

Supporting FY student achievement in assessments in an interdisciplinary programme

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Abstract

First year students complete a compulsory integrated first year programme in the Bachelor of Business degree offered by the Business Faculty at AUT University. There are four compulsory papers offered in the first year with students using knowledge from various disciplines to complete assessments. This is seen as an authentic learning experience for students and has received very favourable feedback from the stakeholders. This session will describe and discuss the development of appropriate skills and capabilities to enhance student achievement in these interdisciplinary assessments. It will focus on the development of skills and capabilities that students need to complete an interdisciplinary Business Report in the Business Information Management paper. It will discuss how students are supported in their learning through the development of these skills and capabilities to enhance student achievement in this assessment.

Introduction

First year undergraduate students have expressed self-doubt about the likelihood of success in higher education in previous studies (Fazey and Fazey, 2001; Rhodes and Nevill, 2004). In the study by Rhodes and Nevill (2004), in response to a question about what made them feel bad about attending university students responded they were not confident they could achieve. Themes emerging from this study showed students are concerned about teaching and learning as well as workload and support. The study by Fazey and Fazey (2001) found that students are unsure of their abilities to meet the demands of higher education. They suggest that for students to realise their full potential this issue needs to be addressed by teaching staff.

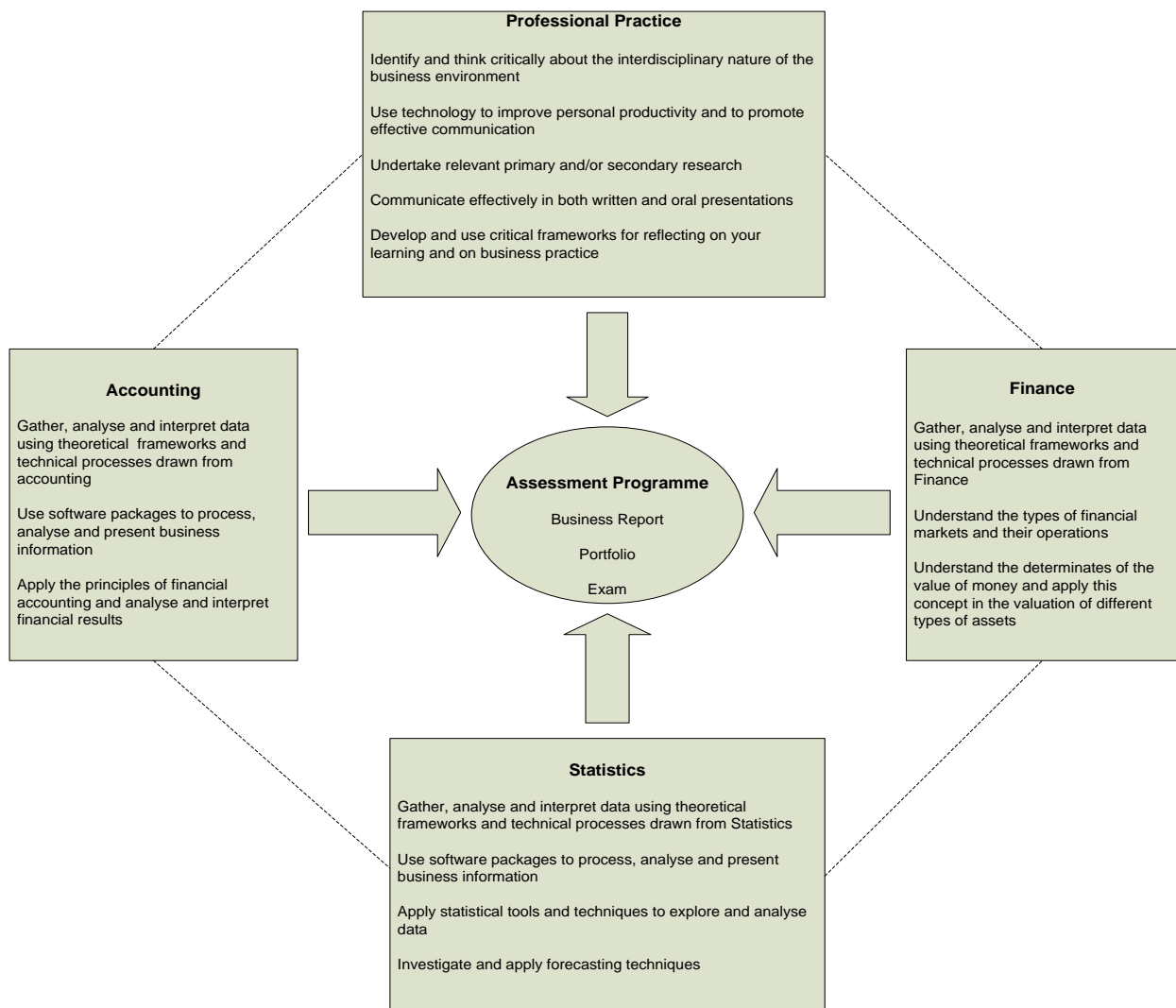
In another study by Lizzio and Wilson (2004) students affirmed their interest in developing skills and capabilities important for success in study and work contexts. Supporting students to develop skills and capabilities essential for success in achievement in assessment programmes may help address the problem of self-doubt as well as provide employability skills. This presentation will describe and discuss the development of skills and capabilities in the FY Bachelor of Business programme at AUT University to enhance student achievement. It will focus on an interdisciplinary Business Report completed by students in a compulsory first year paper, Business Information Management.

