

Carrot or stick? Student engagement with Turnitin: Implementing Turnitin formatively in Business Courses - Judy Cohen & Des Laffey, University of Kent

Chair's Notes (Kate Smith)

Judy's presentation on the approaches used to implement Turnitin at the University of Kent and the qualitative and quantitative findings (see slides) indicating students' and staff reactions sparked an interesting discussion around the pros and cons of such an approach.

The pros and cons presented by Judy and discussed within the group can be summarised as follows:

Perceived positive outcomes:

- Clear guidelines in how to use Turnitin to submit an assignment and to interpret the originality report are provided via WebCT and the University's Academic Integrity website, and this was recognised and valued by students;
- At Kent two sessions of face-to-face training is provided for students in how to use Turnitin to submit/download an assignment and to interpret the originality report. Engagement could be improved if the Directors of Learning and Teaching agreed to build the training in, and use of, Turnitin into student induction at programme level;
- Staff receive a one-hour introduction to Turnitin and have access to UELT support thereafter. Development is very practical as staff are asked to bring their own electronic source and they look at an originality report of it;
- The system highlights poor academic practice, such as students using lots of direct quotes rather than paraphrasing and putting it into their own words;
- Students commented that the system would be more effective in deterring plagiarism if it was used across the whole University. Certain departments have opted out and students are aware of this and are reported as committing plagiarism because the software that would pick it up is not being used. Conversely in departments where Turnitin is being used, students see it as a deterrent. Some even see it as an educational tool!
- Based on their experience these students appeared to have a greater awareness why plagiarism is wrong (undermines academic integrity), of how their university operates in terms of detecting plagiarism and how they can improve their writing by viewing their originality reports;
- Suggested approaches that might be adopted to overcome plagiarism and to complement use of Turnitin as an education tool included:
 - Promoting the formative use of Turnitin
 - Designing out opportunities for plagiarising, such as: setting tasks which require students to reflect on a specific experiences/context; accept the shortcoming of essays; use Turnitin in conjunction with other methods of improving academic skills and deterring plagiarism; and combine them with other methods such as exams;
 - Peer pressure can be a good way of self-regulating student practice. It was suggested that 'policing' might be handed over to the Student Union.

Perceived problems/concerns:

- As the software highlights where students have correctly but directly quoted sources this puts some students off using it as their work appears to be incorrect even though it is correct, if not particularly well written.
- The language of academic writing isn't obvious to all students and even those who have an understanding of what plagiarism is confuse terms such as plagiarism and paraphrasing. In addition to using this kind of tool for educational purposes, there is a need to deconstruct the process academic writing.
- Students and staff report that some students use Turnitin to check if their plagiarism in their work can be detected and then tinker with it until it falls below the 'acceptable' level according to Turnitin. The group discussed 'do students rethink their relationship with the sources they are quoting as a result of using Turnitin or does it just result in superficial tinkering?'
- Students may use Turnitin to incorrectly judge what is a good essay rather than developing their own evaluative skills and critical practice. They see the Turnitin figure as validating their academic writing and if Turnitin is satisfied, they are satisfied.
- It could be seen as inequitable to only check out the odd assignment through Turnitin and 1000 can be loaded at once.
- Judging whether a student has committed plagiarism with intent or whether through a lack of understanding/skilfulness is difficult. Turnitin might be used formatively to diagnose students in need of academic writing support.
- Turnitin won't accept numeric data.

In addition to the material provided by Judy Cohen the Wrasse project (Plymouth) offers a collection of examples of students' academic writing that have been through Turnitin.

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