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Stymied before they get off the plane:
An exploration into creating a level playing field for assessing overseas students

Christine Sorensen
Newcastle Business School
Background to study

- Massification
- Internationalisation
- Lack of research into international student performance across modes of assessment
- Cultural fairness
- Cultural equivalence
In house study

• 2\textsuperscript{nd} yr Marketing module
• Two modes of assessment
  – Practical case assignment (50%)
  – 2 hour exam (50%)
    • 70 Multiple-choice questions (70%)
    • Choice of essay question (30%)
• 2008/2009 changed to practical case assignment only
• Question: were students disadvantaged in any way by the change in assessment?
Research questions

• Is there a difference in the performance of overseas student cohorts as compared to UK students on different modes of assessment?
• If so why might this be?
• What, if anything, could we, or should we, do to attempt to achieve cultural fairness in assessment?
2006/2007 results
Findings – 2006/7

• Module Overall
  – Non UK students performed 8% marks below ave. UK students (EU 3% less, other O/S 9%) on module

• Assessment
  – Non UK students performed 7% below UK students (EU 3% less, Other O/S 8%)

• MCQs
  – Non UK students performed 9% below UK students (EU 6% less, Other O/S 10%)

• Exam essay Q
  – Non UK students performed 13% below UK students (EU 7% less, Other O/S 11%)
Why the poorer performance?

• Exam Essay
  – (Smith 2009) suggests
    • Time pressure
    • Lack of English language skills
    • Inability to express themselves in a second language
    • Write slower in a second language.

• MCQs
  – (De Vita 2002)suggests cross-cultural issues
    • Only 1 correct answer
    • Improper to guess
    • Time constraints

• Intrinsic nature of MCQs
  • Subtlety of language
  • Similarity of answers
  • Precision of understanding

• Do International students perform less well than home students?
Questionnaires

• 74 Overseas students on ASK (Academic Skills international) [57 non EU]

• Questions
  – Preferred assessments
  – Assessments where they felt they did better
  – Whether taken MCQs test in UK
  – Harder or not
    • Reasons why it might be more difficult
Results from Questionnaire

• 37 had a preference for MCQs but half of these thought they were more difficult at Northumbria

• Why?
  – Lack of understanding of vocabulary (13)
  – Lack of understanding of sentence structure (8)
  – Lack of time (2)
Creating the MCQ level playing field – is it possible?

• Use for formative assessment only
• ‘Open book’
• E-learning without time constraints and allowing several attempts
• Review vocabulary
• Review sentence structure