SYDNEY TEACHING COLLOQUIUM 2014

Practice example
Are our assessments making us unhealthy?

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Abstract
Healthy Sydney University (HSU) is a university-wide initiative to make our people, places and policies healthier. Since 2012, we have been focused on creating a healthy learning and working environment for staff and students, and ensuring the strategies to create such environments are evidence-informed and evidence-generating. HSU has four key areas of interest: encouraging healthy eating, increasing physical activity, improving the mental wellbeing of the community, and embedding our strategies within broader structures, policies and processes of the University. One area of recent interest is assessment, due to the interesting links across these four areas. We want to consider and discuss the ways in which our assessment practices directly impact student and staff wellbeing. For example, how do particular assessment practices and policies affect student mental health? Universities such as Victoria University in Wellington, NZ, have instituted university-wide practices such as a 5pm deadline for all assessment items, rather than a midnight deadline, as they recognise healthy sleep practices are integral to the mental wellbeing of their students. HSU also remains concerned by the unhealthy food choices (lollies, chocolate and caffeinated beverages) promoted to students during study periods, as these choices can have disastrous effects on blood sugar levels and are known to directly contribute to the increasing prevalence of obesity amongst young people in Australia. Furthermore, the extensive time students and staff spend sitting down without a break during extended periods of study, examination and marking present a concerning picture of physical inactivity for our University community. HSU wants to facilitate a conversation about whether there is a potential area of research for considering the ways in which the University could implement healthier assessment practices and interventions for our students.