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ASSESSMENT POLICY

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1.0 Interpretation of Operational Terms of the Policy

- i) **Approval of Assessment:** a process involving both internal and external scrutiny to assure assessment items and assessment criteria are appropriate in terms of academic level, and learning outcomes are valid, reliable and authentic and that there is broad equivalence for students across modules/units.
- ii) **Assessment:** a piece of assessed work, e.g., an essay, project, assignment or examination. Assessment items should be valid, reliable and authentic.
- iii) **Assessment Brief:** means guidance provided for students on how to complete a specific item of assessment. It includes information about the nature of the task, the format for presentation, and assessment criteria, and, if used, the marking scheme.
- iv) **Assessment Criteria:** specify the qualities of student work required to successfully complete the assessment item and indicate how particular grades may be achieved.
- v) **Assessment Task:** is an illustrative task or performance opportunity that closely targets defined learning outcomes, allowing students to demonstrate their learning and capabilities.
- vi) **Authenticity:** this relates to the design of assessments that require students to demonstrate skills and capabilities that represent problems and situations likely to be encountered in the 'real' world.
- vii) **Examination:** is a time-limited assessment task conducted under invigilation. For example, tests, practical assessments, in-unit quizzes, and final examinations.
- viii) **External Moderation:** is a process of objective engagement by experienced academic peers (External Examiners), independent of the university, to ensure that the level of achievement of students reflects the required academic standards and is comparable to similar programmes nationally.
- ix) **Final Examination:** is an examination held within a specified examination period that is defined by the university and conducted in compliance with the Examination Policy. This excludes what is referred to as a 'take home examination'.
- x) **Formative Assessment:** is any task or activity which creates feedback (or feed forward) for students about their learning. It has a developmental purpose and does not carry a grade which is subsequently used for summative purposes.
- xi) **Grade Descriptors:** these describe in broad terms the typical performance required to achieve a particular band of marks or degree class; the university publishes generic grade descriptors for undergraduate and postgraduate work to be used by course/subject teams as a reference point or benchmark in establishing assessment criteria.
- xii) **Internal Moderation:** is a process of professional engagement by university staff to demonstrate that the grades awarded are accurate, appropriate and consistent to ensure parity of standards.
- xiii) **Invigilation:** is a direct in person supervision on behalf of the university for the entire duration of an assessment task to prevent cheating and to prevent students using aids other than those permitted for that assessment task.
- xiv) **Learning Outcomes:** are clear statements to indicate what students are expected to know or be able to do at the completion of a unit (unit level) or course (course level or graduate learning outcomes).
- xv) **Marking Scheme:** is a detailed framework for assigning marks, where a specific number of marks is given to individual components of the assessment.

- xvi) Moderation: is a quality review and assurance process which supports assessment setting and marking activities. It involves using other academics and qualified staff to confirm that the assessment tasks and marking are valid and reliable. Essentially, it is a checking process.
- xvii) Moderation of Marking: is a process to assure that assessment criteria, and thus academic standards, have been applied consistently and that assessment outcomes are fair and reliable.
- xviii) Performance Standards: is a clearly articulated description of the level of attainment that acts as a stable reference point or recognized measure for the purposes of reaching a decision on the quality of a student's work.
- xix) Reliability: relates to the need to ensure that the assessment is accurate and repeatable.
- xx) Summative Assessment: is any assessment that contributes to the final grade or mark of a module or course to provide a measure of a student's achievement in relation to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- xxi) Validity: relates to the need to ensure that the assessment task measures a student's attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

1.1 Background of MRU

Muteesa I Royal University (MRU) was offered an operational license by the NCHE in 2005 and started its operations in 2007. The founding Chancellor of the University, who is also its Visitor, is His Majesty the Kabaka, Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II. The genesis of modern education in Uganda is historically associated with the Kingdom of Buganda owing to the role that Sekabaka Muteesa I played in inviting the missionaries who introduced education in Uganda. Owing to this history, it is only befitting that the university was named after this visionary leader. Hence, the university was named after the 31st King of Buganda who was a monarch of great vision, Kabaka Muteesa I (1856-1884). MRU is a skills training, academic and research-oriented institution of higher learning that was established as a private institution. The initiative was promoted by the Executive Committee (EC) of the Buganda Kingdom, headed by the *Katikkiro* (i.e. Prime Minister).

