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### **Harmonization of Students' Assessment**

Transition from high school to university is a particularly stressful situation to students, resulting in high dropout rates at the end of first year, and scoring lower grades than expected at the end of the year.

In such transition, First-year university students face a variety of stressors in terms of making new relationships, modifying their existing relationships with parents and family, learning study habits for a new academic environment, and more importantly learning to function as independent adults.

#### **1. Cultural Transition**

Moving from high school to university involves a cultural transition that may take up to a year to adjust to. Students need to move from the sheltered family like supportive environment found in schools to the wider, less sheltered atmosphere of the university where they might feel isolated because of the wider scope. At school, the students are supervised, monitored, and provided ongoing evaluation, while at the university they have to learn how to work independently to meet the very few evaluations that determine their performance level.

## 2. Issues in Transition

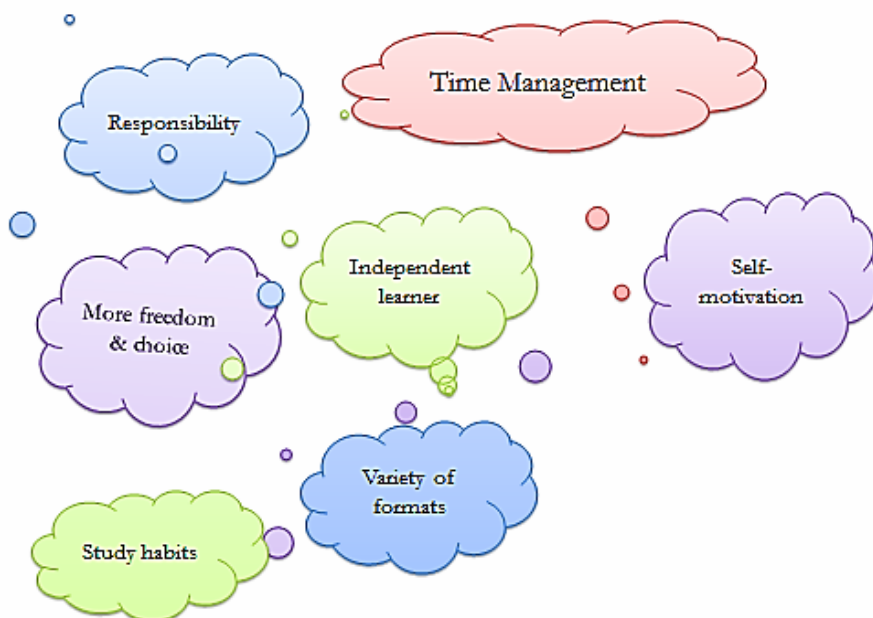
The transition from school to university causes issues at both academic and social levels.

Academically, the atmosphere, responsibilities, and demands are all different at the university. Learning also takes place at a different pace and in a different style. Instruction is provided in a variety of classrooms and formats ranging from large lectures to discussion sessions, seminars, laboratory courses, workshops, field work and internships.. Teaching methods are also varied and include among others use of technology, of cooperative learning, problem-based learning, etc.. similarly assessment is different and uses multiple approaches from assignments to quizzes, papers, projects, case studies, and lab reports. These differing formats, modes of teaching and assessment require different and varied study habits. They impose a greater load on the students as they have to be critical thinkers now, attending to the 'why' and not only to memorizing materials. They have to engage in note taking, researching, writing, arguing, defending, and presenting. All of these are novel to them.

At the personal level, there is definitely more freedom at the university. But because there is a wider variety in the course offerings and there are appealing academic and extracurricular attractions, there is less time available to students. Therefore students are called upon to engage in extensive time management in order to meet the various deadlines and to accomplish their work. They have to make optimum use of their time by prioritizing which tasks are important and which are urgent in order to plan for those tasks that are of high priority. Once a student has an idea of how much time specific tasks take, he can make an effective working plan. The plan should follow the SMART guidelines: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**cceptable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-constrained. Students need to find a balance between time spent on studying and other activities. At the same time, students need to monitor and self-motivate themselves as there is no close follow up, the way it is

at school, and they have to train themselves to become independent self-directed learners.

Normally takes a year to adjust adequately



### 3. Assessment at University

Assessment at University presents a challenge to new university students. They not only have to cope with novel and varied ways of assessments but also with different modes of markings and grading systems, assignments, feedback, and follow up.

At school, students are more used to subjective format of tests and written assignments that is usually a reproduction of core knowledge. At university level, objective item type is more common in its varied formats (multiple choice, true-false, matching, interpretive exercise, etc.) and if students are not familiar with it, and many are not, they will be at a disadvantage as one prepares differently for these types of items and strategies for answering them differ from those of short

answer or essay item types used at schools. Even assessments involving writing at university are more open-ended, requiring critical analysis and supportive arguments and involve a broad range of acceptable answers.

A good number of research studies, projects, case study analysis, lab reports and investigations are also required. In addition, students need to be able to present their findings and projects orally and to be able to defend them. Such assignments are usually stated in the syllabus that is distributed to students at the beginning of term, together with the due dates for each one of them and students are responsible for meeting these deadlines, though they may or may not be reminded of them. At school, teachers constantly remind students of the deadlines for various assignments or assessments.

With respect to marking and grading criteria, it is less clearly specified to students at the university level and differs from faculty member to another, from course to another, and across faculties. This is in contrast to what happens at school where all teachers, within a school at least, follow the same marking and grading criteria. Also, answers to a question are indicated by a request set by the teacher. Another difference is that the components of a grade at university level are relatively fewer, based on longer and less frequent assignments that carry more marks. So any adverse initial grade may impact overall average at end of the term. The same is not true at school level, as there are multiple components of a grade and initial first grades may not adversely affect final grade, which is composed of frequent shorter assignments/assessments with lower weight given to each.

Another difference in assessment lies in limited and infrequent feedback provided by instructors at university level. Classrooms are large and instructors meet with students maximum of three hours a week in addition to office hour, if needed. Rarely individual feedback is given on exam performance, but general review of exam is usually done with all students, unless student approaches instructor for clarifications

and more detailed input. This is in contrast to school where constant feedback throughout school year is given by teachers and progress is regularly monitored and formalized in reports to parents. In summary, students are expected to self-direct their studies at university level and this competency requires time and coaching to develop. So in first year at university, students suffer a lot until they become capable of doing that.

#### 4. Recommendations

From the above it is clear that transition to the university involves a major challenge to the student, and surviving it can be made smoother if we are aware of the cultural leap involved and take the necessary measures to minimize the possible negative effects. Such measures include but not restricted to:

- Emphasizing better academic preparation in terms of helping students in developing needed skills: thesis writing, critical thinking, oral presentation, note taking, researching, etc.
- Building social skills like working both independently and cooperatively, assuming responsibility for their behavior and work, and managing time effectively
- Familiarizing students with different assessment formats at university level. Taking an exam is a skill students can learn. It requires good preparation, a good exam strategy and knowing several techniques to deal with different item types
- Providing counseling services to students to prepare them for the transition
- Strengthening cooperation with universities. In this respect, arrange for visits and tours to universities to orient students to the various procedures, processes, and facilities. Summer internship at the university would be of great help to prospective students to familiarize them with university life.

## 5. Conclusion

Transiting from high school to university is definitely not the case of 'more of the same'. Studying at a university is a skill to be learned, and using the SMART method means studying strategically, being academically competent and confident about taking exams, and practicing good time management. All these are only possible if enough hours are put into them and when school teachers, university personnel, counselors and students themselves all collaborate to enhance this transition.