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Catterall, Stephen and Ireland, Chris

Writing support for overseas students: quick fix or responsive solution?

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Stephen Catterall, Academic Skills Tutor, School of Computing & Engineering

Christopher Ireland, Academic Skills Tutor, Business School
Writing Support for Overseas Students: quick fix or responsive solution?
Academic Skills Project

- Established in 2002
- Funded by the United Kingdom’s Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) as a Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) project
- Established academic skills development across the University to underpin retention of students
- Provide assistance for students in non-subject aspects of study
Help sought from Academic Skills Tutors

Times identified as area of support:

- Essays
- Referencing
- Report Writing
- Grammar
- Sourcing information
- Presentations
- Exam techniques
- Reading academic texts
- Understanding
- Confidence
- Time Management
- Note taking
- Information Technology
- Numeracy

Times: 0 100 200 300 400
Students & Writing Tasks

• Students
  – Access; foundation; undergraduate and postgraduate students
  – UK students and students from overseas including the European Union

• Writing tasks
  – Routine coursework assignments
  – Final year undergraduate projects
  – Dissertations for masters degree students
School of Computing & Engineering: Overseas Students (excluding EU)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country / Region</th>
<th>2004-5</th>
<th>2005-6</th>
<th>2006-7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
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<td>OTHERS</td>
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<td>Eq &amp; Tr Africa</td>
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<td>CHINA</td>
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<td>INDIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAKISTAN</td>
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</table>
School of Computing & Engineering: EU Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2004/5</th>
<th>2005/6</th>
<th>2006/7</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Rep</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Country

Number of Students

- France
- Germany
- Czech Rep
- Greece
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Others
Business School:
Overseas Students (excluding EU)

Number of Students

Country / Region

ME | OTHERS | Eq & Tr Africa | ASEAN | CHINA | INDIA | PAKISTAN

2004-5 | 2005-6 | 2006-7
Business School: EU Students

Number of Students

Country

France

Germany

Czech Rep

Greece

Poland

Slovakia

Others

2004/5

2005/6

2006/7
Pedagogical Challenges

- Writing: level & length
- Experience only of traditional assessment
- Students need to acquire new skills quickly
- Particular issue for final year direct entry undergraduates
Political & Institutional Challenges

- European Union students deemed to be UK students for funding purposes
- The University’s International Office unable to help
- No University-wide strategy for providing English language instruction or support for overseas students
- Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) 20 April 2007 melanie.newman@thes.co.uk
The course

Voluntary participation
Invitations to attend made on the basis of Individual Learning Profiles
Classes formed according to student availability
## Attendance & Take Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Attendances</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>Take up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004/5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005/6</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006/7</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lessons & Tutorials

Up to 16 lessons
8 entirely concerned with aspects of writing
7 containing aspects of writing
1 entirely on presentations

As many individual tutorials as requested
Generally on dissertation issues
BA European Business

Degree Classification

Students

- Did not use AST
- up to 10 hours
- over 10 hours

No degree: [Bars]
3rd: [Bars]
2ii: [Bars, blue]
2i: [Bars, blue]
1st: [Bars, yellow]
BA European Business

Students

Degree Classification

Did not use AST
up to 10 hours
over 10 hours

No degree 3rd 2ii 2i 1st
BA European Business

Students

Degree Classification

Did not use AST
up to 10 hours
over 10 hours

Students

No degree
3rd
2ii
2i
1st
BA European Business

Students

Degree Classification

No degree 3rd 2ii 2i 1st

Did not use AST

up to 10 hours

over 10 hours
BA European Business

Diagram: Students' degree classification and AST usage

- Did not use AST
- Up to 10 hours
- Over 10 hours

Degree Classification:
- No degree
- 3rd
- 2ii
- 2i
- 1st

Students
Sample Session

Using Journal Articles

By the end of the session students will
know how to read an article efficiently;
have made notes from two articles;
have drafted some paragraphs of
‘academic writing’.
Accuracy of References in Three Critical Care Nursing Journals

Marilyn H. Oermann, PhD, RN, FAAN
Linda D. Ziolkowski, MSN, RN, CPAN


Reference List Accuracy in Social Work Journals

Christina A. Spivey
Scott E. Wilks
University of Georgia

Research on Social Work Practice, Vol. 14 No. 4, July 2004 281-286

See Appendix
Note Taking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why are reference lists important?</th>
<th>Oermann &amp; Ziolkowski</th>
<th>Spivey &amp; Wilks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why are errors in reference lists so serious?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions continued in Appendix
Short Writing Task

Reference lists and bibliographies are essential components of academic reports and must be produced immaculately.

What consequences may derive from errors in reference lists? **What steps can be taken to ensure they are accurate?**

What evidence is there in the literature that this is a problem in journals and student writing?
Summary

• Context: pedagogical, institutional and political challenges
• A quick fix to the problem or a responsive solution to a challenging set of circumstances
• We believe that we have provided a responsive solution for our students
• We also believe that this is has proved to be an effective solution
Questions


Language Requirement

Applicants to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at the University are expected to demonstrate English Language ability at a level equivalent to IELTS 6.0 (TOEFL 550).

Concern - level test validity and reliability
Typical Language Issues

The level of language is generally good but first language influences output

Articles seem random
Subject-verb agreement
  3rd person singular present
  Collective nouns
Collocation & word order