

Turnitin Survey 2018 – Report

Produced by the Learning and Teaching Office on behalf of the Learning and Teaching Committee (March 2019)

Turnitin offers two major functions, a similarity report that can assist in making judgements about academic integrity, and Feedback Studio, an online marking tool. Given the need for continuous evaluation of University software, academic staff were surveyed in late 2018 about their use of Turnitin. The response rate was not large (n=70), but evenly distributed between the Fremantle and Sydney campuses, with two responses from Broome.

Turnitin and Academic Integrity

Almost all respondents required assessments to be run through Turnitin, and 90% said that their primary reason for doing so was to check for potential breaches of academic integrity. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they also used the Turnitin report to educate students about academic integrity.

Comment: This is a pleasing result, as there is an increasing realisation in academia (Mphahlele & McKenna; 2019, Zaza & McKenzie, 2018) that there is an over-reliance on Turnitin for detecting plagiarism, especially given the rise of contract cheating, and that using Turnitin is a useful educative formative assessment tool. An educative, rather than a punitive approach has been more recently adopted by Notre Dame. The Notre Dame Academic Integrity Project (under the direction of the Learning and Teaching Committee Reference Group) will focus on an educative approach to plagiarism, so a measure of its success will be a rise in the number of academics using Turnitin primarily for education rather than detection.

Turnitin and Marking

Despite the fact that almost all those who responded asked students to submit their assessments through Turnitin, only 50% of staff members reported that they also used the software for marking. Over a third (36%) required students to submit their assessments twice, once to a Turnitin link and once to a Blackboard Assignment link, with the assessment being marked using the native Blackboard app. Nineteen percent of respondents still required students to submit a paper copy of their assessment in addition to the submission through Turnitin.

Reasons given for not using the Turnitin software (Feedback Studio) for marking were suspicions of its stability, unfamiliarity with it, and a preference for the functions of the native Blackboard Assignment marking capability. Turnitin did experience some performance issues during 2018, communicated to staff via the Blackboard landing page as they became apparent. However much of this lack of confidence is more a lack of familiarity with the software: “am constantly worried I will lose the work I do on it”; “marking is SOOO slow compared to marking on a hardcopy”. Those who find the format restrictive also made fair comments: “until the rubrics can provide a range for each criteria ... I will continue to use it for submitting draft papers only”; “Blackboard feedback mechanisms (are) more user friendly”. There may be a lack of familiarity issue at play here too as Turnitin offers feedback options not available in Blackboard Assignment. As such, it cannot be said that one is better for online marking than the other.

Comment: There are no institution wide recommendations on marking practice. Marking on paper can seem like the quickest option if that is what the staff member is used to. It would appear however, that this is not convenient for the students, many of whom must make a special journey to the University to submit and to

pick up their assessment. Online marking facilitates efficient and reliable delivery of assessment feedback to students, however if academics are to make an educated choice about their marking preferences, they need knowledge of their options (see conclusions below).

Turnitin and Continuing Professional Learning (CPL)

An open section asked what resources staff would like to have available and the most common request was for human interaction: “face to face sessions”; “a person to speak to directly”; “routine training for staff shortly before graded assessments are due”. Only 30% of respondents indicated that they had attended a Continuing Professional Learning (CPL) session at Notre Dame. Forty two percent reported that their most useful resource for learning more about Turnitin was colleagues, with only 8% citing the Learning and Teaching Office CPL page as being “most useful”. One respondent reported that they “resort to Googling the issue”, another that they “don’t know what other resources could be accessed”. Some of the CPL sessions were run by representatives of Turnitin rather than members of the LTO. A number of staff found this to be frustrating: “the presenter was not familiar with Blackboard”.

When asked what Turnitin functions they would like to know more about, 68% of respondents nominated using rubrics, half wanted to know more about using Feedback Studio and most interestingly 42% indicated that they would like to know more about using the Originality Reports – Turnitin’s text matching report. One respondent noted that “I had no guidance at all when I first commenced at Notre Dame as a sessional tutor”.

Comment: In 2018 the LTO changed its approach to delivery of CPL. Rather than campus wide “lunch time” workshops (that were generally poorly attended), the LTO is partnering with Schools/Areas to deliver bespoke sessions on Turnitin. A poster mirroring the Learning and Teaching Office CPL webpage has also been very recently produced and hard copies have been displayed in School staff areas which will hopefully raise awareness of existing support resources. In addition, the LTO has recently created a closed Facebook group for sessional academics by which staff will be notified of CPL opportunities.

Progress from Turnitin Introduction in 2016

A report on academics’ experience with Turnitin was produced at the end of the first semester after Turnitin was introduced (semester 1, 2016). It should be noted that in 2016 the submission of assignments to Turnitin was not nearly as widespread as it is now (while not mandatory, use of text-matching software is now very strongly encouraged, see the relevant [Guideline](#)). This means that respondents to the 2016 survey could be considered early adopters and not representative of the broader experience of academics at that time. Having said that, most academics in 2016, as in the 2018 survey, reported that they used Turnitin to both check for breaches of academic integrity and to educate their students about academic integrity. More of these early adopters used Turnitin for marking (72% versus 50% in 2018), but only 55% of the 2016 group found it easy to use and many had confidence issues and technical difficulties. Ten percent of the 2016 group required students to submit a paper copy of their assignment compared to 19% of the 2018 respondents. Almost 70% of the 2016 group reported that workshops provided by the LTO were useful, but they would also like “more training and support for staff”. The progress, then, that has been made since the introduction of Turnitin is its far more widespread use and fewer technical difficulties are experienced. Issues that remain are confidence in using the system for marking and not enough tailored face to face continuing professional learning.

Conclusion and recommendations

Turnitin is being widely used across the institution, at the very least for its text match reporting. However, the functions of Turnitin as a marking tool appear to be poorly understood and utilised by academics who responded to this survey. A more nuanced understanding of using Turnitin for formative assessment and educative purposes in ethical scholarship will be increasingly addressed by the Academic Integrity Project. In addition, the following is recommended:

- 1) The LTC consider developing an institutional approach to marking practice
- 2) Schools/Areas are encouraged to reach out to the LTO for tailored CPL in online marking to ensure the optimal use of this University investment and equipping academics with the knowledge to make the best choices for their students
- 3) Schools/Areas work with the LTO to ensure that all academics (including sessional staff) are familiar with the use of Blackboard
- 4) The LTO continue to commit to producing support materials and promoting and improving its CPL webpage and eResources
- 5) Sessions run by Turnitin are vetted by the LTO and promulgated appropriately
- 6) Academics are surveyed at the end of 2019 to determine possible trends
- 7) A report identifying the number of Blackboard course sites using Turnitin links in 2019 is provided to the LTC.

References

- Mphahlele, A., & McKenna, S. (2019). The use of Turnitin in the higher education sector: Decoding the myth. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, , 1-11. doi:10.1080/02602938.2019.1573971
- Zaza, C., & McKenzie, A. (2018). Turnitin® use at a Canadian university. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(2) doi:https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2018.2.4