



UWA STUDENT GUILD
The University of Western Australia
M300, 35 Stirling Highway | Crawley, WA 6009
(08) 6488 2295 | hello@guild.uwa.edu.au
facebook.com/UWASStudentGuild | @UWASStudentGuild

Late Penalties – the case for change

Conrad Hogg, Lincoln Aspinall, June 2019

There have been long and continuing discussions about whether the late penalty should remain the same, at 10%, or be increased or decreased. Following consultation and feedback from a broad cross-section of the student body, the Guild has adopted a strong stance in favour of **lowering** the penalty for the late submission of assessments, to a **flat 5% per day**.

Consultation with academics through the Education Enhancement Unit indicates there is social license for such a change from the academic community – **61% of academics preferred models with lower penalties**, compared to the current 10% per day.

10% has an excessive impact on students' marks

A 10% penalty means that student marks rapidly decrease with each day the assessment is late. Effectively, a student will fall one grade each day they are late (i.e. HD > D > C > P > F). This occurs so quickly that an assignment that would have been awarded a high distinction will be failed if submitted four days late. Although it is important that students submit their work in a timely manner, we believe that 10% per day is too harsh, and has negative impacts on student wellbeing and equity, as described below.

Equity

Increased late penalties have the potential to disproportionately affect students from marginalised groups – chiefly student from low-SES backgrounds, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, student parents and LGBT+ students. These students sometimes have circumstances which make it markedly more difficult to keep up at university (e.g. having to work part-time while completing university, caring for children), and are disproportionately affected by the late penalty. The 2025 Strategic Plan aims to better engage, include and retain students from these groups. Lowering the late penalty would provide help in this regard to some extent. Furthermore, many circumstances are not captured by UWA's rigid special consideration policy. Students who face such exceptional circumstances have no choice but to pick up a penalty of 10% each day.

Building Professional Conduct in Students

It is often argued that late penalties are important to teach students about deadlines, simulating a workplace. However, on closer examination, it is easy to see that this does not line up to real workplace expectations. In most Australian workplaces, staff are permitted to exceed or negotiate deadlines without major penalties.

Assignments as a psycho-social stressor

Evolution of the student lifecycle has led most students at UWA to lead crowded lives, balancing study, work, extracurricular, family and social commitments. 76.8% of students aged 18-25 find that these competing pressures have affected their mental health while studying at university (1). A big part of the stress of balancing study with other commitments completing assessment tasks on time, and to a high quality. As such, 79.5% of the cohort cite course workload and deadlines as having affected their mental health (1). The environment that the students of 2018 find themselves in is a highly stressful one, which is exacerbated at by the stress of losing a high proportion of an assessment mark to the late submission penalty. A lower late penalty is a simple change affords students the opportunity to take better care of themselves, with less fear that doing so is putting their degree on the line.

References

1. Headspace, The National Union of Students. National Tertiary Student Wellbeing Survey. Melbourne, Victoria; 2016.