

Analysing a Practical Teamwork Assessment for Distance Education Students at an Australian University

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Abstract : Learning to embrace and value teamwork assessment at a university level is critical for students, as graduates enter a real-world working environment where teamwork is likely to occur virtually. Student disdain for teamwork exercises is an area often overlooked or disregarded by academics. This research explored the implementation of an online teamwork assessment approach at a regional Australian university with a significant cohort of Distance Education students. Students had disliked teamwork for three reasons: it was not relevant to their study, the grading was unfair amongst team members, and managing the task was challenging in a virtual environment. Teamwork assessment was modified so that the task was an authentic task that could occur in real-world practice; team selection was based on the task topic rather than randomly; grading was based on the individual's contribution to the task, and students were provided virtual team management skills as part of the assessment. In this way, management of the team became an output of the task itself. Data was gathered over three years from student satisfaction surveys, failure rates, attrition figures, and unsolicited student comments. In one unit where this approach was adopted (Advanced Public Relations), student satisfaction increased from 3.6 (out of 5) in 2012 to 4.6 in 2016, with positive comments made about the teamwork approach. The attrition rate for another unit (Public Relations and the Media) reduced from 20.7% in 2012 to 2.2% in 2015. In 2012, criticism of teamwork assessment made up 50% of negative student feedback in Public Relations and the Media. By 2015, following the successful implementation of the teamwork assessment approach, only 12.5% of negative comments on the student satisfaction survey were critical of teamwork, while 33% of positive comments related to a positive teamwork experience. In 2016, students explicitly nominated teamwork as the best part of this unit. The approach is transferable to other disciplines and was adopted by other academics within the institution with similar results.

Keywords : assessment, distance education, teamwork, virtual

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