

Discipline/Course/Subject Area:

Economics

Institution:

Glasgow Caledonian University

Start date:

2005-06

Impact:

The practice was introduced:

☒ across a level 1 core module

☐ across levelof a degree programme

☐ across CBS / two or more subject groups

☐ across the institution as a whole

The practice was adopted by:

☐ the department, other departments in the institution and in other institutions

No. of students affected:

c500 in large lectures & 21 in seminar group

Contact:

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Others involved:

Title of Practice – Enhancing formative feedback in economics through the use of EVS in lectures and student involvement in question creation : The REAP (Re-Engineering Assessment Practices) Project

Abstract

This implementation focuses on a large group of level one economics students. In order to enliven and contextualise the topic, online quizzes, web-based resources and podcasts of lectures had already been developed by the tutor. These additional resources were not fully used by all students however, and some still had difficulty with basic economic concepts. To address these issues, two new approaches were piloted as part of the REAP project: the use of electronic voting systems in large lectures, and linking this to the creation of exam questions by one group of these students who were studying economics as part of a Journalism degree.

Description of Implementation

In what context did the new assessment practice happen?

Economics, Markets and Enterprise is a level 1 core module in the Caledonian Business School (CBS) and is taken by students from a wide range of programmes. As well as the large lectures which target all students (c 500), this case study focuses specifically on a level one cohort of 21 students from the BA (Journalism) programme who take this module in their second semester.

What was the rationale for introducing the practice?

In order to contextualise the module for the Journalism students, the seminars have to be made contemporary and thought provoking, aiming to boost the investigative nature of journalism through knowledge of economic analysis. A range of supporting resources including a tailored web site, formative MCQ quizzes in Blackboard, and podcasts of some of the lectures, had already been introduced, all of which had been created by the tutor. Feedback from end of module surveys indicated that students welcomed these opportunities for formative and diagnostic feedback.

Use of the MCQ tests and other resources was not consistent however, and there was concern that they were not being used effectively by all students. Assessment results indicated that further support was required to help students gain a deeper understanding of some of the basic economic concepts. Introducing EVS in large lectures and engaging students in creating exam questions in seminar groups were seen as ways to increase active student learning.

How was the practice implemented?

The summative assessment for the module consisted of:

- Coursework 25% (group project between weeks 5-12)
- Essay 25% (due week 9)
- Unseen exam 50%

As it was not possible to change the structure of the summative assessments in this instance, formative aspects of the assessment strategy were the main focus of the implementation.

There was a need to gauge student progress at an early stage and to deepen their understanding of key concepts by involving them more actively in lectures, in the creation of resources and in enhanced peer support. The intention was to provide a clearer alignment across diagnostic, formative and summative assessments and in the longer term, to reduce tutor workload.

Before REAP, formative feedback and support for students comprised:

- Weekly self-test MCQ quizzes in Blackboard with comprehensive feedback created by the tutor
- A tailored web site, including previous exam questions & examples of how they might be addressed
- A diagnostic test in week 7, taken under exam conditions and marked by peers based on criteria used for marking the final exam.
- A bulletin board on Blackboard where students can pose questions to tutors

As part of the REAP project, 2 new activities were piloted.

1. Electronic voting systems (EVS) were introduced in lectures in order to:

- allow the tutor to pick up on any conceptual misunderstandings at an early stage and address these directly in seminars
- encourage students to engage in a more timely and effective way with the MCQ quizzes and other resources provided

The students were encouraged to listen and reflect carefully before responding using EVS. For example, a short video clip illustrating a key concept such as 'Public Goods' was played early in the lecture. One or two fairly open questions were posed, but students were not required to answer till later in the lecture. Where there was evidence of misunderstanding the lecturer could address this immediately, and/or refer the students to the online MCQ quiz as a follow up activity. The topic could also be taken forward in a subsequent seminar. Positive feedback from students in this pilot, along with similar evidence from EVS use in Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities, resulted in the purchase of an EVS system for wider use across level 1 classes in the Caledonian Business School in academic year 2006/7.

2. This was linked to a new activity in seminars in which students were asked to review previous exam questions on these topics and re-write them, with the aim of:

- testing further their own understanding of the concepts through group discussion and peer support
- developing a bank of questions to be used to test future students
- linking the formative activities with the summative assessments, in particular the type of questions they could expect in the exam
- providing the tutor with feedback on levels of student understanding of the key concepts and highlighting any misconceptions

Difficulties included:

- Practical problems due to lack of foresight as to pressure of timetables and a rather full seminar content
- Insufficient time made available for adequate discussions with students regarding the new process

All of the students in this Journalism cohort passed the exam and progressed to level 2. Feedback from the end of module survey (a detailed questionnaire issued at the final lecture) was very positive on all aspects.

Future plans

Due to CBS policy, contact time with students is being reduced by 25% in the coming year (06/07) with seminar time cut back by a half, and the group coursework element of the assessment is being dropped. This presents challenges to the teaching team in addressing the balance between independent learning, directed study and face-to-face teaching. In these circumstances, ensuring early engagement in the formative activities, supporting more self-directed learning and increasing levels of peer support will become even more important. Both of the new REAP formative activities will be further developed beyond the pilot phase to underpin this shift in emphasis.

Assessment results will be monitored, module surveys will be conducted and, assuming additional administrative support is available, user statistics on usage of EVS, quizzes and other resources will be collated.

What resources were needed?

- Tutor's time in developing new lecture format and piloting EVS.
- Re-use of questions previously developed by tutor for MCQs, essays and exams

Perceived Benefits

For students...

- Increased levels of formative feedback
- Deeper understanding of key economic concepts through more engagement

For teaching/support staff...

- More student engagement in lectures
- The gradual development of a reusable bank of questions for essays, exams, MCQs
- Gives tutor a student perspective on exam questions
- Longer term, a reduction in tutor workload

Issues/Challenges

For students...

- They have to be more actively involved in their learning and engage more in peer support

For teaching/support staff...

- Revising lecture format to accommodate EVS approach
- Successfully adapting and re-using resources created by students
- Encouraging wider buy-in from tutor team

Enablers that Help/helped the Practice to Work

- Support and advice from the REAP team across all 3 participating institutions

Points of Advice

- Additional administrative support is required to fully analyse data on use of online resources and MCQs
- Students need guidance on developing 'good' exam questions

Possible Improvements/Enhancements (suggested by the case study provider)

- Greater analysis of use of resources is necessary
- More time is required for creation and review of students revised exam questions

Further Reading

Relevant publications by those doing case-study:

Poulter, M. & Chalmers D. (2004) Using the Web to Teach Economics, in *The Handbook for Economics Lecturers*, Economics Subject Centre, Higher Education Academy

Chalmers, D. & McAusland, W.D.M. (2002) Computer-Assisted Assessment, in *The Handbook for Economics Lecturers*, Economics Subject Centre, Higher Education Academy

Relevant/influential/related publications in the research literature suggested by the case study provider: