

Learning & Teaching Conference 2010

Abstract 3C

Academic performance & student engagement in level 1 physics undergraduates

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At the beginning of academic year 2007-08, staff in the Department of Physics & Astronomy at the University of Glasgow started to implement a number of substantial changes to the administration of the level 1 physics undergraduate class. The main aims were to improve the academic performance and progression statistics. With this in mind, a comprehensive system of learning support was introduced, the main remit being the provision of an improved personal contact and academic monitoring and support strategy for all students at level 1. The effects of low engagement with compulsory continuous assessment components had already been observed to have a significant effect for students sitting in the middle of the grade curve. Analysis of data showed that even some nominally high-achieving students achieved lowered grades due to the effects of low engagement. A comprehensive system of attendance monitoring coupled with a rapid-response to non-attendance was put in place at the start of 2007-08 to tackle lowered engagement amongst all students in the class. Academic support measures in the form of drop-in tutorials, weekly formative assessment exercises and an increased continuous assessment component were also adopted. These methods all played a part in raising the pass rate for the level 1 physics class by ~8% as well as raising the direct level 1 to level 2 progression rate by ~10% over the course of one year. Analysis of data from the 2008-09 level class has shown a consolidation in progression statistics with increases of ~10% in pass rate and ~13% in direct progression to level 2 when compared with similar statistics from 2006-07.