1.2 Strategic Goals of MRU

The Strategic Goals of MRU are as follows:

- i) To produce graduates with all-round competencies and skills to be able to initiate self-employment activities or compete for jobs in the global market;
- ii) To promote research and encourage students and staff to publish;
- iii) To build and expand collaboration and engagement with the community, the alumni, and industry and business, and to equip students with practical skills while empowering the community, industry & business to develop local solutions;
- iv) To strengthen MRU's human resource capacity;
- v) To achieve a sustainable financial resource base;
- vi) To improve the administrative and organizational arrangements of MRU with a view to achieving efficiency and effectiveness in all sections of MRU; and
- vii) To construct or acquire, rehabilitate and maintain buildings, equipment, implements, ICT facilities and land particularly for the growth and development of its niche.

1.3 Vision of MRU

The Vision of MRU is to be “a leading university responding to contemporary challenges through teaching and learning, research and technical guidance”.

1.4 Mission of MRU

The Mission of MRU is “to provide training, research and technical guidance responsive to national socio-economic needs”.

1.5 Core Values of MRU

The core values of MRU are as follows:

- i) Professionalism; Professionalism is a trait that's highly valued in the human resource of any organization. It has many attributes, including: (a) Specialized knowledge, (b) Competency, (c) Honesty and integrity, (d) Respect, (e) Accountability, (f) Self-regulation, and (g) Image.
- ii) Respect for Diversity;
- iii) Cultural Sensitivity;
- iv) Tenacity; and
- v) Team spirit.

2.0 Introduction of the Policy

Assessment is the process of forming a judgment about the quality and extent of student achievement or performance, and therefore by inference a judgment about the learning itself. Assessment inevitably shapes the learning that takes place; that is, what students learn and how they learn it should reflect closely the purposes and aims of the course of study. The aims of assessment include:

- i) Improving the quality of the curriculum (courses and programs);
- ii) Evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching process and facilitating continuing improvement;
- iii) Improving and promoting subsequent learning through feedback that is clear, informative, timely and relevant;
- iv) Formally certifying achievements for external audiences; and
- v) Accountability to the University, accrediting bodies, employers and the wider community.

Assessment methods may take a variety of forms: the key criterion for choice among methods should be appropriateness to the learning outcomes. Assessment should be criteria based rather than norm referenced, and may include individual or collaborative achievement or both. The requirements for the success of learners should be made clear, and the overall strategy should be to develop in students the ability to evaluate the quality of their own work in order to equip them to function as professionals with a

commitment to life-long learning.

Assessment practices within the university are based on the general principles of criteria based assessment. These are that the desired learning outcomes for a course of study are clearly specified; assessment tasks are designed to indicate progress towards the desired learning outcomes; and the assessment grade is a measure of the extent to which the learning outcomes have been achieved. The standard of performance that is required for the award of a particular grade is a judgment that is based on the professional expertise of the various staff who contribute to the assessment process and is informed by experience with accepted standards, including, where appropriate, standards in other institutions. There is no pre-determined distribution of grades as the outcome of assessing a group of students.

Assessment of students' learning is facilitated by systems using technology for the purpose of constructing, delivering, storing, comparing and reporting student assessment tasks, responses, grades and feedback. Such systems are used to diversify the types of assessment tasks, broaden the range of skills assessed, assure comparability of assessment standards and consistency in achievement of outcomes and provide students with more timely and informative feedback on their progress. Technology may also facilitate the timely and efficient administration of student applications and decisions relating to assessment.

3.0 Objectives of the Policy

The assessment policy provides a comprehensive statement of the principles and processes that govern the design and management of student assessment within the university. It is therefore, an essential reference point and course teams, particularly in relation to the design of assessment strategies at course and module level, and the quality assurance of assessment from the approval of items of assessment through to the standardization and moderation of a student's work. The policy indicates those matters where responsibility is devolved to Faculties or course teams – usually within a framework of minimum requirements, and those matters where university determined processes apply.

4.0 Application of the Policy

This policy shall be applicable to all persons charged with the principles and processes that govern the design and management of student assessment at MRU.

5.0 Principles of Assessment

MRU believes that assessment is an integral part of effective learning processes, and has established the following principles for the design and management of assessment practice:

- i) Each module or unit or course element shall have an assessment strategy which is aligned with the intended learning outcomes and learning activities;

