

Developing a Moderation Community of Practice

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This paper reports on a study to evaluate technology-based processes for assessment moderation. The aim was to evaluate standard features found in an institutional Learning Management System, and their compatibility with the values and practices of a large teaching team. The process used an online discussion board forum for tutors, the pairing of more experienced tutors with those new to the process, and further meetings conducted in both face-to-face and web conferencing environments. Online rubrics were used for assessing student work and the provision of feedback. A focus group conducted after marking was concluded and the analysis of the discussion board forum demonstrated a strong community of practice with a shared understanding of assessment requirements.

Keywords: discussion board, rubric, assessment, moderation, online community of practice

Introduction

There are many challenges associated with managing quality in higher education. Amongst these are moderating assessments and the provision of feedback to students studying in different locations and modes of study and necessitating the coordination of large teaching teams (ALTC, 2010, 2012; Kuzich, Groves, O'Hara, & Pelliccione, 2010). Drivers include a desire to offer timely and consistent feedback to students in a manner contributing to student learning, and consistent with institutional policy (Curtin University, 2012) and the expectations of regulatory agencies (TEQSA, 2012) and accreditation bodies (AACSB, 2012).

Background

Moderation aims to ensure the consistency of assessment and feedback provided to students (ALTC, 2012). Despite having marking criterion and rubrics that outline assessment expectations, variation in marking is known to be a common issue. In part, this is due to the tacit knowledge that individual markers bring to the assessment process (Bloxham, 2009; Hunter & Docherty, 2011). While controlled studies have shown that marking briefings and training can reduce the variation between markers (Crotwell Timmerman, Strickland, Johnson, & Payne, 2011), there is evidence that this should include group activities and discourse that fosters the emergences of an assessment community of practice (Price, 2005). Such a community would ordinarily rely less on transmitted knowledge, and operate with the goal of developing a shared understanding of assessment expectations.

Research Context

This study evaluates processes that use standard online features of an institutional Learning Management System to moderate assessments outcomes, provide feedback to students, and report on the level to which students have attained intended learning outcomes. This investigation was part of a larger study to evaluate how technology currently in use at the authors' institution could be used to support ongoing assurance of learning initiatives. Work is reported here in the context of using technology that is compatible with the existing values and practices for assessment moderation used in a large first year communication unit. This unit is taught in multiple locations in the business faculty of an Australian university.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of introducing technology into the moderation process with respect to the development of a:

- community of practice amongst the teaching staff associated with a large undergraduate unit;
- shared understanding of marking criterion; and
- consistent approach to the provision of student feedback.

There are typically up to 52 staff and 2,300 students associated with the unit that was the subject of this study during any one study period. It is conducted in multiple face-to-face locations and fully online. Students complete two written assignments and give an oral presentation. All assignments are submitted and marked using a rubric through the assignment manager of the Blackboard 9.1 Learning Management System (LMS).

A range of strategies has been employed to ensure the consistency of marking and the provision of student feedback. Key to this has been encouraging a team approach to marking based on a moderation processes that pairs new and veteran tutors and uses online tools that are embedded in the LMS. The electronic moderation process commences with the posting of a past student paper submitted by the Unit Coordinator to a discussion board forum on the dedicated staff LMS site. This is known as the 'pre-moderation process'. This process commences one week before an assignment is due. All tutors are requested to review the paper that has had all identifying information removed. Tutors are specifically requested to provide feedback that is:

- clear, direct and prescriptive;
- focused on meaningful aspects of the task including content, level of analysis and text structure;
- targeted global feedback that explains the mark relating to the rubric and specific to the task;
- not focused on surface features such as spelling, grammar and referencing conventions; and
- reflects both positive areas of student performance as well as areas needing improvement.

Once the tutor has marked the sample paper and submitted the marked work to the staff-only online discussion forum, they are requested to comment on at least one other tutor's mark and feedback within the forum. At the end of the process, the Unit Coordinator posts a summary on the forum. This summary outlines the key consensus areas, points to consider when marking, and expectations in regards to the quantity and focus of feedback. The pre-moderation process is asynchronous and spans seven days.

The moderation community of practice is further developed in a follow up meeting, conducted in both face-to-face and web conferencing environments. The focus is to discuss outcomes arising from the pre-moderation process and the summary posted by the Unit Coordinator. The goal is to develop consensus and a shared understanding regarding assessment objectives and the manner in which feedback is to be provided.

