

Paulina Navrouzoglou

Lecturer in Economics

Learning and Teaching Forum

# Assessment approaches over my three years teaching experience

- Environmental Economics is (now) a Honour course with 45 students maximum
- The in-course assessment involves two activities:
  - **Summative:** a group essay (2-3 students, self-selected) or an individual essay
  - **In-class formative:** presentation or collaborative feedback for group essay and peer-to-peer feedback for individual essay

# 1<sup>st</sup> Approach: Group Essay & Presentation

## Students' feedback

- Half of the students would prefer **individual essay**
- Most students would prefer to slip up the group task rather than work together
- Group **working strategies**: keep in touch, share workload, use peer strength, share ideas/information
- Biggest **benefits**: meeting new people; sharing ideas and knowledge; share workload; help each other and learn from others
- Biggest **drawbacks**: poor commitment and attitude; different motivations, work practices and abilities; uneven contributions; rely on others; poor time management
- In terms of **skills development**, students recognised: team work, communication and interpersonal
- Complains about **presentation workload**

## My concerns

- Group or individual essay?
- On what basis to allocate students to groups?
- How to overcome free riding?
- How to assist the development of good group norms?
- Should I change the type of formative activity?

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Approach: Group Essay & Collaborative feedback (+ weekly recommended schedule)

### **Formative activity:**

1. Students' had to read and provide feedback on their group member(s) draft/a part of the essay
  2. Communicated their ideas and wrote a full essay draft:
    - Write a paragraph for each section explaining what the section will be about
    - Clarify how each section relates to all the other and how long each section should be
  3. Decided (again) who should do what and organised the next meeting
- **On the whole**, students cooperated well and responded to the task requirements
  - **My concerns:** few self-selected groups, some complains about group member(s) and group work

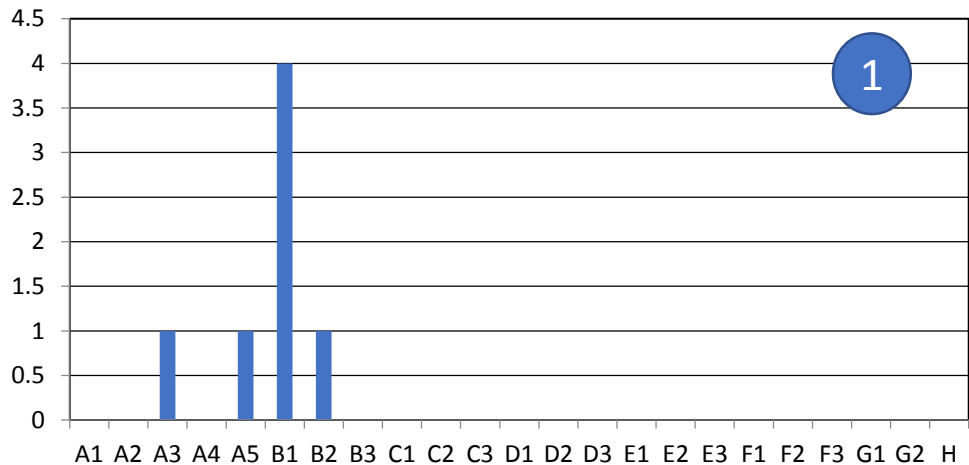
# 3<sup>rd</sup> Approach: Individual essay & Peer-to-Peer feedback & Group office hours

## Students' feedback

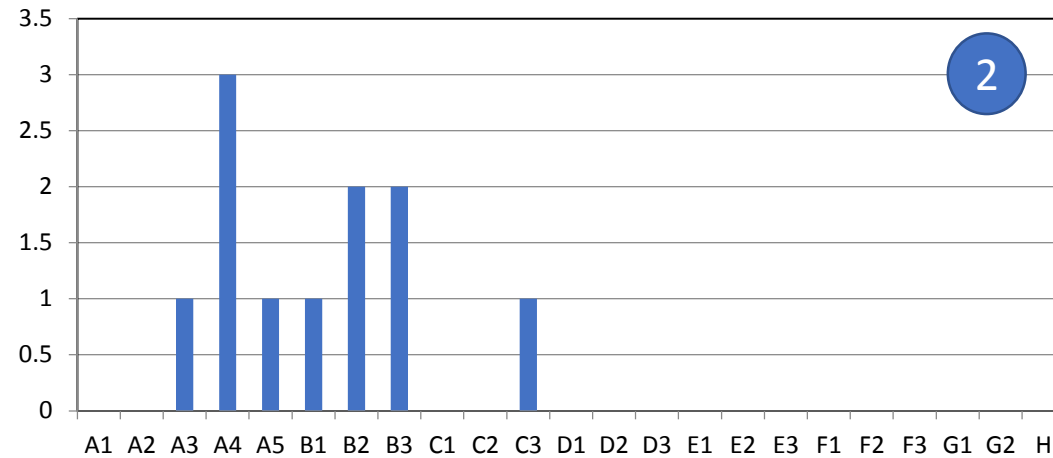
- **22%** of the students would prefer **group assignment** (19% don't mind)
  - Too much stress; free riding; different perspectives and capabilities; different effort but same reward; different schedules; less efficient; working alone allows better reflection of learning; work on a topic you really have an interest
- **22%** of the students would prefer to **formally peer-assessed**
  - Peer-assessment can be **biased**
- Students **were satisfied** with the feedback they received throughout the processes. But some **complained about the peer-to-peer review**:

