students are prepared to deal with. The choice of two assessments seems to have been adequate and many disagreed with having any additional choice. In contrast, Easterbrook *et al*'s (2005) case study in Engineering, students were satisfied with a choice of three assessments.

Giving students empowerment did not seem to affect the standards and/or students achievements, a concern discussed by Ashworth *et al* (2010). Students perceived the assessments to be equitable and their grades confirmed this perception. Some staff, however, did describe how students who would usually achieve poorer grades had gained higher grades than they would have normally achieved. However, the staff involved believed this was a valid outcome as these students were articulate, well-read and engaged students, who often under-achieve in a certain style of academic writing. The overemphasis in higher education on certain assessment methods, such as the written examination (QAA, 2003), has disadvantaged many groups of students.

Students with variety of learning needs and styles seem to have been supported in the process. Whereas, it was evident in some of the modules that the need for traditional special accommodations was reduced, the more 'hidden' students needs, such as, poor organisational skills, home-life arrangements or demands from parallel modules, were also accommodated. This view of assessment choice for all students needs is in keeping with the idea of universal design for assessment (Rose & Meyer, 2000; Waterfield *et al*, 2006; Hanafin, *et al*, 2007). It appears to be gaining support as a more efficient, student-centred approach to dealing with the huge diversity of students in higher education. It has a less labelling affect on certain groups of students; it removes 'the need for a sticker' and, in addition, as in other case studies, it appears to benefit the full student cohort (Garside *et al*, 2009; Easterbrook *et al*, 2005)   .

Staff Recommendations for Practice

In this study, the staff involved to date were very positive of the approach, however as one staff highlighted *'it should be rolled out cautiously'*. All staff commented on the need for carrying out the process in a 'fair' and 'rigorous' manner. They gave some recommendations for others considering this approach to assessment:

- – The staff recommended both a careful planning of the assessment choices and then articulating these

choices clearly to the students. They advocated the use of the *'Student Information Template'* (appendix 1) which also doubled up as an assessment design guide for staff in the planning stage. In addition to such a guide, Easterbrook *et al* (2005) suggested students fill in a form to reflect on the assessment choice at the early stage, to help engage them with the informed choice.

– As in Easterbrook *et al*'s (2005) study, the choice of assessments in this project was introduced early to the students and they then had to sign off on this decision. Some of the staff suggested a 'cooling off period' to allow students to change options. However, this cooling off, or change of mind period, may vary depended on the assessment methods and their timing.

– The staff recommended that consideration be given to having quite diverse assessments, to maximise on student diversity.

– Some staff felt that their examples for some assessment methods could have been improved. For example, the format of communication in a poster is quite different to that of a traditional oral presentation (such as, PowerPoint™). They recommended getting examples for students on these less traditional approaches to improve their familiarity with these approaches.

– Whereas all staff advocated the choice of assessment within a module, they also recommended that choice and variety of assessment could also be considered at programme level.

The students' experiences and staff recommendations, to date, have been on three modules. Further, inferential statistics will be completed as the other modules are rolled out next semester.

In conclusion, both staff and students in these three modules were extremely positive to the experience of, what is often described as, inclusive assessment. This approach appeared to suit many different student circumstances and needs, both known and hidden. Given that this approach benefits such diversity, it might even challenge the use of the word 'inclusion'. Inclusion has connotations of including a 'minority' or 'excluded' group. In considering this debate, we have moved to the use of 'Assessment Choice within a Module' as a means of describing this approach, in our hope that academic staff might challenge their own preconceptions of what is 'academic work' and consider this an approach for **all students**.

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Appendix 1 = Student Information and Equity Template. See Appendix 3 of this Practitioner's Guide.

7 Steps to Implement Choice of Assessment Methods within a Module: A Quick Guide for Lecturers/Faculty

Students can experience a variety of assessment as staff design different module assessment methods throughout a programme. Alternatively, students can be given some control by assessment choice within a module. Some competencies in a programme should not be avoided by students, such as academic writing; therefore a mixture of both these approaches is preferable.

