Student Selected Components: Making engagement count.

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Introduction

Student engagement with learning has been widely proven to be driven by assessment[1] and in many instances across higher education assessment is still heavily weighted towards written examinations. This may be successful in terms of engaging students with the material for progression purposes but its value post-examination is questionable. Written examinations are a rare event in the daily working lives of most individuals and often fail to build skills beneficial in the workplace. Here, graduate employment more likely involves preparation of reports using data fully accessible to the individual as they write, an activity quite distinct from the traditional closed book written examinations. The Student Selected Component aims to create learning opportunities that more closely resemble situations with which graduates will encounter in future careers capitalising on assessment-driven student engagement through an employability focused exercise. It integrates RESEARCH-LED TEACHING, a key criterion of the University of Aberdeen's Strategic Plan with STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING and EMPLOYABILITY

Design of Student Selected Component

14 research active staff members acted as tutors.

Tutors selected three easily accessible journal articles on their subject speciality, "showcasing" research currently taking place in the School.

Student Choice

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14 themes and associated papers were available to students from start of term. Informed selection of one theme was made by students in week three.

Students identified and assimilated key information from selected papers into 1500 word review type article by week 11. Tutors supported students during this process. Students were free to supplement chosen articles with further reading of their own choosing.

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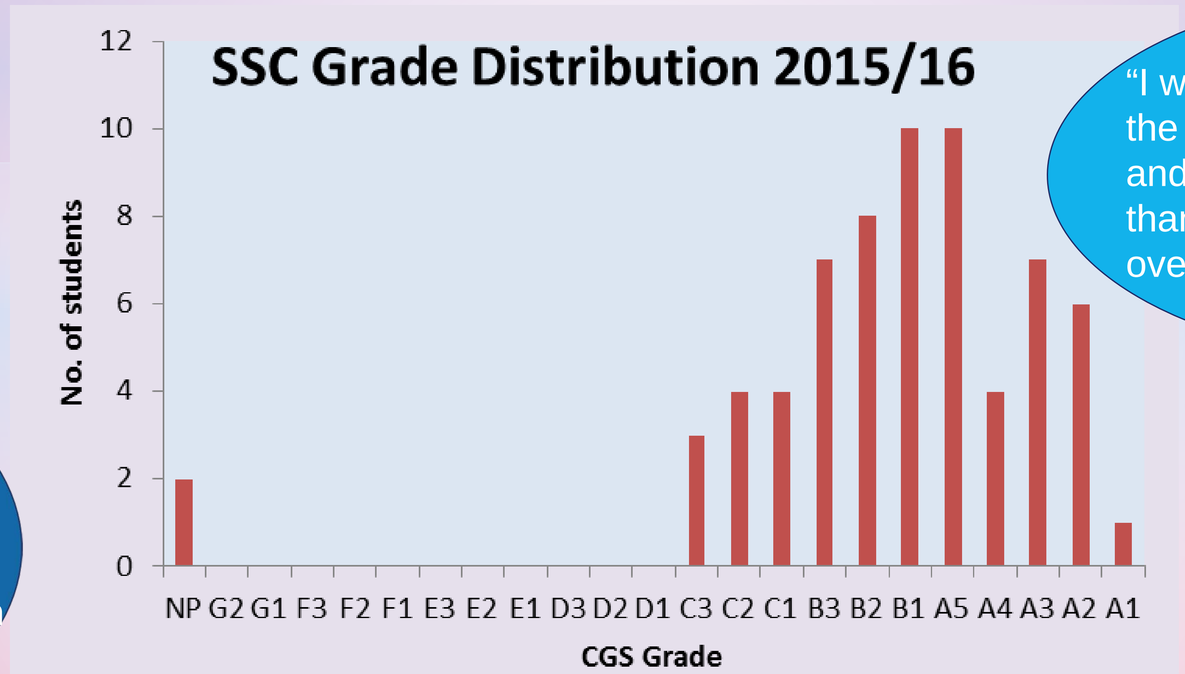
Review articles assessed by tutors; grade contributes to overall course assessment

Results and Feedback

"I genuinely enjoyed the SSC component of the SM3002 course"

"I have learnt a lot of new information which has really helped throughout the course. I think I have retained more because I had to actively teach myself unfamiliar concepts."



"I wish it had more weighting as it was the most time consuming assignment and I feel I performed better in this than others which were worth more overall"

"I was proud of what I submitted".

"Scientific papers/journals don't seem as daunting now, so my confidence has improved from this too"

And from staff:
"I have marked the essays for the SSC, I must say that they were all of a very high standard"

Discussion

Inquiry based learning requires sound foundations built on a more traditional teacher-centred model to be most effective[2] This novel exercise aimed to integrate research-led teaching into the third year Medical Sciences curriculum, and develop skills applicable to the workplace environment, using a student-centred approach with tutor support. Exercises students engage with have the greatest influence on long-term retention and transfer of knowledge[5], and the feedback summarised above supports this with students reporting deeper, more consolidated learning and improved confidence. Feedback further suggests a 5% contribution to continuous assessment under-represented the student effort invested in preparing this exercise and a SENAS form has been submitted to increase contribution to 7.5%. The distribution of grades, with a high proportion in the A category, suggests this will be beneficial to the student's grade spectrum across the course.

Conclusion

Learning activities designed to integrate discipline specific, student selected, subject matter with the promotion of employability skills engage students with the learning opportunity resulting in deeper learning and improved confidence.

References:

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