

Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) Project

Exemplars of Good Practice Initiatives

EMPOWERING TUTORS TO HELP STUDENTS IN THEIR ACADEMIC WRITING DEVELOPMENT, UOW

EXEMPLAR: USING TURNITIN AS A TEACHING TOOL TO ASSIST SESSIONAL TUTORS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Title: Empowering tutors to help students in their academic writing development

University : University of Wollongong

Discipline Area: Psychology

Subject/Unit Coordinator (optional) PSYC241 Developmental and Social Psychology;
Dr Amy Chan, School of Psychology

Level of Unit 200-level

Number of Students: 160 students

Number of Sessional Staff 2 sessional tutors

Delivery Mode: On campus, face-to-face delivery

Profile: This subject's sessional tutors were PhD students at the School of Psychology with 1 to 5 semesters' experience in undergraduate sessional tutoring

Background/Context: Academic plagiarism is commonplace in the university learning environment. Two common causes of undergraduate student plagiarism are (i) lack of engagement with the subject matter, and (ii) poor academic writing skills. Much stigma and anxiety is involved when sessional tutors identify and have to report on suspected cases of plagiarism in their students' work. This project sought to use Turnitin (a text-matching on-line application) as a self-learning tool, for tutors to provide support for students to increase their awareness of how to avoid poor academic writing practice (e.g., excessive use of direct quotes, superficial paraphrasing of information from published sources).

EXEMPLAR: USING TURNITIN AS A TEACHING TOOL TO ASSIST SESSIONAL TUTORS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Good Practice Initiative:

- Gathered data on tutors' baseline perceptions and experiences regarding student plagiarism
 - Incorporated an in-class introduction to Turnitin, for students to use as a self-learning tool to seek feedback on their academic writing; used this in-class activity as a means for tutors to help students increase their awareness of how to avoid poor academic writing practice (e.g., excessive use of direct quotes, superficial paraphrasing of information from published sources).
 - Obtained end-of-semester feedback from tutors on their perceived usefulness of the Turnitin setup, as a tool to create opportunities for them to discuss with students issues relevant to good academic writing practice and student plagiarism, and for them to appreciate factors contributing toward academic plagiarism in undergraduate students.
-

Tips for Implementation:

(1) Identify tutors' a priori assumptions regarding why undergraduate students commit academic plagiarism. (2) Explain to tutors the rationale behind using Turnitin as a self-learning tool for students. These steps are important because, typically being diligent students as they went through their own undergraduate studies, some sessional tutors may lack the perspectives of inexperienced undergraduate students who struggle with academic writing.

Evaluation:

- Tutors found that it was fairly easy to convey to students the intended use of Turnitin within the present context: that Turnitin can be used as a self-learning tool for students to seek feedback as they gain experience with writing critical literature reviews (as opposed to a tool for catching academic plagiarists).
 - This project also prompted tutors to gain better understanding of some potential reasons underlying undergraduate students' academic plagiarism (e.g., "The suggested use of Turnitin ... opened my eyes to other ways in which students may plagiarise, or more specifically, how poor integration and understanding of material may inadvertently cause students to commit plagiarism" - Tutor 1).
-

Reflection:

This practice can be easily incorporated into the tutorial program for any undergraduate subject that includes a major written assignment. It provides a valuable avenue to help sessional tutors develop their understanding and respect for undergraduate students. It also provides a means for tutors to identify how they may provide appropriate support and encouragement to students as they gain experience with academic writing.
