

ICED 2020 proceedings:

Pre-empting academic misconduct and improving learning outcomes with a teaching and learning approach – A preliminary report

Dongmei Li¹

*Arts Teaching Innovation (ATI), Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne
Parkville, Victoria 3010, Australia*

Abstract

This article reports on a preliminary analysis of Integrated Academic Success (IAS), an academic development program embedded in subject teaching for a humanities postgraduate degree involving a large number of international students at a major university in Australia. It was found that integrating academic skill development in subject teaching improved academic integrity and learning outcomes significantly in a course with a large number of students without relevant prior disciplinary or educational experience. The findings might inform curriculum development in postgraduate courses where students have no prior educational experience in the relevant discipline or academic context.

1 Introduction

An increasing number of postgraduate courses in Australia and other major English-speaking educational systems have been developed so that students, including international students, can enrol with a recognised undergraduate degree in any discipline. International students, especially those enrolled with direct entry, often find themselves unprepared for the assessment in the first semester, which normally starts within the first couple of weeks. The combination of stress from assessment and lack of familiarity with the academic expectations of the university has been shown to cause poor outcomes and lead to academic misconduct (Fass-Holmes, 2018). From the perspective of teaching and learning, it would be beneficial to equip students with relevant academic skills (Perkins, Gezgin, & Roe, 2020) and familiarise them with assessment requirements (Bretag et al., 2018) and academic integrity (Nayak, Richards, Homewood, Taylor, & Saddiqui, 2015). This paper reports on the Integrated Academic Success (IAS) program, an academic development program embedded in subject teaching with the goal of reducing academic misconduct and improving learning outcomes.

2 The context

The study was set in a major university in Australia. It involved two foundation subjects of a new postgraduate Media course where international students made up a high percentage of the student cohort. This course ran two intakes per year, in February and August. In the first year, 2018, 200 students were enrolled. Over 90% were international students. Many of the students had no background in the relevant discipline. As the subject coordinator observed for both intakes, many students seemed to be unfamiliar with academic conventions in the humanities. For example, in this pilot course, essay writing and literature research had significant weighting in the assessment. These tasks require skills such as essay structuring, literature research, argument development and critical analysis, as well as more mechanical techniques such as citation and referencing styles. For the international students these skills

¹ mei.li@unimelb.edu.au

were new: they may not have been developed or formally assessed in their previous educational experience in their home countries (Li, 2019). A new educational system and a new discipline requires a different set of skills, which these students had to acquire in a short period of time: the first assessment task was due in week 4. In the first two semesters in 2018, the students' outcomes were lower than average graduate coursework degrees at the faculty. In addition, the number of academic misconduct reports was much higher than the faculty average.

To address these problems, the Integrated Academic Success (IAS) program was developed by a team of teaching and learning specialists (TAIs) in close collaboration with subject teaching academics.

2.1 Stage 1

In semester 1 2019, academic skill development was implemented in Subject 1 in tutorials and as adjunct workshops (Table 1).

Weeks 4, 7 & 11	Co-planning and co-teaching face-to-face sessions
Week 9	Adjunct workshop – Understanding feedback
Week 11	Embedded lecture with librarian

Table 1 Implementation timeline semester 1 2019

As Table 1 shows, three sessions were planned and taught together by a TAI and the subject tutors. The goal of co-planning was to integrate the development of required academic skills into subject delivery. Co-teaching was aimed at supporting the tutor and for the TAI to understand the student response. The three weeks were selected in line with the major assessment tasks. In these sessions, the link between activities, learning outcomes and assessment requirements was explicitly explained to students.

Figure 1 below maps out the academic skills that were integrated in delivery over the three sessions in order to address the skill requirements in the corresponding assessment tasks. The more generic transferrable skills required in the subject, such as collaboration and critical thinking, were addressed throughout all sessions. The more detailed lesson plans are available on request.



Figure 1: Skill development in line with assessment timeline

In addition, an adjunct workshop was delivered on understanding feedback, with the purpose of helping students to make effective use of the feedback from the previous assessment to inform the upcoming assessment task; hence it was given in week 9. This workshop was developed based on the lecturer's observation that students had made repeated errors in past semesters.

2.2 Stage 2

In semester 2 the sister subject joined the IAS program. While intervention in the first subject continued, more academic development focusing on research skills was also implemented, which involved the following:

- An academic integrity quiz (available on request) with a follow-up workshop on academic integrity for Subject 2
The academic integrity quiz included three parts:
 - 1) Relevant areas of university academic integrity policy
 - 2) Types of misconduct
 - 3) Paraphrasing exercises using the recommended referencing style in the discipline. The sources used in the exercises were relevant literature for the subject selected by the lecturer.

The follow-up workshop focused on Part 3 of the quiz, with time dedicated to questions and answers regarding assessment task requirements in terms of subject-specific academic conventions.

- Tutors in Subject 1 delivered the sessions independently.
The tutors in Subject 1 were now more familiar with the session plans and were able to adapt them more contextually. These three sessions were stretched over the whole semester, to meet learning needs in a more timely manner.

