"Plagiarism detection should be helpful rather than punitive"

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

A helpful pedagogical tool rather than a punitive detection system – this is how the University of Canberra sees use of an effective web based detection system to identify plagiarism in student essays. For three years now, the University has been using URKUND to identify textual similarities in work submitted by students.

Canberra University uses the plagiarism detection program URKUND as a tool for detection of plagiarism in student essays and research. Some might say it is being used to expose cheats, but the main reason is not detection and punishment. The university's academics see it rather as a tool in the learning process – a way of getting their students to learn more about copyright, correct listing of sources and reference techniques.

Arshad Hussanee of the University of Canberra sees major advantages in plagiarism detection. For the past three years the University has been using URKUND to identify textual correlations in essays and to train and guide its students in reference techniques and listing of sources.

Training in reference techniques important

"Our academics emphasise how seriously they take plagiarism. The students always get a thorough training in listing of sources and quotation techniques. They become aware that their work will be checked by URKUND, and teachers see the program as an aid in guiding students instead of punishing them," says Arshad Hussanee, the University of Canberra's Learn Online Manager.

And the implementation of URKUND has been effective. During the initial period of use of URKUND, the workload of many examining teachers increased. There was an increase in the proportion of student essays revealed as containing impermissible plagiarism. This provided important knowledge for preventive work.

"The number of students caught out using plagiarism at the University of Canberra increased dramatically to start with, but in the fullness of time we have seen a decrease in plagiarism. This indicates a big need to draw attention to the problem and the importance of training."

Highly preventive effect

The mere knowledge that student essays will be scrutinised by a powerful plagiarism detection program has proven to be very effective.

"The preventive objective of plagiarism detection is highly significant. When the students become aware of URKUND they are less inclined to seek shortcuts. Trying to cheat the system is ultimately more resource intensive than doing a good job from the start," says Arshad.

Arshad Hussanee thinks URKUND is a very user-friendly item of software, and this was crucial when it came to establishing the technology amongst the university's staff.

"When implementing a new approach it is important that the system be easy to use and that good support be provided, otherwise it will be hard to get everyone on board for the task."

Arshad Hussanee also sees a major advantage in URKUND being so easy to link to the learning platform used by the university (Moodle). Furthermore, there is no need to install complicated software, and the interface is extremely user friendly.

"The price, the user-friendliness, the support and the preventive effect are the biggest advantages of the plagiarism detection program URKUND. I have already recommended URKUND to other universities, thanks to its representing good value for money. And I'm extremely impressed by the support URKUND offers. It is of a higher level than I'm used to with web based services," says Arshad Hussanee.