



JISC RSC Scotland South & West @ The City of Glasgow College

An Information Literacy and Plagiarism Pilot Project

Summary

This case study gives an overview of a pilot project which addresses the need for information literacy skills training for students in conjunction with the use of the Blackboard Safe Assign plagiarism detection tool.

Background

The City of Glasgow College formed in 2010 as a result of a merger between three city centre colleges. It has a staff of around 1,100 and a student body of over 40,000, making it the largest college in Scotland. The pilot stage of the *Safe Assign* project was conducted by Glasgow Metropolitan College prior to the merger. At the time of the project, the college employed around 500 staff and had a student body of around 18,000.

The Challenge



Both the library and the e-Learning team had received requests from lecturing staff to address the lack of information literacy skills of students, as well as their lack of awareness of accurate referencing. The pilot stage of the project consisted of 1st year HNC/D students who were likely to go on to further study at university with entry during the 2nd or 3rd year of their degree course. It was felt that these students were at a disadvantage in comparison to students who started the degree course in year one and would be lacking in information literacy skills.

The Activity

Around 40 students plus 2 lecturers participated in a pilot project. During a 1 hour guidance slot, the students and lecturers received a 30 minute Information Literacy skills tutorial developed and delivered by the Digital Librarian. This was followed by a 30 minute tutorial on how to submit work online using a plagiarism detection tool (Safe Assign). The plagiarism tutorial was developed and delivered by the e-Learning Technologist

The Information Literacy skills tutorial covered how to search for information and evaluate resources, and how to correctly reference different types of information. Students were given paper-based notes addressing referencing and information skills. Students were also pointed to the Intute Internet Detective tutorial (an online Information Skills tutorial). This was not used during the face-to-face session as time was limited.

Safe Assign (the plagiarism detection software used) is an in-built tool available as part of the Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment. Safe Assign checks student submissions against a comprehensive range of sources: the internet; the ProQuest ABI/Inform database; and an institutional database (of work submitted by other students at the institution). A report is produced identifying matches found between the student submissions and the databases. A sample Safe Assign report can be found here - <http://kb.blackboard.com/download/attachments/37191686/SafeAssignment+Report.png> (last accessed 19/11/10).

During the tutorial, students were asked to copy text from the internet about their favourite film and save it to a text document which they then submitted to a practice Safe Assignment. They were then able to view their own report to ensure they understood how the tool would help their lecturers identify copied work.

It was hoped that by giving students the opportunity to understand how Safe Assign worked, they would not see its use as a covert operation but instead appreciate how the software could be used as a learning tool.

Staff using the tool received training prior to the student tutorial session to ensure they understood the limitations of the tool. Although the software does pick up plagiarism, it is an automated tool and judgment calls still need to be made. The tool does not mark student work for them.

A full evaluation of the project has yet to take place and therefore it is still at the pilot stage although the workshops and software are made available on request. A decision was made not to roll out the project across the college due to the impending merger and the possibility of the Virtual Learning Environment changing, making it likely that a different plagiarism detection tool would be used.

Informal feedback from the staff involved indicates the pilot was successful. The lecturers sought feedback from their students who found the workshop useful although there was mixed feedback about the use of the tool; some students appreciated having the opportunity to practice submitting an assignment via Safe Assign, whilst others found it confusing.

Lessons Learnt

Information Skills can be a difficult area to teach. In an ideal world the tutorial could be re-worked to include more engaging materials and make more use of online resources such as the JISC Digital Media *Finding Images Online* Tutorial. This is not really feasible in a short 30 minute tutorial but it is useful to be able to point students to online resources which they can access at a later date.

It was felt that it was vital to include guidance on information literacy when using plagiarism detection software. The report produced by the software still needs to be manually checked and should be used as a guide only. It was also felt that the tool would be most useful when the assignment being submitted was research-based as this provides the most opportunities for accidental or deliberate plagiarism from third party sources. Where students were required to submit personal or reflective essays the tool was not so useful (although it would still be beneficial to check submissions against the institutional database, to ensure students aren't copying from each other). Students should always be signposted to the student guide which gives advice on technical issues that could be encountered (such as the requirement to enable cookies).

The pilot was guided by the college eLearning Committee which consisted of the Vice Principal, an Assistant Principal, several Heads of Department, as well as staff from both the library and e-Learning team. The fact that the pilot project was backed by college senior management and formed part of college strategy was considered essential.

It is hoped the project will be rolled out across the newly merged college, however several things need to take place first, including the selection of a VLE. There will be a much larger staff and student body in the new college but it is hoped that this will provide an opportunity to address student induction, IT skills and digital literacy skills.

Useful Links

Self Assign by Blackboard, last accessed 19th November 2010

<http://safeassign.com/>

The Internet Detective, available from the Intute Virtual Training Suite, last accessed 19th November 2010

<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/detective/>

Internet for Image Searching, available from JISC Digital Media via the Intute Virtual Training Suite, last accessed 19th November 2010

<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/imagesearching/>

Internet for Audio Resources, available from JISC Digital Media via the Intute Virtual Training Suite, last accessed 19th November 2010

<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/tutorial/audio/>