- ii) All stated learning outcomes for a module/unit/course element shall be summatively assessed via assessment activities that are reliable, valid and authentic;
- iii) Assessments shall enable students to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of the module/unit/course elements and the overall aims and learning outcomes of their course or programme of studies and achieved the standard required for the award;
- iv) Each course shall include a variety of assessment types and an appropriate balance of assessment for summative and formative purposes;
- v) Information about assessment, including the details of assignments and due dates for submission, schedules for examinations, assessment or grading criteria, and assessment regulations and arrangements for publication of results where these are course specific, shall be published in the University Student Handbook, course handbooks, module outlines or equivalent as appropriate, at the start of the academic year or semester (or other defined teaching period) in which the course commences;
- vi) All courses shall ensure students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of, and the necessary skills to, demonstrate good academic practice;
- vii) The scheduling and amount of assessment shall be manageable for students;
- viii) Constructive and timely relevant feedback shall be an integral part of the assessment process;
- ix) Assessment processes and regulations shall be transparent, consistent and equitable across courses;
- x) Assessment processes and outcomes shall be monitored and evaluated through the annual monitoring process; and
- xi) A reliable assessment shall produce the same results if it is repeated, and shall produce similar results with a similar cohort of students, to ensure that it is consistent in its methods and criteria. A valid assessment is one that measures what it is supposed to measure. Authentic assessments are those which are relevant to the real world (the term is sometimes used to indicate relevance to student employability).

6.0 The Assessment Plan for a Course

Student learning is gradual and cumulative, with qualitative changes taking place throughout the process. For this reason, the assessment plan for a course should enable the teaching staff to engage in both formative and summative assessment. Academic staff responsible for a course should exercise their professional judgment in using a variety of assessment methods that are relevant, valid, fair and appropriate to the aims and objectives of the course.

6.1 Assessment Methods, Types and Tasks.

There are four methods of assessment commonly used at MRU and five broad assessment types:

- a) Examinations: selected and/or constructed response, practical and oral examinations;

- b) Assignments: written, planning, problem-solving, reports, research-based, practice-based;
- c) Assessment based on observation or record of practice;
- d) Assessment based on performance, presentation, creation or discussion; and
- e) Assessment based on research (e.g. theses).

Within each broad assessment type a number of detailed assessment types are used in course assessment plans. A range of assessment types are to be used in a course's assessment plan to assess the range of course and program learning outcomes. A number of assessment types may be integrated into a single assessment task or each assessment task may be representative of a single assessment type.

Assessment tasks are to be equivalent when the course is offered on more than one campus or in more than one learning mode (such as in person, print materials, in field and online). Equivalence does not require the tasks to be identical, they may be adapted to suit the needs of campuses or modes of study, but they are required to be similar in complexity and nature, and assess the intended learning outcomes of the course.

The assessment plan for a course in the Course Outline provides a summary of both formative and summative assessment tasks in the course, including the assessment type, number, weighting, the due date, the assessment and marking criteria for each item of assessment. No course grade is to be determined solely by using a single summative item or a single form of assessment. A dissertation, or other large forms of assessment (e.g., designs and inquiry-based projects), are considered to be equivalent to multiple forms of assessment. However, large items of summative assessment should incorporate interim formative assessment opportunities. Assessment should normally be spread across the teaching period, to provide time for students to respond to feedback from early assessment items.

The assessment plan also specifies how individual assessment tasks are to be conducted, for example, in person in a designated examination centre or facilitated through information and communication technologies (ICTs). Assessment plays a central role in student learning whatever the type or mode and the relationship between the purpose of the assessment tasks and the intended learning outcomes of the course is to be clearly outlined in the assessment plan.

Examinations for summative purposes are to be invigilated in accordance with the invigilation of Examinations Policy. Tests or quizzes may be administered regularly throughout the course for formative purposes to provide students with practice and feedback on their learning or used summatively to contribute a small percentage towards the final grade. These may not require supervision by teaching staff or an invigilator.

6.2 Approval of the Assessment Plan

The assessment plan for a course is documented in the submission for approval of the Course Outline. In approving the course for offer, the relevant Internal Examiner shall

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have regard to the relationship between the assessment methods, assessment tasks and the learning outcomes expected for the course.

6.3 Changes to the Assessment Plan

Proposals to alter the assessment plan of a course should be made to the Faculty Dean prior to the next scheduled offering of the course by the Internal Examiner responsible for teaching the course by lodging a revised Course Outline. The Faculty Dean shall determine whether the proposed revised assessment plan is consistent with the originally approved assessment plan in its relationship to learning outcomes and its overall demands on the students.

6.4 Advice to Students

The Internal Examiner is required to provide all students with the approved Course Outline which states the assessment plan for the course, including the due dates of assessment tasks and relevant characteristics such as word lengths for essays or duration for examinations. The Course Outline must state the criteria against which individual assessment tasks are judged and their relative weighting. The Course Outline must also indicate the way in which the assessment of individual assessment tasks is combined to give an overall grade. The Course Outline is normally provided to students on first days of the class in the semester in which case the Internal Examiner should ensure that all students are advised of the location of the Course Outline at the commencement of the course.

