

“Not another Ted Bundy essay” Re-designing the assessment of undergraduate forensic psychology to improve the staff and student experience



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Abstract

This poster presents the findings of a small scale research project designed to assess the effectiveness of a major assessment change in the teaching of forensic psychology at Edinburgh Napier University. Assessment was changed from a traditional essay and examination to a portfolio replacing the essay. The portfolio comprises several different types of short assessment and incorporates reflective practices, employability skills and independent learning. The changes were made based on evidence from pedagogical research and the results of the evaluation suggest that students have found the changes to be beneficial. Student feedback on the module was significantly more favourable than in previous years and attendance at lectures was also significantly better. The findings from this research are discussed and suggestions are made for transferring these findings to other areas of psychology teaching.

Background

This poster is titled “not another Ted Bundy essay” after the author had to mark sixteen 2,500-3,000 word essays chronicling the crimes of Ted Bundy. Forensic psychology is incredibly popular at both undergraduate and postgraduate level with many undergraduates initially believing that they will spend a great deal of time studying serial killers. When given the opportunity to write an essay on a case study of dangerous personality disorder, many chose Ted Bundy. This phenomenon, along with issues surrounding attendance, engagement and performance, prompted an overhaul of assessment for undergraduate forensic psychology. An assessment portfolio which encouraged students to explore a much wider variety of forensic psychology topics replaced the essay. Students were required to prepare a presentation on their subject of interest, make a class handout and write a short essay. They also had to provide feedback on each other’s presentations and write two reflective pieces about their learning on the module. The use of portfolios has been shown to be more motivating for students and allows them a greater array of opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge (Arter & Spandel, 1992). Reflection has also been shown to be beneficial for deeper learning (Hedberg, 2009).

Method

Four consecutive student cohorts were used in this study with the assessment changes being implemented with the fourth cohort. A mixed methods approach was employed to assess the impact of the assessment changes on student performance, attendance and engagement. Quantitative data on attendance, marks and engagement were gathered along with qualitative survey data exploring student opinion on the module.

Results

Student attendance significantly improved with the introduction of different assessment methods. The attendance for cohort 4 is the highest so far and is statistically significant. A one-way ANOVA using Tukey post hoc testing demonstrated that the attendance for cohort 4 was significantly better than that of cohorts 2 and 3 $F(3, 38) = 9.77, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = .45$ (a large effect size). The difference between cohorts 1 and 4 was not significant. The percentage of students completing module evaluation forms also increased by over 45% from the previous cohort. The pass rate and mean module mark increased very slightly but this was not significant. Table 1 summarises the data and figure 1 provides a graphical representation.

Table 1

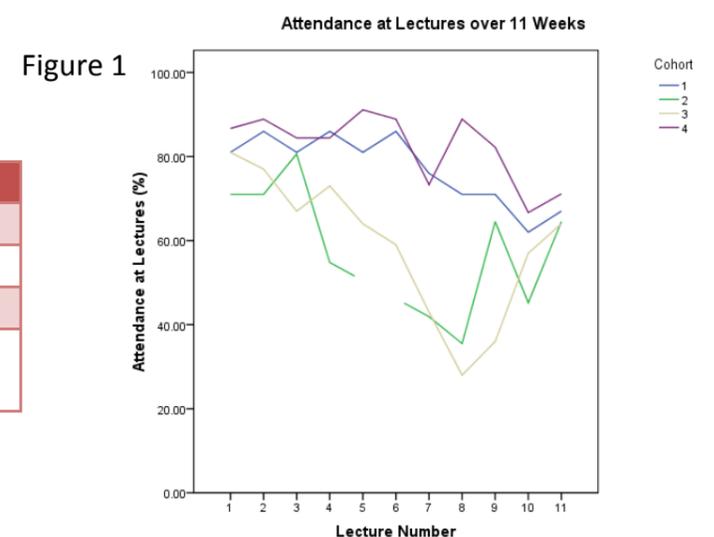
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4
Module Mark (SD)	56.80 (19.21)	58.27 (10.41)	52.60 (16.8)	53.88 (13.22)
Mean Attendance (SD)	77.09 (8.30)	58.78 (15.28)	59.00 (16.94)	82.42 (8.28)
% Pass Rate	90.48	93.33	86.75	87.23
% Completing evaluation	71.43	50.00	21.69	67.39

Discussion

The results demonstrate that the implementation of new assessment practices coincided with a significant increase in student attendance, greater student engagement in terms of providing module feedback, and modest increases in the average module mark and module pass rate. These findings lend support to the work of Arter and Spandel (1992) and Hedberg (2009) who suggest that portfolios and reflective learning aid learning and engagement. It is recommended that portfolios be considered for other areas of psychology teaching especially those concerning applied areas. Reflection on tutorials with an applied focus is particularly useful for students as it is similar to writing a CPD log and thus provides a skill for employment.

References

- Arter, J. A. & Spandel, V. (1992). Using portfolios of student work in instruction and assessment. *Instructional Topics in Educational Measurement*. Retrieved October 14, 2009, from <http://www.ncme.org/pubs/items/18.pdf>
- Hedberg, P. R. (2009). Learning through reflective classroom practice: applications to educate the reflective manager. *Journal of Management Education*, 33, 10-36.



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