



Editor's Note:

Due to the atypical learning models implemented over the past two semesters, the format (and even the existence) of end-of-year examinations has been a major area of debate among students and teachers for a while. Recently, due to the newly-announced province-wide lockdown, in-person learning will be put on hold at least until May 20, and as such, debate about the format of exams has intensified across all grades.

In this Convergence Blue Page, I asked two of my friends in Year 11 to share their perspectives and opinions regarding the currently-planned model of Year 11 exams this year. They happened to have differing views on this particular issue. Either way, I hope that sharing these perspectives might be useful during the decision-making process if the school decides to re-evaluate the exam models, not only for Year 11 but for other grades as well.

Kevin Liu, Editor-in-Chief.

Graeme Tremain's Perspective

Exams. They have got to be every student's favourite time of year, right? There's no better feeling than studying for hours and overthinking a simple test on all the material we covered in our courses over the past year, right?

Yeah, I don't enjoy them much either. But regardless, they are an integral part of our education, and an indispensable tool to prepare us for the next step in our learning: university.

The current exam format planned for Year 11s involves two possibilities regarding overall grade weight: based on our numerical achievement thus far in

the year, if our exam mark is over our present average, it will count for 30% of our final mark. If our exam mark is under our present average, it will be worth only 15% of our final mark in that course, while our cumulative work will account for the remaining 85% of our percentage grade.

The Year 11 student body was given a comprehensive presentation regarding the exam format to demonstrate to us that even if students heavily underachieve on our final exams, the 15% weight they would carry would not be too detrimental to our overall grade. However, I feel that it is the popular opinion among Year 11s that this format is still inequitable for a few reasons.

First and foremost, the past year of education has not been up to the standards of previous years. Due to our hybrid learning model of one day on campus, one day at home, combined with multiple school shutdowns, students have only actually been **in class** for about **a quarter** of the 2020-21 school year, and that isn't even taking into account students who have, for their own safety or that of their families, decided to take on fully online classes.

It's no secret that online learning is nowhere near as effective a learning model as being in class in person. In no way is this the fault of the UCC faculty, teachers, or community; in my opinion, UCC has done an outstanding job in not only delivering an excellent learning model, but providing an incredibly safe campus experience. However, online learning simply is not comparable to in person learning. The point is, the Year 11 student body is objectively nowhere near as prepared as we would be under normal circumstances, so why is it fair to treat our exams as though we were? Yes, the 15% weight is a difference from the normal 30%, but it's not enough.

Last school year, the Year 11s (current Y12s) were given no-hurt exams. Their exams, no matter how poorly they performed, could not have a negative impact on their grades. Moreover, only roughly a third of their school year was impacted by Covid-19. Yes, they had to take on a fully virtual learning environment for the last three months of the year, but we have, this year, been **in person for less time than they spent at home** last year on average, especially when the fully online learners are taken into account. And again, they were given no-hurt exams while we still face the stress of final exams possibly worsening our marks.

Now, I understand the reasoning behind the decision not to offer no-hurt examinations. If we know our marks can't go down, where is the motivation to study properly? To prepare ourselves for Year 12 and university exams? Well, some of us might not muster the motivation to study as hard as we otherwise would. But would it nevertheless be in our best interest as students to have no-hurt exams this year? Yes.

In the context of what UCC has taught us over the entirety of our high school experience, no-hurt exams will not lead to poor study habits. They would not be detrimental to us in the long run. We have been working consistently all year and for many years through high school. Our good study habits and work ethic are already established.

The past year has taken an immense toll on all of our mental health. The general motivation to try as hard in school has waned, and doing 6-8 hours of online classes and meetings every day doesn't help. We are undoubtedly in a worse position than our Year 12 predecessors, therefore I do not believe that we should face the additional burden of a potential 15% weight from exams.

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I'd like to reiterate that this is not a criticism of UCC's handling of the unprecedented situations over past year. They have done everything and more than students could have asked for in terms of education delivery considering the circumstances. These are my opinions about our current exam format as a hybrid Year 11 student, and why I believe we should have no-hurt exams.

William Trojniak's Perspective

It is no secret that there has been considerable demand from the Year 11 student body for the school to reconsider the weighting of our final exams. With talks of the exam format once again on the table as a result of the renewed state of lockdown, I'd like to weigh in on the discussion.

Let's first start by addressing the structure of the school year. Although the arrangement of year levels into cohorts was a new routine to get used to, it was straightforward and predictable. The year also introduced a shift to 20-day cycles, which, I argue, helped students stay focused on their course material and eliminated the usual struggle of juggling double the number of courses at a time. The 20-day cycles also made it easier for students to anticipate major assessment deadlines, and allowed them to plan their time accordingly. Coupled together, I believe that the cohorts and 20-day cycles provided a well thought-out compromise between the desired in-person learning experience and ensuring a safe on-campus environment for the school. That's not to say that there were no inconsistencies over the course of the year; a number of lockdowns and shifting the March break made for some adjustments. Nevertheless, this is a time of uncertainty, and reflecting on the current state of the

lockdown as well as those of the past, it is hard to consider them unexpected given the trends seen in the number of cases leading up to them. Continuing on that point, I find it troublesome to argue that these lockdowns were disruptive to learning. Since September, students have attended every other class virtually. By alternating the cohorts like this, we were eased into the initially challenging environment of virtual classes. The alternating schedule also forced teachers to design their lessons in order to accommodate for an online audience. In almost all cases, this resulted in teachers using digital platforms to create lessons and deliver course material. Going from in-person to online, this allowed for practically no difference in course content and delivery in almost all classes. Hence, I find there is little reason during both the previous and current lockdowns for students to have found transitioning to a completely virtual classroom challenging.

With so much in question, it was unsurprising that students were wondering if there would be a change to the format of exams. I cannot deny that I was relieved earlier this year when I learned that the midterm exams for our grade had been cancelled — After all, it was one less thing to worry about. At the same time though, I was disappointed. The exams would not have been much harder than a typical test for a unit, and really, they were not likely to cause all that much stress. What's more, it would have been the first time in years since our grade has written exams and would have provided a level of preparation and familiarity for the more challenging upcoming exams. Now, many students are using online learning, our year's relative inexperience with writing exams, and the school's decision to cancel Year 12 exams to argue that the results of this year's final exams should only be able to increase our final marks. If the school did choose no-hurt exams, I cer-

tainly wouldn't be opposed to it. However, I personally believe that no-hurt exams are not in the best interest of the student body. Instead, I support the proposed exam format of a 15 or 30 percent weighting depending on whether the score benefits or worsens a student's mark. Students should realise that a weighting of 15 percent is less than the weighting of most other individual assignments from throughout the year; so really, it shouldn't be a source of too much stress. However, the possibility of decreasing one's marks deters students from neglecting the exams and provides an additional incentive to do their best. I expect that this incentive the weighting provides will benefit students' results much more than the weighting will damage them, especially in the long run.

Finally, I think that students should consider the overall benefits of writing these exams. Realistically, it is unlikely that a student's marks will be drastically affected by their exams. Therefore, I believe that it is the experience of preparing for and writing the exam itself that is most important. Preparing for an exam is stressful and will only continue to grow more stressful next year and in university. I also believe that our grade is particularly stressed by the thought of writing exams because of our lack of experience in writing them. However, the solution to this concern certainly isn't to delay the experience any further. Learning to work under stress is essential to our success in all sorts of environments. The way I see it, if never provoked nor challenged, we have no reason to grow. Thus, my belief is that the current exam structure will provide the most benefit to the greatest number of students.