

# **Supporting academic honesty in first year students through the embedding of VPASS**

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## **Abstract**

*To address issues of academic honesty, we trialled a version of supplemental instruction (or what we termed VPASS) in a senior core UG Unit of Study in the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Sydney in 2009. Feedback from students and participating staff indicated that while the information and VPASS method of peer learning was valuable, it would have been more appropriate to implement this program earlier as part of the first year experience.*

*To further refine the remaining challenges of the first study, a second pilot will be conducted in the same senior UG unit in 2010. The aim of the 2010 pilot is to fully embed two VPASS sessions into the course. This will give us the opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of the VPASS program, discover any pitfalls and adapt it for large scale implementation as part the first year foundational units of study in 2011. The aim of this session is in part to explore common issues around academic honesty that face students and academics in western institutions, as well as exploring how to manage the logistics of rolling out a program that works with a medium sized body of students (400) to suit the challenges of a very large intake of first year UG students (1,200).*

## **History of VPASS**

Video-based Supplemental Instruction (VSI- or in the Australian context VPASS) is a highly successful teaching strategy developed by Dr Robert Blanc over 20 years ago at the University of Missouri-Kansas City as an extension of the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS). A trained facilitator leads a group through a video presentation and small group assignments, giving them time to test their perceptions, practice and clarify concepts presented in a non threatening group learning environment. Given that the sessions are student driven, the pace of the session can be modified by the needs of the participants, and content can be reviewed more than once if needed. At the University of Missouri-Kansas City, VPASS has been implemented a broad range of disciplines and units including Calculus, Algebra, Chemistry, Physics, Western

Civilization and Critical thinking in the Arts (Martin & Arendale 1998; Arendale and McLaren 1999; Painter et al 2006)

### **VPASS in context**

VPASS has traditionally been used to address two particular needs: to offer students who do not have access to the physical space of a classroom the same opportunities to master content, and to address the needs of students who do not have foundational knowledge of the prerequisites of the study they are undertaking. Lack of foundational knowledge and skills, especially in the area of literacy and academic honesty has been a huge challenge for our Faculty over the past decade. Currently students in the Faculty can attend voluntary literacy lectures and workshops and/or seek one to one assistance

The aim of this project is to extend the repertoire of literacy support programs on offer to students by drawing on the PASS model which has more than proven its efficacy in our Faculty over the past few years. The project therefore has the potential to reach a large number of students and impact positively on their literacy development by combining proven PASS principles with VSI and a highly recognised approach to literacy known as scaffolding (Rose 2005; Martin & Rose 2005, 2007). This project is also part of a broader literacy initiative within the Faculty – one of the multiple interventions being piloted to assist students in developing the essential skills and competencies that are integral to the graduate attribute of communication.

The VPASS project is a two year piloted work in progress. It was first implemented as a voluntary pilot program in a senior undergraduate core unit of study in second semester of 2009. Student evaluation and focus groups suggested that they valued the information but thought that it should be available in their first semester of first year.

In terms of evaluating impact on student learning in the first pilot, there was only a marginal reduction in the number of plagiarism cases detected. The percentage of students who were detected remained the same however the severity of the nature of the plagiarism cases changed. For example, there were no incidences of duplicating Wikipedia or cutting and pasting entire documents.

### **Moving ahead with VPASS**

Before rolling out the program to a large undergraduate cohort of first year students it was decided to trial the *embedding* of VPASS into the same undergraduate senior unit of study and evaluate the efficacy of its full integration. So in semester one of 2010, the VPASS project will be rolled out and embedded as part of the course. Students will submit one section of their major assignment, a report, which will be passed through plagiarism detection software. Students who are identified as being ‘at risk’ will be asked to attend the two VPASS sessions using their submitted assessment as a point of reference for their workshop activities and discussions. The other students will also be given the opportunity to participate. Both VPASS sessions will be run in week seven during the normal lecture time. Students who chose not to attend the sessions will be encouraged to use the time to independently research their reports.

This will be the first time that the session will be completely embedded into a core unit of study. It is a pilot to check both the impact and the feasibility of rolling it out for a large scale first year cohort in 2011.

### **Questions**

1. What issues do you face in regards to Academic honesty?
2. What solutions have you tried/ are you planning on trying?
3. How can we take a program that embeds neatly into a core unit with a small number of students (400) and make it work for a large cohort of first year students (1,200)?

### **Session outline**

**Whole group discussion ice breaker** (5 mins): Consider the problems and current solutions in your institution for addressing academic honesty in first year subjects.

**Presenters** (5 minutes): Outline pilot of VPASS program, and how we intend to implement in a first year core unit.

**Paired discussion** (10 mins): Participants consider one or more of the following:

1. The potential issues arising with the transfer of a program from a small unit to a large unit of study
2. The potential of developing VPASS within your own institution/ opportunities for collaboration
3. How VPASS can enhance academic honesty understanding and use.
3. How to evaluate VPASS' success

**Presenters + Whole group discussion** (10 mins): Draw together ideas from participants – what has come up that has not been part of the local experience. Discuss if participants would consider/have considered / have implemented / similar initiatives within their own institutions or nationally.

## References

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