

Learning and Teaching Conference 2012

Abstract 7A

Early feedback in L1 Earth Science classes: using Moodle and Turnitin for in-course writing skills training.

Presenter: Fiona Meade, School of Geographical and Earth Sciences

The removal of report writing from the externally assessed portion of the Higher English syllabus in 2001 (Buie, 2009) means Scottish students have difficulties with several aspects of writing academic essays in university; from finding the information, to referencing it correctly and synthesizing it in a grammatically coherent and well-structured manner. Students often rely on general course textbooks and superficial web searches, leading to essays based on non-peer reviewed information and lacking in scientific detail (see Thompson, 2003).

First year students' difficulty with the transition from school writing to academic writing is well documented (Cook and Leckey, 1999, Lowe and Cook, 2003). Students expect a learning environment similar to school and university-style independent learning means they often feel unsupported by teaching staff (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Staff often consider academic writing to be a skill that should be taught centrally and the nuances of individual subject styles are often only implicitly stated in the assessment information (Street, 2004).

To address this imbalance, a series of Moodle-based study skills websites were created for L1 Earth Science students, covering topics such as writing skills, referencing, research and using the library. Combined with a single lab class introducing these resources and a low-credit, early writing assignment, L1 Earth Science students are familiarised with research, writing and using scientific journals. Essays are submitted and marked online where detailed, web-linked feedback, referring back to the Moodle resources is given using the Turnitin Grademark facility. This approach has been effective, well-received by students and the quality of submitted work has increased markedly.

BUIE, E. 2009 Creative writing external assessment unlikely to be exam based, TESS, August 14th 2009

(<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6020468>).

COOK, A. & LECKEY, J. 1999. Do Expectations Meet Reality? A survey of changes in first-year student opinion. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 23, 157-171.

LOWE, H. & COOK, A. 2003. Mind the Gap: are students prepared for higher education? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27, 53-76.

STREET, B. 2004. Academic literacies and the 'new orders': implications for research and practice in student writing in higher education. *Learning and Teaching in the Social Sciences*, 1, 9-20.

THOMPSON, C. 2003. Information Illiterate or Lazy: How College Students Use the Web for Research. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 3, 259-268.

Outcomes

use Turnitin for feedback as well as plagiarism checking see how Moodle can be used to provide readily accessible general study skills support understand that subject specific study skills training is very effective