Step 1	**Module Design Stage** **Consider Which Module:** When creating assessment choice 'within a module', consider which modules might be best suited to having an opportunity for students to play to their strengths. For example, modules that have students with a variety of learning needs; with different prior learning; that are learning in different contexts; or in modules with high numbers of special accommodations.
Step 2	**Consider Diverse Choices:** As students have different strengths, learning styles, different needs and are from different contexts, it is helpful to choose methods that are dissimilar to each other, for example, an oral versus a written assignment. As students have different time-management skills and lifestyle commitments, choice can also include continuous versus end of semester. From the research, it appears two options can often be sufficient choice. See '*UCD Practitioner's Guide*'* for some examples.
Step 3	**Develop Equity:** Having decided on the choice, use the *'Student Information and Equity Template'** consider the equity of effort, standards, feedback, etc. This template will assist in designing the equity between the assessment choices. In addition, this can then be made available to the students at the beginning of the module as a handout and/or available in the VLE environment. This assists the students in making an informed choice.
Step 4	**Make the Expectation and Standard Explicit:** Create examples of the assessment methods and make these available to the students at beginning of the module. This is not so students can 'copy' assessment answers, but rather that they are exposed to assessments that are less familiar to them, i.e. posters, problem-solving assignments, wikis. In addition, it is good practice that the assessment criteria for both assessment types are also available for the students. See *'UCD Practitioner's Guide'* for some examples*.
Step 5	**Implementation Stage** **Implement:** Explain the rationale of this approach to the students, i.e. to empower them in their learning. Procedures need to be put in place for students to communicate to the staff their decision on assessment choice. It may be necessary to set a time limit on this, in particular if one option is continuous assessment. Examples of this include an in-class 'signing-off sheet' or an e-mail correspondence. To streamline this, it may be useful to decide that one assessment method is the 'default' assessment, if students have not informed staff of the choice. This could be the more familiar of the two assessments.
Step 6	**Support the Process:** At the early stage of the module, it may be useful to allow some in-class discussion on the choices, including opportunities for the students to discuss these with staff and/or with other students. As highlighted in the *'Student Information and Equity Template'**, related teaching activities, support for feedback and advice on the assessment must be relatively equitable throughout the module.

Step 7	**Evaluation Stage** Evaluate and Adjust: It is essential to gather feedback from the students, and where relevant the staff, on their experience of this approach. The student questionnaire designed for the project, the '*Choice of Assessment: Student Questionnaire*' (*PEAMC)**, is available to be used, providing its author is acknowledged in any further research/publications. This questionnaire* evaluates themes such as, equity, empowerment, support, anxiety and diversity. In addition more qualitative interviews/focus groups of staff and students are appropriate. Based on these findings, make improvements for the next reiteration of the module. Any evaluation procedures should not conflict with local Institutional evaluation practices.

*The *UCD How to Assess Student Learning* resource page includes downloads of the '*Student Information and Equity Template*', the *'Choice of Assessment: Student Questionnaire' (PEAMC)*, and *'A Practitioner's Guide to Choice of Assessment Methods within a Module: Case Studies from University College Dublin'*. These are all available at http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/assessment/howdoyouassessstudentlearning/

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Appendix 3: Student Information and Equity Template

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Student Information and Equity Template: Description of Choice of Your Assessment Methods and Equity of efforts, standards and support		
Module:		
Assessment Choice	**Assessment :**	**Assessment :**
Weighting toward Module Assessment		
Details of assessment		
Why this might suit you (i.e. more visual, more continuous, different style of writing, apply to practice…)		
Learning Outcomes to be assessed		
Assessment Criteria used		
Equity in Marking Procedures (examiners, etc…)		
Equity in Teaching and Learning activities to support the assessments		
Equity in Feedback Mechanisms (how made equitable)		
Student Workload expectations	Total / Hours* — *Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown	Total / Hours* — *Should be relatively equal, but may be different in breakdown
Examples of assessment method available to student beforehand (if unfamiliar)		

Table continued on next page

Any additional comments for students on this choice or other relevant information: (for example, other assessments and their weighting to module..)

Date for decision and sign-off on assessment choice aspect: …………………………………………………..

For further queries on the assessment choices, please contact: …………………………………………….…….

Appendix 4: Choice of Assessment: Student Questionnaire (PEAMC)

Module code	Module Name	Date

Students views on choice of assessment methods *(PEAMC)*

Please circle:

1. Gender:	Male	Female
2. Mature student (over 23 on entry)	Yes	No
3. **International student** (2nd level experience was not in Ireland):	Yes	No

VIEWS on Choice of assessment experience in this module.

