

Assessment Case Study

Combatting perceived academic misconduct on a Sino-UK commercial law program

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Course: LLB Commercial Law (Sino-UK Joint Programme)

Module: Advocacy (AD19/20S6)

Student Level: Undergraduate



AN EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT THAT INVOLVES...

- Tackling plagiarism
- Promoting assessment literacy

AIMS

This focus of this case study is a collaborative course which exists between CU and the South West University of Politics and Law (SWUPL) in Chongqing, China. Advocacy is a practical legal skills module with the assessment split between a courtroom application (worth 50% of the grade) and a written reflective/comparative piece of 2000 words.

The module is delivered to around 100 Chinese students. Some students were failing the assessment due to **perceived academic misconduct**, with large extracts of online text being copied into assignments, often without proper referencing. Various approaches were taken to try and combat this issue.

ACTIONS

Initially, a copy of the **referencing guide**, along with simple “warnings” about plagiarism, was made available to students. When the need for greater preventative measures was identified, the course team created a video, and an **accompanying quiz**, outlining the requirements of academic conduct. This led to some improvement in students’ work, but numerous problems persisted.

In the absence of appropriate guidance in the literature on educating students about academic misconduct, the lecturer collaborated with the **Centre for Academic Writing (CAW)** to create a “**plagiarism and poor source-work training programme**”. This included a new video resource which explains the different types of academic misconduct and how to avoid them, as well as guidance on choosing and using sources properly.

After viewing the video, students undertook an “**academic conduct task**” in which they identify problems with a sample piece of coursework and practice paraphrasing. Students received developmental “feed-forward” points from the lecturer on the basis of this task. Additionally, the assessment brief and criteria were revamped so that expectations were made clearer (e.g. the criteria now include referencing as a distinct theme).

IMPACT

Student attainment improved as a result of the changes –

there was much less reliance on poor sources than before and the amount of identified academic misconduct was 50% less for this particular module.

The real test came, however, with the English Legal System module whereby **only half the number of students failed** as had in the previous year due to the changes made. This is a great result for the course team and they are very grateful to George Ttoouli of CAW for his support. For info on CAW, CU staff can contact: writing.caw@coventry.ac.uk or visit: <https://libguides.coventry.ac.uk/cawlibcalhome>.

One thing that the lecturer aims to improve on in future is **giving more explanation** to the students of the purpose of general textbooks and how these should be used to reference basic information.

Both School management and colleagues in CAW praised the changes, highlighting that this more holistic approach to tackling plagiarism results in more **favourable outcomes** than the usual methods.

SCALABILITY

This practice is both sustainable and transferable, as the **approach taken could be followed by any discipline**, i.e. treat the cause and not the symptoms.



Screen shot of the video being produced. Image: A. Simmonds

MESSAGE TO PEERS

When it comes to tackling academic misconduct, **systematic training** is far more effective than merely issuing warnings. Educating students on how to avoid misconduct, and why this is so important, is much **more likely to enable** them to act appropriately than, for example, showing a quick PowerPoint slide about plagiarism.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL: See next page

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

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The quiz and the academic writing task that it was based on. Screen shots provided by Alex Simmonds.

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State	Finished
Completed on	Monday, 14 September 2020, 1:36 PM
Time taken	34 mins 48 secs
Marks	2.00/2.00
Grade	10.00 out of 10.00 (100%)

Question 1
Complete
Mark 1.00 out of 1.00
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For task 2 you were required to identify academic conduct problems with a piece of work. You must now list as many problems with that piece of work as you can in the space below. You may wish to watch the video on avoiding academic misconduct to help you with this.

1. There should be quotation mark besides " **the symbolic function of the jury far outweighs its use**".
2. "The jury is typically made up of twelve individuals who must evaluate the evidence offered in the court case" is copied from a website, there should be quotation mark beside this sentence.
3. The author uses lawteacher.net as reference, which is an unacademic website.

Your Task is to read over the work below and identify the problems with academic conduct and source work. You should be able to list at least 5 problems.

Hint: try searching for some of the text on the internet!

1. The famous English Judge, Lord Devlin, once said that juries are "*the lamp that shows that freedom lives*". Describe and evaluate the system of trial by Jury. Do you consider there to be more strengths than weaknesses? (1000 words)

Penny Darbyshire once wrote that the symbolic function of the jury far outweighs its practical significance.¹

In this essay it shall be argued that the jury system has more weaknesses than strengths. Adulation of the jury is based on no justification or spurious justification. It has fed public complacency with the English legal system and distracted attention from its evils: a systematic lack of due process pre-trial and post-trial and certain deficiencies in the trial process itself. It has distorted the truth. The truth is that for most people who pass through the criminal justice system this palladium is simply not available and for those who can and do submit themselves to its verdict, it will not necessarily safeguard their civil liberties. There are a number of disadvantages to having a trial by jury. As the people on a jury do not generally have a legal background, it is possible that they may not entirely understand complex legal documents or argument, or in-depth forensic evidence.

The jury is typically made up of twelve individuals who must evaluate the evidence offered in the court case. They must weigh and discuss discrepancies in the presentation of evidence.² Jurors are now selected by a Central Summoning Bureau at Blackfriars Crown Court³