3 Preliminary findings and discussions

Preliminary analysis showed increased average outcomes and a significantly reduced number of misconduct reports from student work, as well as higher tutor motivation. The average score in the final essay increased from 69 before IAS to 74 after stage 1 and then to 76 after stage 2 (Figure 2). The number of academic misconduct reports went down from 16 (out of 75 students) before IAS to 2 (out of 70 students) after stage 1 and was cleared to zero after stage 2 (out of 50) (Figure 3).

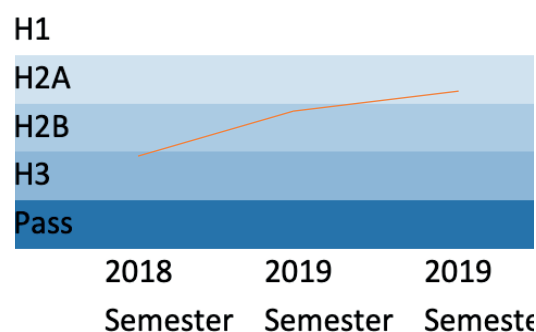


Figure 2: Changes in average final score across three semesters

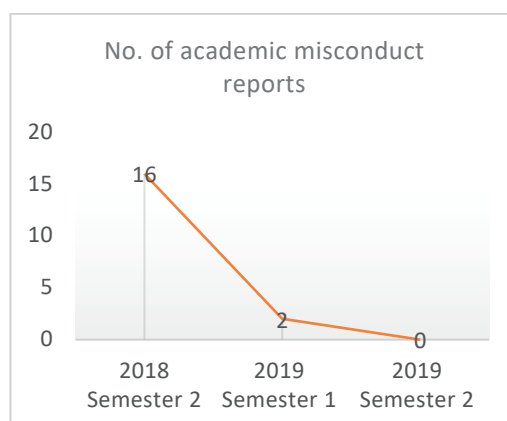


Figure 3: Number of academic misconduct reports across three semesters

The changes were significant in terms of both learning outcomes and academic integrity. The increase in the average final score was encouraging as it increased by two grades from Third Class Honours (H3) to Honours Second Class Honours Division A (H2A). This change indicates that addressing academic integrity from the teaching and learning perspective was effective in this pilot context. This finding agrees with a growing argument in the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education community that addressing academic integrity should consider teaching and learning strategies (Bertram Gallant, 2008). The fact that the program was effective in reducing academic misconduct accounts confirmed the subject coordinator's concerns that students may not have had the required skills for the subject on enrolment. Embedding academic skills development in the early weeks of tutorials seems to have filled the gap.

The significant drop in the number of academic misconduct reports involving the final essay also indicated the effectiveness of the program in this course. Research has urged us to explore the relationship between academic integrity and learning outcomes (Stoesz & Yudintseva, 2018). This program presents a positive relation between the two, even though it involved only the study of a single context where students were mostly international students who appeared to be unfamiliar with the academic expectations of the subject in which they were enrolled.

4 Limitations and further work

Although the above findings were generated in only one course, we can see the potential of embedding academic development in subject teaching for helping students without prior experience of a relevant discipline or a similar educational system.

While the changes are encouraging, we must also take into consideration the variables across the two semesters. Stage 1 and stage 2 involved two different groups of students. Although we expect that the students were of similar levels across each intake because they were enrolled according to the same standards and requirements, individual differences may have affected the outcomes.

Looking at future work, obtaining the student perspective on the IAS program would help us to develop better informed strategies in our attempt to support academic integrity and learning outcomes in postgraduate courses where a majority of students have diverse disciplinary and educational backgrounds.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Dr. Lauren Bliss, Dr. Xia Cui, and Dr. Megan McIntosh for their dedicated contribution in the development and delivery of the program; and Dr. Johan Geertsema, Dr. Michelle Raquel, Dr. Kwong Nui Sim and Dr. Christine Slade for their generous input during the writing of this paper.

References

- Bertram Gallant, T. (2008). A New Approach to Academic Integrity: The Teaching and Learning Strategy. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 33(5), 87-103.
- Bretag, T., Harper, R., Burton, M., Ellis, C., Newton, P., Rozenberg, P., van Haeringen, K. (2018). Contract cheating: A survey of Australian university students. *Studies in Higher Education* 44(11). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1462788>
- Fass-Holmes, B. (2018). International students reported for academic integrity violations: Demographics, retention, and graduation. *Journal of International Students*. doi:10.5281/zenodo.570026
- Li, D. (2019). Groupwork to enhance learning beyond the classroom. *Research Notes* (74), 44-59. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/549991-research-notes-74.pdf>
- Nayak, A. C., Richards, D., Homewood, J., Taylor, M., & Saddiqui, S. (2015). *Academic integrity in Australia: Understanding and changing culture and practice: Final report*. Retrieved from Sydney: https://research-management.mq.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/45295033/Publisher_version_open_access_.pdf
- Perkins, M., Gezgin, U. B., & Roe, J. (2020). Reducing plagiarism through academic misconduct education. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 16, 1-15.
- Stoesz, B. M., & Yuditseva, A. (2018). Effectiveness of tutorials for promoting educational integrity: A synthesis paper. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 14(1), 22. doi:10.1007/s40979-018-0030-0