“Not everyone put effort preparing draft”, “I knew more than others”, “hesitation to be critical”, “my peer didn't want to show his/her draft”, “I don't want to exchange my ideas with everyone”

# Performance Statistics

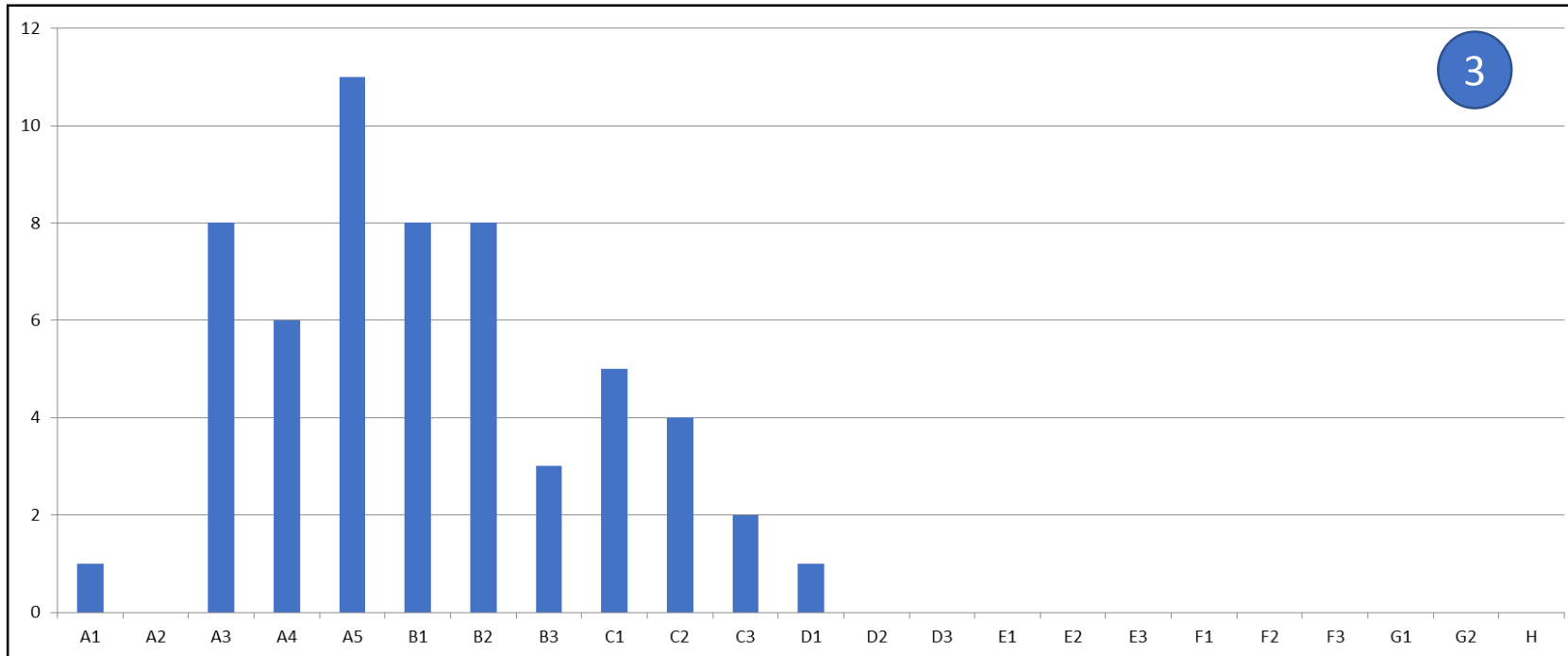


**Mean Grade: B1**  
**StDev GP: 1.3**



**Mean Grade: B1**  
**StDev GP: 2.4**

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**StDev GP: 2.4**



# My conclusions and concerns

- Using individual essay, I didn't receive complains but increase my workload
- Group essays benefit weak students, but strong students prefer (and are capable) to work alone
- Using peer-to-peer review and group feedback:
  - I directly communicated the marking criteria
  - I had the opportunity to timely identify common errors and good performances (this also gave students an indication of where they were)
  - I felt more satisfied with my support and feedback as well as more innovative
- Some found more valuable the group meeting than the peer-to-peer feedback, and very few would prefer individual meeting
- Some students didn't attend the in-class formative activity. These students submitted weaker essays
- In general, I found that in-class formative activities have several other benefits