

TLC Project Assessment Case Study

Assessment Strategy	Class Debate. Oral presentation of an argument for or against a given statement or viewpoint in a structured class forum
Subject and module	Advance Topics in Health & Exercise Science
Useful for students who are:	Studying a subject/topic where knowledge and/or policy is/are contested.
Keywords	Debate, Oral, Express Ideas, Contested
Assessment activity	In class debate in the standard British Debating Society format with 2 pairs of speakers for and 2 against the motion, speaking alternately for and against, modified to a maximum of 3 minutes per speaker. Depending on the class size, 2 or 3 debates have been run in one session. For a given debate, the students in the “audience” are required to submit a written point by the end of the 15 minute preparation time for the speakers. A selection of these points are read out (anonymous summaries) before the final vote on the motion is taken.
How does this assessment improve student learning?	Students are required to engage with the module subject material and critically evaluate the evidence for and against relevant research findings and public policy and rehearse their arguments with a view to expressing them orally in a class debate.
Underpinning assessment theory links	Conversational Framework
What went well	The range of the issues included in the arguments presented by the students.
What could be improved	Spontaneous contribution from the floor/audience.
What support for staff is needed to implement this method of assessment?	Familiarity with the format of a structured debate and knowledge of the background issues relating to the debate motion in order to be able to assess the students’ contributions to the debates. Also staff should be willing and able to contribute if this is required to help maintain continuity, although this is rarely necessary.
What support for students is needed to implement this method of assessment?	The first two years that this assessment was run, a practice debate of the form of students working in pairs to speak for 1 minute for or against a specific statement (in this case health promotion messages) was undertaken and worked well. This year (the third time of undertaking), additional preparation for the practice debate was facilitated by means of lightly moderate

	online discussion forums on each discussion. This appeared to improve both the quality and the range and scope of arguments put forward by the students in the debates.
What are the time implications?	Three debates can be undertaken in approximately 1 ½ hours (this includes preparation time between debates). This gives scope for the participation and assessment of 24 students.
Other resource implications?	It helps that the room is sufficiently large for the students to break into small groups to prepare for the debate. Also, it is recommended that the 8 students speaking in the debate sit across table(s) at the front of the class. This is likely to necessitate some furniture rearrangement.
What are the risks?	That some students may be unable to contribute to the class debate.
How can these be minimised?	Practice prior to the assessed debate is essential. In addition, careful selection of motions on topical and controversial issues will mean that it is unlikely that the students will be unable to express an opinion. Furthermore, the debate is also portrayed to the students as a means to helping them to develop their argumentative skills prior to written examinations.
Implications for dyslexic students?	Contribution to the debate is spoken and therefore should not present any barriers. The written contributions from the “audience” are also assessed, but it is the point/argument being made that is being assessed and it is unlikely that this will present any problems. Furthermore, the written submissions are reviewed assessed during the 15 minute preparation period and therefore if necessary, clarification could be sought from any student.
Institution where this was trialled	Heriot-Watt University
Lecturer	Alasdair G Thin a.g.thin@hw.ac.uk
CATS	10
Level	HEQF 6 (SCQF 10)
Compulsory/optional	Compulsory
Relationship to other modules	Part of a synoptic triple of modules along with <i>Advanced sport and exercise psychology</i> and <i>Applied sport and exercise psychology</i>
Delivery pattern	Series of 5 two hour seminar sessions with a mid-session break plus the class debate
Student profile Year 2006-7	BSc Honours Sport & Exercise Science n=16, male = 10, female = 6
Learning outcomes	Critically evaluate current public policy affecting health

assessed	and exercise. Critically evaluate current health promotion practice. Argue the case for or against the claim(s) made by a particular health message.
References	Laurillard, D. (1993). Rethinking University Teaching: A Framework for the Effective use of Educational Technology. Routledge, London. Online resources on running a debate http://www.britishdebate.com/ http://www.walesdebate.org.uk/

Assignment Brief and assessment criteria

Class Debate

The final session of the module is a class debate on a number of separate motions relating to the material discussed in the workshops and contained in the reading lists. Students will work in teams of two and each motion will be debated with two teams supporting and two teams opposing the motion. Each student will have up to a maximum of 3 minutes to speak on a key issue relating to the motion.

It is essential that each team is properly prepared by compiling a list of around 10 key issues/points after each workshop relating to both the material presented in the workshop and that drawn from your own reading. This is because the debating teams allocated to speak for or against a specific motion and the motions themselves will only be on assigned on the day of the debates. Each team will be given 15 minutes to prepare their speeches (oral only, no visuals) and agree on who is going to make which point either for or against the motion.

Note: The reason for giving only a short period of time to prepare the speeches is so that you can practice developing arguments under pressure, as this is what you will have to do in your final exams that take place a couple of weeks after the debates. Furthermore, it is the same for everybody and it is recognised that in the circumstances, nobody's speech is going to be perfect.

At the same time that the speakers are preparing, each pair of students in the audience will have to submit on a card a relevant point either for or against the motion.

Each student will be marked on their own contribution to the debate. At the end of each debate, a vote on the motion will be taken.

Practice Debate – “Health Messages”

In order to get some practice prior to the debate, a number of “Health Messages” will be discussed online for 2 weeks prior to being allocated to pairs of students for the practice debate. Each pair will have 2 minutes to speak on a health message that has been

allocated in advance. One person will speak for 1 minute in support of the message and the other for 1 minute against the message.

Assessment criteria

Each student must present **one** point either in support of or against a specified motion in the class debate.

Contribute **one** written point to each of the debates (except the one on which the student is speaking).

For each **valid** point made, marks will be allocated as follows:

1 mark if the Point has only minor relevance to the subject.

2 marks if the Point is relevant to the subject.

3 marks if the Point has major relevance to the subject.

An additional **1** mark is available if the reason(s) for the Point being relevant to the subject is clearly stated.