

## FLEXIBLE ASSESSMENT IN A BUSINESS COURSE — John Asafu-Adjaye

<i>University:</i>	University of Queensland
<i>Faculty:</i>	Business, Economics and Law
<i>Subject:</i>	Quantitative Analysis for Economics and Business (ECON1320)
<i>Coordinator:</i>	John Asafu-Adjaye ( <a href="mailto:j.asafu-adjaye@economics.uq.edu.au">j.asafu-adjaye@economics.uq.edu.au</a> )
<i>Size:</i>	850 students (approx. in Semester 1)
<i>Year:</i>	2001

This case study is most interesting for its use of flexible assessment, incorporating web-based activities. The complexity of the course content and the diversity of the student body mean that failure rates have been quite high (sometimes over 20%). However with the introduction of flexible assessment, the failure rate has decreased to around 18%.

A brief overview of the course's organisation will be followed by a detailed description of the flexible assessment program. For further information about this course, contact Dr John Asafu-Adjaye or visit the web-site at [http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/course\\_materials/econ1320/](http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/course_materials/econ1320/).

### **ECON1320**

#### **Teaching modes and organisation:**

Lectures, tutorials and on-line activities are used. Two-hour lectures are delivered weekly in four streams with approximately 200 students in each stream. Students are streamed according to their program of study (ie. business, economics etc). The lecturing is shared between two lecturers who each teach a 6 or 7 week block of lectures.

Students attend a 1 \_ hour tutorial each week. Attendance at these tutorials is not compulsory but is recorded and may be used to advise on matters of course withdrawal and supplementary exams. A tutorial coordinator heads the team of 12 tutors, organising monthly meetings with the team and course coordinator. She also oversees examination procedures and inquiries [assisted by a full-time administrative officer]. Tutors are given a full day of professional development at the start of semester in the form of a workshop. At the workshop, tutors are provided with course and teaching materials (such as OHP s, problems and solutions etc) and are briefed about the course structure and their roles/responsibilities.

In addition, Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) are offered once a week from Week 3 onwards to supplement tutorials and assist students with further problems. These sessions provide informal, non-threatening opportunities for first years to gain help and advice from second and third year students who previously performed well in this subject. These PASS leaders are paid for their time and are required to attend some of the lectures. About one third of ECON1320 students usually choose attend these sessions regularly. There are approximately 15 PASS groups run by 8-10 PASS leaders with around 15-20 students per group.

The set text is *Statistics for Managers Using Microsoft Excel* and comes with a CD ROM study guide. A popular feature of the text is an Excel add-in, PHSTAT, which facilitates statistical operations. Around 80% of students usually purchase the text. The new edition of this text has a related web-site, which serves as a useful resource for extending particularly interested or gifted students. It contains extra examples and more complex problems for those students looking for a challenge.

**Web-based activities:**

This course has a WebCT web-site, parts of which may be publicly accessed via [http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/course\\_materials/econ1320/](http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/course_materials/econ1320/) The web-site provides students with access to the course outline, lecture and tutorial materials, course announcements, timetables, past exams, exam results, discussion boards and more. In addition, students use the site to complete CML (computer managed learning) exercises online, which can be used to make up 15% of their final grade (see below).

Because so much of the course content is available via the Web, the course coordinator is careful to ensure that lectures and tutorials add value to course materials. He does this by providing extra examples and problems in class (including videos etc.) and working through solutions to the problems. While it may be that many students still rely heavily on the web-based materials, the web-site has many advantages with such a large group including improved communication with students and less demand on paper-based resources.

**Assessment:**

Assessment in ECON1320 consists of a mid-semester exam (25%) and a final exam (60%) both of which are multiple choice and short answer, as well as 5 CML quizzes (15%). However, only the final examination is compulsory. A flexible assessment program is offered whereby a student's best score among the following 4 options will be chosen for allocating a grade:

Option 1: End of semester exam **100%**

Option 2: End of semester exam **75%**, mid-semester exam **25%**

Option 3: End of semester exam **85%**, CML exercises **15%**

Option 4: End of semester exam **60%**, mid-semester exam **25%**, CML exercises **15%**

The only condition specified is that if the difference between a student's CML results and final exam result is greater than 25% it will only be counted as 25%. For example, if a student gets an average of 95% on CML exercises and only 60% in the exam, then the difference is 35%. For assessment purposes however, the CML average is taken as 85% (so that the difference is 25%).

The final grades are calculated for each student using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet which automatically determines the best grade possible for each student. The spreadsheet has been designed and formulated by the tutorial coordinator Averil Cook (contact [a.cook@economics.uq.edu.au](mailto:a.cook@economics.uq.edu.au)).

According to the course coordinator, although students have the option not to complete some of the assessment items, most students attempt all four assessment tasks. However, since providing these flexible options the number of grade appeals and requests to reschedule due dates or re-sit exams has markedly decreased. This is partly because students who are unwilling or unable to undertake some items simply choose to forfeit the opportunity to do so knowing that they won't necessarily lose marks. Conversely, students who wish to gain a high grade have the opportunity to increase their chances of doing so.

**More about CML**

Students access the CML exercises via WebCT using their usernames and passwords. A designated CML tutor is responsible for making the 5 quizzes available online at various times during the semester. Each student can print off his/her own set of 20 randomly allocated questions, work on them with the help of peers and study materials for about a week, then enter the answers via the computer to be graded. The questions require either a multiple-choice response or a short numerical answer. A cut-off date is set for each quiz, after which time students' answers are no longer marked by the computer. Each CML quiz is only available after tutorial exercises for the topic have been completed. Hence students attending tutorials and following up with study have little difficulty in attempting the questions and usually achieve good results. According to teaching staff and students, the CMLs are an excellent learning resource as students can take time to reflect on the problems and learn from mistakes made.

### **Summary**

The flexible assessment program in ECON1320 consists of 2 MCQ exams (mid- and end-of-semester) as well as 5 computer managed learning exercises. These exercises compliment topics taught in lectures and tutorials during semester. Students have the option to complete all assessment items or a combination, however the final exam is compulsory. Students increase their chances of receiving a high mark if they complete all items, as the best mark is chosen for their final grade. As the assessment is semi-automated it is extremely efficient, relieving staff from the burden of marking loads and allowing them more time to consult with and support students.