Upon the conclusion of the pre-moderation process and the commencement of the marking period, tutors are partnered with another tutor. New tutors are paired with a veteran tutor. A veteran tutor is defined as one who has completed all prior training sessions and at least one semester of teaching experience in the unit. Novice tutors may have prior teaching experience, but are new to the unit. During the marking period, tutors are encouraged to send questions or examples to their "moderation buddy" via email or to post these to the discussion board moderation forum.

Upon receipt of students' assignments, tutors are given four days to mark three papers and include student feedback using the online rubric tool, which is a standard feature of the LMS. The Unit Coordinator provides individual feedback to each tutor via email before the remainder of the assessments are marked.

The use of rubrics in this unit is not new. They have been an integral part of the marking process for the past five study periods using an MS Word-based marking form and feedback sheet. Previously, tutors would append an annotated rubric to each student's assignment along with relevant feedback. The level of attainment was indicated by highlighting a descriptor at a given attainment level in a specified colour, and providing feedback by copy-and-pasting from a bank of common feedback statements.

Commencing in Semester 1, 2012, marking and the provision of student feedback was conducted entirely online using the LMS rubric tool. Tutors indicated the level of attainment by clicking in the appropriate cell of the online rubric. Marks were not directly computed based on this, so as to focus student attention on feedback rather than the mark awarded for individual rubric criterion. Instead, the tutors awarded one mark for the assignment as a whole. Global feedback was provided to justify the overall mark via text or via an attached audio file. Additional feedback could also be supplied in a text box at the level of individual rubric criterion and level descriptors.

In previous study periods, the pre-moderation process required tutors to email marked samples as part of the

pre-moderation process, rather than using the discussion board. Tutors would utilise email to communicate or attend 'round table' discussion meetings open to anyone who wished to discuss marking concerns. These were not compulsory meetings but rather took place in an organised venue for tutors to meet during the marking period.

Reporting on the affordances and limitations of using an online discussion board to share tacit knowledge during the pre-moderation process, and the extent to which the online rubric tool is consistent with established marking and moderation workflows are the principal contributions reported in this paper.

Methodology

The study adopted a triangulation mixed methods design to “simultaneously collect both qualitative and quantitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand the research problem” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Tutors participated in a focus group where semi-structured questions were asked. The research questions were designed to elicit the challenges and benefits that tutors experienced in terms of making the transition from a marking rubric implemented in an MS Word document to using the online rubric tool. Additionally, the challenges of interpreting learning goal statements and level descriptors were investigated. Tutors were asked to reflect on the impact of using technology on the student and academic workflow and on the quality of feedback provided to students. An articulation of the interviewees' reflections on their experience was made as complete as possible by following up with probing questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Focus group data were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software.

Learning analytics is defined as “the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimizing learning and the environments in which it occurs” (SoLAR, 2011). Analyses of quantitative data included the application of SNAPP, a learning analytics tool that visualises the network of interactions resulting from LMS discussion forums. Tutor posts from pre-moderation discussions related to an assignment (n=47) from the staff-only LMS site were used to explore data interrelationships. Visual representations were developed in order to ascertain the nodal connections between tutors. The names used in these visualisations and quotes in the analysis of discussion board posts have been randomised to protect the identity of participants.

Additionally, student data for the first written assignment (n=1027) were extracted from the LMS and the distribution of attainment levels were evaluated.

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the authors' institution.

Results

There were 41 tutors involved in this unit during the study period reported in this study. Of these 34% (n=14) were men, and 66% (n=27) were women. All of the tutors taught in the blended delivery mode, except 1 tutor who taught in a fully online delivery mode. There were 24 tutors (59%) who posted in the tutor-only pre-moderation discussion board forum. Of those participating in pre-moderation exercise, 100% (n=24) posted a mark and feedback on the sample student paper, and 78% (n=18) offered feedback on the marked sample posted by at least one of their peers. There were 46% (n=19) members of the tutor community who participated in the focus group, held during an end-of-semester debriefing meeting.

Results arising from the analysis of the pre-moderation discussion board form and the focus group are given below, along with the levels of attainment distribution for the assignment.

Pre-moderation in the Online Discussion Board

The pre-moderation discussion board pattern of participation and interaction pattern for assignment 1 is shown in Figure 1. Each red square represents a tutor, and each arrow represents a discussion board post in response to another member of the teaching team.

