Evaluation of the implementation of criterion-referenced assessment in a School of Zoology

Ashley Edwards
School of Zoology, University of Tasmania
Ashley.Edwards@utas.edu.au

Introduction
Students are more engaged with their learning and perform better if they know what expected of them (1).

The use of standards-based Criterion-referenced assessment (CRA) to achieve these goals was mandated by the University of Tasmania Senate in 2009, to be implemented across all undergraduate teaching units by Semester 1, 2011, with four perceived outcomes for students:
- Clearer understanding of what is expected of students
- Increased control over students’ own learning
- Increased satisfaction by students about assessment practices
- Increased consistency within and across faculties (2)

For staff, expected benefits include opportunities to:
- Improve assessment practices and evaluate units
- Share good teaching practice with colleagues
- Streamline the feedback process (2)

Results

Q1. The criteria for each assessment component were clearly identified

Q2. I was given useful feedback on my assessment work

Results - UTAS staff impressions of CRA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Providing feedback was made easier for some</td>
<td>• A lot of work to set up initially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marking time was sometimes reduced</td>
<td>• Criteria may not be transferable between years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Marking consistency was sometimes improved</td>
<td>• Marks may not as well spread as in previous years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transparency of expectations improved</td>
<td>• Rubrics not as helpful to students when there is not a single correct answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schools of Zoology SETL scores are comparable to Faculty means

Interpretation

• School of Zoology SETL scores are comparable to Faculty means

• Staff report both benefits and costs to the use of CRA rubrics

• Benefits may come at the expense of perceived quality of feedback at 1st + 2nd yr

References

Methods

Student perceptions were measured via Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (SETL) responses (Likert scale and open questions) comparing results prior to the overt use of CRA rubrics, with 2010 responses after the initial implementation.

Staff at UTAS School of Zool. were surveyed about their use of CRA rubrics as both assessment and feedback tools to evaluate the effectiveness of the transition, and whether modifications for 2011 might ameliorate any concerns. Univ. of Otago (NZ) Biol. Dept were also interviewed for a broader perspective.