6.5 Responsibility of Students to Ascertain the Assessment Plan

Where a student enrolls in a course after the commencement of teaching or for whatever reason is not present when students are given information concerning the assessment plan of the course, it is the student's responsibility to ascertain the information from the Course Examiner.

6.6 Change of Assessment Plan During a Semester

In exceptional cases, the Faculty Dean, on the advice of the Head of Department, may approve a variation of detail in the assessment plan of a course, providing any such variation maintains the relationship between the assessment methods and the learning outcomes expected for the course. Notification of the change to the assessment plan must be provided to students in written and/or electronic form. In giving approval for the change, the Faculty Dean must be satisfied that students are not disadvantaged by the change or the timing of the change.

7.0 Assessment Scheduling and Loading

Each module/unit of a course shall specify the summative assessment items, together with any specific requirements for passing the modules (e.g., requirement to obtain a pass grade in

each assessment item and/or attendance requirements) in the module specification. The assessment details for each module shall be subject to validation.

8.0 Language of Assessment

All assessments contributing to a MRU award shall be conducted in English, except in the case of awards or modules in other languages as approved by Senate.

9.0 Formative Assessment

- i) All courses should have an assessment strategy that includes provision for formative assessments, and all modules/units/course elements should include opportunities for formative assessment;
- ii) Formative assessments do not carry a grade contributing to the final mark or grade for the module; their primary purpose is to improve the learning of students. Formative assessment can include peer-assessment and self-assessment as well as tutor-assessment, and may include evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning process carried out while the module is in progress. It is recognised that summative assessments can also have a formative function; and
- iii) Work presented for a module/unit/course, whether for summative or formative purposes should conform to the norms of academic scholarship and referencing unless otherwise specified.

10.0 Feedback to Students and Return of Student Assessments

- i) Effective and timely feedback (i.e., commentary on performance identifying strengths and ways in which improvements could be made with an emphasis on feed forward) should be given to students for all formative and summative assessments including examinations;
- ii) Academic staff members are particularly encouraged to use generic forms of feedback in class or via other media, where appropriate, to ensure students receive speedy feedback whilst assessments are still fresh in their mind; and
- iii) Feedback to students on their assessments should:
 - a) promote learning, and enable students to improve their performance in subsequent assessments, by indicating areas for improvement and/or setting specific targets or goals for improvement;
 - b) be clearly linked to learning outcomes and assessment criteria;
 - c) provide the students with an understanding of the way in which their grade was derived and their relative success in meeting the learning outcomes; and
 - d) be based on a consistent course team approach to providing assessment feedback to students be provided electronically.

11.0 Anonymous Marking

- i) Wherever possible and practical the anonymity of students in the marking process should be maintained. Anonymous marking is a system whereby the student's identity is not made

known to the Internal/External Examiner at the time of marking. Its purpose is to protect students and markers against the possibility of bias, whether conscious or unconscious. A student's assessed work should be identified only by a reference number, which shall normally be the student number found on their identity card;

- ii) Anonymity must be retained until the grade for the assessment (which remains provisional until the examination board has confirmed it) has been formally recorded on the student record system; and
- iii) It is recognized that certain forms of assessment cannot be marked anonymously as it is impossible for the students not to identify themselves.

12 - Standardization and Moderation of Marking

- i) Moderation is employed to ensure that academic standards are appropriate and consistent across Internal Examiners and reflect agreed assessment policies and assessment criteria, and that the assessment outcomes for students are fair and reliable;
- ii) It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to ensure internal and external moderation of all marking (student examination papers and coursework assignments), before grades are presented for confirmation to the Board of Examiners;
- iii) The university takes the view that a variety of practices in relation to standardization and moderation of marking exists, reflecting discipline differences and conventions, differences in the assessment tasks and/or assessed materials. There is, therefore, a range of different acceptable models of practice for ensuring the accuracy and consistency of marking:
 - a) Marking Standardization Exercises: a group of assessors (e.g., a module marking team, or a course team) all independently mark a sample of pieces of student work and assign grades using agreed criteria, compare and discuss the outcomes. The purpose of this exercise is to establish that all assessors are applying the agreed criteria consistently. Following the exercise, assessors mark the students' work in the normal way. Marking standardization exercises, as a model of moderation, can be used in addition to various models of double or second marking – it is particularly useful as a means of assisting new staff become familiar with marking standards and conventions;
 - b) Blind Double Marking: two separate assessors each independently assess a piece of student work, assigning a mark and providing comments which justify the marks in relation to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Both examiners record their marks and comments separately and then compare marks and resolve differences to produce an agreed mark. Agreed marks and comments may then be entered on the work. Normally carried out as a universal exercise, i.e., every piece of student work is considered by two assessors;
 - c) Non-blind Double Marking: an assessor marks a piece of student work, assigning a mark and providing comments to justify the mark, and then a second assessor also assigns a mark and provides comments. It is normally carried out as a universal exercise;
 - d) Second Marking: an assessor marks a piece of a student's work, assigning a mark and providing comments to justify the mark as above. A second assessor then reviews the mark and comments on it in order to confirm (or not) the mark awarded by the first marker. It is normally carried out on a sample basis in order to corroborate the accuracy of the marking standards applied by the first marker, but can be applied as a universal exercise;