Please circle:

4. Which method did *you chose*:   …………………… or……………………

5. Which method would have been *more familiar* to you?   …………………… or……………………..

6. Please TICK the *one* reason that 'best' reflects why you (the group) chose this method:

MAIN REASON for your CHOICE	TICK ONE (√)
a. I wanted to try a different type of assessment	
b. I was very familiar with this method	
c. I knew I do could well on this method.	
d. I thought it would be less work	
e. It allowed me to show strengths I didn't often get a chance to show.	
f. The timing of it suited my organisation skills	
e. Other (please state)……………………………………..	

Please circle

7. Are you glad you picked this method: Yes   No

Why?

8a) What were *the positive experiences* of assessment choice in this module?	**8b) How could this *assessment choice be improved* in this module?** See second page overleaf……………….

Table continued on next page

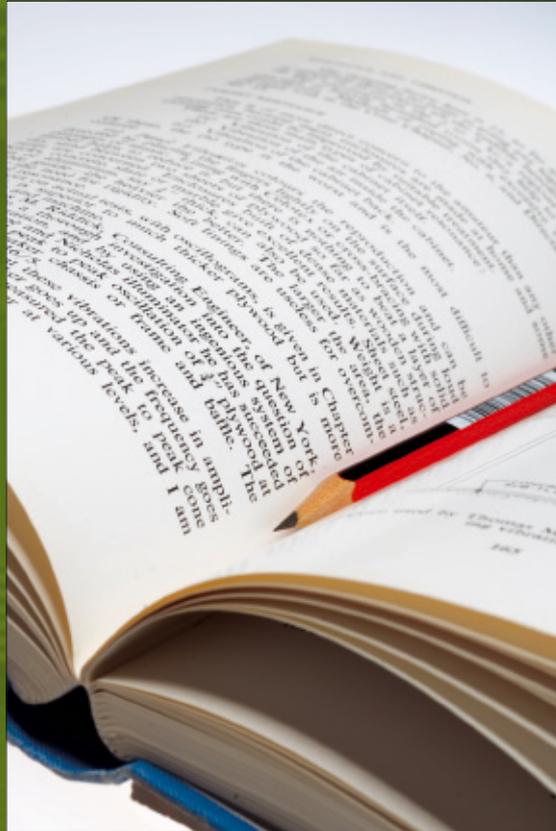|	Positive Experience of Assessment Methods Choice Scale: PEAMC					
	⁹Please circle the extent that you disagree or agree with following statements:					
1.	I felt some ownership of the learning experience in this module (empowerment)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
2.	The module attempted to accommodate my learning style (diversity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
3.	I appreciated being given a choice of assessment methods (empowerment)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
4.	I felt empowered by having some choice of assessment (empowerment)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
5.	Having a choice of assessment reduced some of the stress I normally experience with assessment (anxiety)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
6.	Having a choice of assessment method allowed me to play to my strengths (diversity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
7.	I felt I was given sufficient information required to choose the assessment method (support)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
8.	I found it stressful to have to chose an assessment method (anxiety)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
9.	Over the course of the semester, the workload for my choice appeared similar to the other assessment method(s) (Equity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
10.	I was satisfied with the level of feedback I had compared to the feedback in other assessment method (Equity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
11.	I felt I was given the support required while attempting this assessment method (support)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
12.	I was satisfied with the examples available of my assessment method compared to the examples of the other assessment method (Equity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
13.	The assessment method I chose was not explained as well as the other assessment method (equity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
14.	I was confident in my choice of assessment method (anxiety)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
15.	It was a relief to experience some choice in my learning (Anxiety)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
16.	I would like to have had a wider variety of choices of assessment methods in this module (Diversity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
17.	I felt that the assessment method allowed me opportunity to demonstrate my knowledge in this module (Diversity)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

Table continued on next page

18.	The staff could have been more supportive in the helping me choose my assessment method(s) (Support)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
19.	It helped to talk to the other students about the assessment choice (Support)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
20.	I felt I had should have had more control of my assessment in this module (Empowerment)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

Please elaborate on any of these answers, where necessary:

Thank-you for filling in this questionnaire. Your identity will remain anonymous and this questionnaire is not a compulsory aspect of your module. Please return to your module co-ordinator.

© Questionnaire designed by Geraldine.m.oneill@ucd.ie Use as required, but acknowledge author in research/ publication: O'Neill, G (2011). *A Practitioner's Guide to Choice of Assessment Methods within a Module: Case Studies from University College Dublin.* Dublin: UCD Teaching and Learning http://www.ucd.ie/teaching/resources/ assessment/howdoyouassessstudentlearning/
Word document version available on this website.

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