The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy

Context

At the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), we are committed to offering our students a high quality experience. We are immensely proud of our multicultural learning community, and recognise that our Institution offers a social, academic and cultural experience. We celebrate the diversity of our students and staff, and recognise and respect the knowledge, skills and experiences we all contribute.   We value our students' enthusiasm, commitment and ambitions, and seek to offer rich learning opportunities to support the achievement of their personal, social, cultural, creative, intellectual and economic goals.

We believe that effective learning must be underpinned by the provision of excellent learning resources. We seek therefore to provide an appropriate learning environment in terms of physical teaching spaces to include those which provide for individual and small group learning. We regard the provision of hard copy and digital resources of both a contemporary and seminal nature to be a key element of our strategy.

In our learning, teaching and assessment strategy we wish to consolidate a culture for success. We strive to inspire and celebrate the attainment of excellence in our learning and teaching practice, and the extent to which these experiences equip our students to fulfil their aspirations as both learners and citizens. Thus our programmes seek to develop students' analytical and critical skills as well as those valued by the employment arenas to which our students progress. Our curricula are challenging and rigorous whilst at the same time providing relevant breadth, depth and pace of learning. We strive to ensure that our approach to learning, teaching and assessment enables students to reach the relevant academic standard and to achieve the intended learning outcomes at the highest level of their personal

ability. Encouraging students to develop independent learning skills is a key element of our approach. We seek to innovate practice, to challenge orthodoxy and to think differently about our students, so that we may best acknowledge their ambitions and empower their achievements.

We view assessment as an integral part of learning and regard formative assessment as a key part of assessing the success of learning. We ensure that students reflect on their own performance through the provision of timely, supportive and constructive feedback on formative (and summative) assessment. We strive to ensure that students are aware at the outset what is expected of them in the assessment process and ensure that these expectations are clearly set out for them.

Our strategy is intended to hold relevance and meaning for all members of our community - students and staff within departments - who are engaged in the many activities encompassed within teaching and supporting learning, assessment, scholarship and research. We seek to support the development and enhance the experience for all our students. The critical importance of strengthening relationships with all stakeholders is acknowledged, and of sustaining close links with our collaborative partners.

The importance of peer support and collaboration, and of building effective partnerships between staff and students, is recognised. In seeking to strengthen a sense of ownership, pride and belonging within our learning community, the strategy emphasises empowerment, engagement, empathy and mutual respect. We recognise the benefits of using the virtual learning environment as a means of supporting and providing information to students.

We respect individual learning preferences and styles, recognise the requirements of disability legislation, and aspire to develop learning, teaching and assessment practices that are truly inclusive, designed to enhance learner choice and achievement. We recognise the opportunities, as well as the challenges, that the use of emerging technology affords. The importance of understanding the ways in which today's learners differ is becoming more crucial and our learning and teaching practices must evolve to address today's new learners and establish the research required to understand the new pedagogies.

We believe that excellent scholarship, research and knowledge exchange underpins excellent teaching, learning and assessment, and participation in pedagogic and subject-specific activities are key aspects of professional practice. Projects which empower the student voice, locate staff and students as co-researchers, explore the needs and outcomes of our diverse student body, innovate in practice and explore its pedagogical basis are particularly valuable in this regard. Similarly, the importance of staff engagement in continuing professional development and critical reflection on practice is vitally important in attaining, and upholding, standards of excellence. This includes participation in activities internally and externally, staff development and review, our teaching observation scheme and engagement with relevant polices and strategies regarding all aspects of our practice.

A rigorous admissions policy is essential in ensuring all candidates selected for our programmes are equipped with the right level of skills necessary to be successful. This process is crucial to the IIS fulfilling its objectives and long-term strategic plans.

Our Strategy: Themes, Aims and Objectives

Our strategy, has five key aims, these are outlined below:

- Provide a quality learning environment

- Promote excellence and share best practices in teaching

- Create and celebrate a culture of success for students and staff

- Ensure students have the skills necessary for success in learning, personal development, and the enhancement of employability

- Ensure that assessment is an integral element of learning

These are now explored in more detail, each theme is presented with a key aim (or aims), and specific, measurable objectives.