- iv) University minimum requirements for external moderation of marking: in order to carry out their responsibility for external moderation, in addition to the sample of student work, External Examiners must be provided with:
- a) Module outline,
 - b) Examination papers and/or assessment briefs;
 - c) Assessment and grade criteria, together with the; and
 - d) Provisional statistical profile of marks for the modules/units for which they are responsible.
- v) External Examiners are not expected to arbitrate in the event of disagreement between first and second markers, and are not expected to change marks for individual items of student work.
- vi) A minimum sample of 15% of the work for each item of assessment for individual modules must be made available to the External Examiner(s). This must include students' work across all grade bands, and student work in the highest and fail categories. In the case of small cohorts (i.e., 6 or fewer) all work should be provided to the External Examiner. Normally the sample size shall be between 9 and 25 pieces of work.
- vii) The External Examiner is expected to use the sample to ensure that marking standards are appropriate and that internal moderation has been effective. The rationale for providing a larger sample for external moderation is to enable the External Examiner to ascertain the effectiveness of the internal moderation procedures – there is little point in asking the External Examiner to moderate only student work that has been subject to internal moderation – rather, the External Examiner shall compare marking practices and grading across a sample of internally moderated and un-moderated student work, and from this shall be able to reach judgments regarding the effectiveness of internal moderation processes.
- viii) Where a course or module is delivered at more than one site, the External Examiner should be provided with the provisional statistical profile of marks for each site of delivery, so that they are able to comment on the standards for each delivery site. If the provisional profile of marks indicates significant discrepancies, then the External Examiner and/or the Board of Examiners may require a further process of second marking to be carried out.

13 Publication of Results

- i) The Faculty Registrar shall record the Board of Examiner's decisions on the progression of students and the awards for which they are recommended and shall be responsible for the publication of official results to students following the meeting of Boards of Examiners. Publication of results shall be made electronically via the secure student portal and shall include access to individual module results, the progression decision and the award agreed by Boards of Examiners;
- ii) It is the student's responsibility to ascertain his or her results; and
- iii) As exam results are personal data, results should not be disclosed over the telephone, unless a suitable security system is in place to ensure that the caller is in fact the student concerned.

14 Ownership and Archiving of Students' Assessed Work

- i) Students hold the intellectual property inherent in all work produced for assessments, but the material produced by students for assessment (essays, projects, examination scripts, dissertations, artworks, computer disks, etc.) is the property of the MRU, and may be retained pending confirmation of marks awarded by Examination Boards, possible appeals and quality audits. With the exception of examination scripts, the university shall endeavor to return to students their assessed work whenever a student explicitly requests this. Arrangements for returning assessed work to students are the responsibility of individual academic staff; and
- ii) Assessed coursework that has not been collected by the student shall be retained by the university for six months after the relevant Examination Board, after which time it may be disposed of. Arrangement for the disposal of such work is the responsibility of the university.

15 Responsibilities of Examiners and Heads of Department

- i) Internal Examiners are responsible for conveying to students clear advice about the aims and objectives of the course, the assessment requirements, the relationship between the assessment methods and the expected learning outcomes, the criteria against which individual assessment tasks are judged and their relative weight;
- ii) Internal Examiners are required to provide feedback to students on their performance in assessment tasks conducted during the semester. Internal Examiners should give guidance to students and comment on work presented for assessment during the semester by written comments or other suitable means. Examiners should be prepared to discuss with students their performance after an examination;
- iii) Regardless of whether the invigilator for an examination is a university staff member, the Internal Examiner or nominee must be present in the examination room 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the examination and for the first 15 minutes of the examination, except where the examination is conducted at a remote location;
- iv) It is desirable that the Head of Department should be able to be contacted by any means throughout the duration of the examination;
- v) In a team teaching situation where different examiners contribute to the assessment in a course, the Head of Department is responsible for ensuring that appropriate moderation processes are in place;
- vi) The Head of Department confirms there is no error in student marks and recommends grades to the Faculty Board before the Senate; and
- vii) The Internal Examiner will be responsible for ensuring that a final grade is recommended for all students enrolled in the course.

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