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Background

The first year Bachelor of Business Programme at AUT University has four interdisciplinary compulsory papers with each paper covering several academic disciplines. The development of skills and capabilities is integrated into class room sessions in which discipline content is taught. As well students attend a ‘professional practice’ class in which the focus is on the process rather than the content. Students are encouraged to bring material covered in discipline classes and focus on skills and capabilities such as research, communication and team work.

Of the four papers, the Business Information Management paper covers the disciplines of Accounting, Finance and Statistics. It is the core numeracy paper and traditionally one students find challenging. Assessments in this paper cover content from all the disciplines taught. The diagram below shows the learning outcomes for the different disciplines in this paper.



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Development

This presentation will describe and discuss the role of professional practice sessions in supporting students to develop skills and capabilities to achieve well in the assessment programme. It will begin with a description of the Business Information Management paper as it is different to the normal 'traditional' first year papers offered at universities. It is an interdisciplinary paper where students are expected to use knowledge from various disciplines to complete assessments.

The focus of the presentation will be an interdisciplinary Business Report completed by students in this paper. The presentation will describe the requirements of the Business Report as an authentic learning experience for the students related to real world data and events. It will explain how content from the disciplines of Accounting, Finance and Statistics is used by students to write a single report with one common objective. The objective is to investigate an industry and a company from this industry listed on the stock exchange for investment decision making.

The presentation will then explain and discuss the embedding of skills and capabilities in the discipline sessions and the role of professional practice sessions to tie it all together and help establish links between findings from the three disciplines. It will discuss the integrated content covered in the professional practice sessions to develop relevant and appropriate skills that students need to write a professional Business Report and how these sessions enhance student achievement.

Questions for discussion

The questions for discussion part of this presentation will provide an opportunity for participants to share their knowledge and experiences and find out more about an interdisciplinary programme. The questions that this session will pose for discussion are:

1. What are the challenges for student achievement in first year programmes?
2. How do you embed/support the development of skills and capabilities in your teaching in the first year programmes?
3. With reference to our programme what is your view on students using knowledge from various disciplines to complete an assessment such as a Business Report?

References

- Fazey, D. M. A., & Fazey, J. A. (2001). The Potential for Autonomy in Learning: perceptions of competence, motivation and locus of control in first-year undergraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education, 26*(3), 345-360.
- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2004). First-year students perceptions of capability. *Studies in Higher Education, 29*(1), 109-128.
- Rhodes, C., & Nevill, A. (2004). Academic and Social Intergration in Higher Education:a survey of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within a first-year education studies cohort at a new university. *Journal of further and Higher Education, 28*(2), 179-193.

Session Outline

Whole group Discussion (5 minutes): What challenges do students face in first year programmes, with particular emphasis on the skills and capabilities that students need to achieve well in assessments?

Presenters (10 minutes): Outline what is done at AUT University re the development of skills and capabilities to help student achievement.

Whole Group Discussion (15 minutes): Sharing of experiences in terms of:

1. How participants embed/support the development of skills and capabilities in their teaching in first year programmes.
2. What participants think of students using knowledge from various disciplines to complete an assessment and whether they may consider using similar initiatives in their programmes?