UNSW Business School

Guide to integrating Flexibility Week as part of active student learning

1. Summary: autonomous active reflection and consolidation

Flexibility Week provides an opportunity for students to actively reflect and consolidate learning and construct a foundation for new learning to come. Students should take this opportunity to exercise greater autonomy over their studies by spending the week directing their energies to their personal learning priorities.

The envisaged outcome of Flexibility Week is students who have a clear sense of the progress of their learning and who are well placed and eager to integrate new material into their knowledge structures. For some students, Flexibility Week can provide an opportunity to address any knowledge gaps. For others, the focus might be on creatively extending their current knowledge in line with their personal interests and perhaps an eye to future study.

2. Content and connection

Flexibility Week can helpfully focus both on discussing class content and on building connections within the learning community. For instance, forums and Q&A sessions can have 'ask me anything' components and recorded sessions can introduce students to interesting things about the discipline they may not find out otherwise. Particularly in highly quantitative courses, such activities can be a way of humanising learning material and making connections between the taught content and the 'real world'. These sorts of opportunities are especially valuable for facilitating teacher presence, especially emotional presence.

3. Active student engagement

While assessment cannot be used as an incentive for engagement in Flexibility Week, other elements valued by students can be incorporated to foster engagement, such as:

- Teacher presence and care – without the need to cover new content, Flexibility Week provides an opportunity to focus on students' flourishing in a broad sense, including in their life outside study.
- Guidance from teachers – especially about study methods, academic skills, revision plans and structured reflection on learning.
- Feedback – ideally this will be from both teachers and peers and can be made directly relevant to preparing for upcoming assessment or providing structured revision plans.
- Autonomy and creativity – invite students to collaborate on the direction activities should take during Flexibility Week.

4. Supporting activities

The following activities can help facilitate students' autonomous active reflection on, and consolidation of, learning while minimising teacher workload.

Diagnostic and consolidation exercises

- Quizzes and self-guided online lessons on material already covered. These should be designed to provide feedback and links to previous learning activities or resources to facilitate follow-up revision. Using online tools to automate these quizzes and lessons can eliminate marking.
- Student-directed summaries, perhaps in wiki or blog form (these could be started earlier and optionally consolidated in Flexibility Week). Or more interestingly, in a form chosen by the students (video, audio recording, curated images etc).

Creative extension activities

- Encourage students to apply their knowledge to new contexts drawn from their own experience. Either peer or teacher feedback can be provided.
- Opportunities for students to map out how their current course connects to their major sequence, perhaps collaboratively with other students sharing their major.

Question and answer sessions

- Forums (with no participation requirement) where the teacher answers questions
- Live (recorded) Q&A sessions.

5. Policy framework

- Flexibility Week is compulsory for all undergraduate courses.
- No new content is to be introduced in Flexibility Week.
- Students cannot be required to attend classes during Flexibility Week.
- No assessment tasks can be scheduled to be due in Flexibility Week unless students have adequate opportunity to complete them before Flexibility Week.
- Where postgraduate and undergraduate courses are taught together Flexibility Week must be implemented.