CASPAR: A Web-based Tool for Self and Peer Assessment in Group Work

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Introduction

Self and peer assessment (SPA) within group work can encourage appropriate student contribution, ensure fairer allocation of marks and enhance the learning gained from working with others. CASPAR (Computer Assisted Self and Peer Assessment Ratings) is an internet based tool developed to manage the administration and assessment of group work more efficiently. CASPAR allows students to provide qualitative feedback and numerical marks online. Lecturers can monitor progress, moderate marks and collect feedback, which can be used within formative and summative assessment.

CASPAR was developed by colleagues at the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice (CEMP) at Bournemouth University and CASPAR V2 has been released for use general use. CEMP provides a hosting service for the system and will continue to develop future versions for end users. Consequently, institutions or individual lecturers do not need to fund development work, host the system on their institutional servers or have specialist technical expertise.

CASPAR's features

Users can access CASPAR from anywhere in the world via the internet, and feedback from students suggests the system easy to access and use. Login and registration is managed through a single webpage and CASPAR can be synchronised with university intranet/e-mail accounts. User information can be extracted from student record databases such as Unit-E and transferred into CASPAR using a ".csv" spreadsheet format. CASPAR can use student data to assign individuals to groups alphabetically or randomly, but lecturers can also allocate students manually. Multiple dates and time-frames can be preset for the completion of assessment. The marking area becomes available during these periods and the system identifies late submissions.

When setting up the project, lecturers can enter multiple marking criteria, including short descriptions to help guide students when allocating marks. Moreover, different criteria can be set for specific phases of the project and corresponding assessment points. Student marking and feedback can be anonymous or open, and users assess using alphabetical grades (A-E), marks (out of 100) alongside qualitative feedback. When setting up a project, staff can also set the standard deviation, which helps to identify potential collusion or disagreement among member. The system will then highlight significant deviations in marks between individuals. Staff can also moderate final marks if there is evidence of collusion or unfair marking.

Finally, students can view assessment scores, qualitative feedback and track changes in their grades using a line graph throughout the project life. Users can also record project related information and send messages to other group members through a project journal.

CASPAR's Limitations

If large cohorts of students are already allocated to seminar groups and the project groups are self selecting, the process of assigning individuals to groups is time consuming. More importantly, once students are placed in a group and the project is launched, it is not possible to reorganise groups, reassign individuals to different groups, change assessment dates or add new dates; nor is it possible to change any of the marking criteria or the standard deviation. Staff can only moderate numerical scores; the alphabetical grades and unprofessional or offensive comments made by students cannot be edited or removed.

Feedback following trials of CASPAR highlighted that some students found it difficult to match the institutional marking system (100 – 0, 1st, 2.1, 2.2, 3rd, Fail or Distinction, Merit, Pass, Fail) to the (A-E) alphabetical marking system used by CASPAR. This can be addressed through clear guidance. However, other features of the system present further challenges. Students cannot recall or change marks or comments once they have been submitted. This caused a number of problems when students completed their SPA hastily and subsequently realised that their feedback or marks were inappropriate, or when they mistakenly assessed the wrong person. Staff cannot select or eliminate a particular set of results, for example, the marks assigned during one assessment period. This feature would have been particularly useful after the first round of peer assessment, when students made the most mistakes or submitted marks/feedback prematurely.

Finally, the current version of the system has limited reporting functions. The system produces a print-friendly version of the group marks and lecturers may choose to print the screenshot of an individual student's scores/feedback, but marks, alphabetical grades or collated qualitative feedback cannot be extracted in a spreadsheet format.

Getting the most from CASPAR

- If team teaching, make sure all the team members are registered with CASPAR and, if necessary, assigned admin rights prior to setting up projects.

- Check student lists very carefully prior to uploading data and the setting up of projects; this will eliminate the need to reload the entire project.

- Establish the marking criteria collaboratively. This can be used to help students develop key employability skills.

- In briefing students about qualitative peer feedback, encourage them to identify positive characteristic of a colleague as well as highlighting areas where they need to improve. If possible, students should also use the qualitative feedback function on CASPAR to justify why they gave marks/grades to individuals and themselves.

- Check the marking criteria carefully for spelling errors and clarity as these cannot be changed later. Users may wish to type the criteria into a document and proofread them prior to cutting and pasting into CASPAR.

- Get all students to check that they can access the system and that they have been allocated to the right group prior to the start of the assessment.

- If possible, set up a test project so students can familiarise themselves with the system and the norms of assessment.

- Establish multiple assessment points. This will help students to identify areas where they need to improve and give them time to address emerging issues.

- Provide students with clear guidance that helps them allocate alphabetical and numerical grades. Try to clarify how the institutional marking system (100 – 0, 1st – Fail or Distinction – Fail) corresponds with the alphabetical (A-E) system used by CASPAR.

- Ensure assessment dates are matched with appropriate milestones and deliverables deadlines in the group work project.

- **Wherever possible, use peer and self-assessment as part of a broader learning and development strategy. For example, this can be used to think critically about students' strengths and weaknesses, the difficult nature of offering constructive criticism, the challenges involved in developing an appraisal/performance evaluation process. If possible, the qualitative feedback as well as their marks can be used within a Personal Development and Planning programme.**

- If appropriate, make clear to students when setting up the project the penalties for late submission, non-submission and unprofessional feedback or marking.

- When issuing guidance remind students to:

  -make sure they assess the correct person;

  -think very carefully about their comments/marks before pressing the submit button because they cannot change them later;

-assess themselves, including qualitative feedback.

To find out more about CASPAR and to trial the system, please visit the CEMP website:

http://www.cemp.ac.uk/caspar/

Users can trial the system free for 90 days or subscribe to a premium version.

The user help guide is available at:

http://www.cemp.ac.uk/caspar/files/CASPAR-User-Guide-v2.pdf

A sample briefing and marking criteria can also be found at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/hlst/documents/case_studies/135_lugosi_caspar.pdf