Aim 1: Provide a quality learning environment

AIM

To provide a quality learning experience that will motivate our students to fully engage in their academic and personal development, promote their academic and professional success, and empower them as independent learners and citizens.

Objectives

1. Ensure that our curriculum provides intellectual challenge to our students, develops their analytical, critical and creative powers and facilitates the acquisition of independent learning skills as well as those valued in employment settings.

2. Provide a range of appropriate and timely learning support options (ensuring they are equipped to engage with 21st century technologies), recognising the imperative of employing a variety of delivery modes to maximise access and achievement.

3. Present appropriate, timely and integrated information and guidance to enable our students to make informed decisions at key transition points: pre-entry, entry, progression within programme, assessment and professional practice at the end of programme.

4. Provide a physical environment conductive to learning which is augmented with a wide range of relevant library and associate learning resources

5. Create a trained peer support network to enhance both academic and community engagement.

6. Seek and act upon student feedback through the use of timely and appropriate mechanisms in all programmes, with transparent and accountable responses.

Aim: 2 Promote excellence and share best practices in teaching

Objectives

1. Ensure that examples of innovative, effective and proactive practice in teaching, supporting, learning and assessment are collated and shared.

2. Promote continuous professional development for all colleagues, encouraging engagement with doctoral study, higher degrees, and / or advanced professional qualifications where appropriate, and support skill development in the use of new technologies to ensure staff are able to communicate effectively with students using a variety of methods

3. Embed the practice of peer enhancement (peer review) as an effective means of facilitating learning, critical reflection, scholarship, innovation and research.

Aim 3: Create and celebrate a culture of success for students and staff

AIM

To enhance our collaboration with students and ensure that the notion of success permeates our learning community and extends into all our learning spaces, both virtual and actual.

Objectives

1. Promote practice in teaching and supporting learning that ensures a range of learning and engagement preferences.

2. Ensure that feedback on formative and summative assessment is timely and constructive and supportive to students in their efforts to enhance the demonstration of their learning for future assessments.

3. Further enhance our robust recruitment process in an effort to recruit high calibre students with potential to be successful and serve the community.

4. In partnership with students, negotiate and define codes of behaviour and responsibilities that promote learning, engagement, sharing, tolerance, ownership and creativity within our physical and virtual learning environment

Aim 4: Ensure students have the skills necessary for success in learning, personal development, and the enhancement of employability

AIM

1. To ensure our students are sufficiently equipped to maximise their ambition and potential for employment and economic engagement, through the use of appropriate technology

2. To support the development of employability skills and ensure their inclusion within our programmes.

Objectives

1. To provide comprehensive support, including academic writing support, to students.

2. Develop our students' ability to appropriately select and use a range of written and oral communication methods.

3. Facilitate the achievement of knowledge, skills and attitudes of appropriate professional graduate behaviour in all programmes

4. Create opportunities for students to develop teaching and other workplace skills through participation in, and reflection on, relevant teaching and workplace experiences.

5. Offer to our students exposure to career options to enable them to realise their career aspirations, through Career Seminar Workshops.

6. Incorporate effective employer engagement in design and delivery in our programmes, enhancing currency and relevance of the curriculum.

7. Enhance our portfolio of work-based learning opportunities in conjunction with ITREBs

Aim 5

To ensure that assessment is an integral part of learning

Objectives

1. To ensure a varied range of formative and summative assessment activities in order to develop critical analytic skills and enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
2. To provide students with clear information on the nature and timing of assessment points throughout their programme.
3. To provide students with clear guidance as to what is expected of them in assessments through the provision of assessment criteria and/or marking schemes.
4. To provide alternative forms of assessment where this is deemed necessary to ensure students are not disadvantaged in the assessment process.
5. To ensure that assessment feedback is timely so that students may use this to enhance their performance on subsequent assessments.
6. To provide formative assessment opportunities throughout our programmes and to ensure students receive feedback on this assessment.