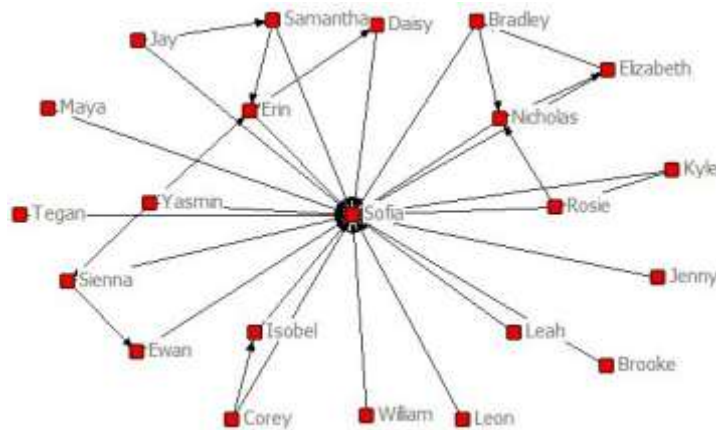


Figure 1: Pre-moderation discussion board participation and interaction.

Most of the posts contained reviews in which tutors applied the marking rubric to the sample paper posted by Sofia, the Unit Coordinator, as part of the pre-moderation exercise. Other posts fell into one of several categories described below.

Confirmation of findings and areas of agreement

In responding to Erin’s review and feedback, Daisy wrote, “I like Erin’s approach to this feedback. Her comments are positive and helpful. Erin also commented on the student’s strength’s and weaknesses and recommended places where the student can find further help in academic writing.” Yasmin agreed, supplying a bit more detail in her response to Erin: “I like the way you have structured your feedback. You have identified a number of positive points in the first paragraph that would encourage the scholar to take overall feedback into account for the next assignments.”

Suggestions for improving student feedback

Corey reported that he found many of the same issues identified by Isobel in her review, but offered suggestions on ways she could improve her review. He posted, “I picked up a lot of the same things you did with this example. The student obviously faced issues with the mechanics and execution of language, which unfortunately interfered with their argument construction and clarity. I did appreciate the fact that they had put some effort toward the structure though. My feedback for your example would be to try and find some positive aspects to comment on the written feedback section, and put them first. Hopefully students will have something positive to take away from their efforts, and a good set of feedback from which to receive further coaching”. It is interesting to note that Corey is modelling the advice given to Isobel in his post to her. That is, he starts his post by offering positive feedback before offering suggestions regarding how she could improve her feedback.

Points of disagreement and ensuing discussion

Ewan, a veteran tutor, posted “I have attached the marked sample. I will comment on Sienna’s when it appears as she wanted to be my moderation buddy.” Interestingly, while Sienna responded to Ewan, he never responded to her assessment of the sample assignment. In part, this was because the novice tutor had disagreed with Ewan, who was the veteran tutor which whom she was paired. Although she starts her post by identifying points of agreement with Ewan, she continues, ” Not having time to proof read is no excuse and I feel the referral to the Comm[unication] Skills Centre is necessary. I’m not sure I agree with the high mark you have given this scholar. I feel this level of academic writing and lack of research in the reference list is not worthy of a credit pass.” Because Siena disagreed with Ewan, they chose to continue their communication privately via email instead of the more public discussion forum. Sofia, the Unit Coordinator, eventually intervened and moderated a broader discussion on the points being discussed by this veteran/novice pair at the next tutor meeting. Ewan, the veteran tutor, changed his view following the moderated synchronous meeting with his peers. These meetings are held face-to-face and simultaneously via web conferencing for the benefit of remote staff.

Aligning assessment feedback with the rubric

Several posts emphasised the importance of linking feedback to the marking rubric. For example, Brook posted the following in response to Jenny: “ I like how the overall feedback is given in a positive attitude. It would even be more helpful for the scholar if he/she was given insights on why he/she had ‘pass’ on the first two columns [of the marking rubric], which would increase her understandings on the unit and he/she would be able to carry this forward to the second assignment.”

Communication outside of the discussion board

There were instances in which posts referred to communication taking place amongst tutors outside of the discussion board. For example, Yasmin posted the following in response to Erin: “As we discussed earlier on Facebook, our marking is quite similar...” Similarly, an obvious absence of posts was due to communication that shifted to email, or that was brought to the subsequent tutor meeting conducted face-to-face and via web conferencing. The later became evident following Sienna’s post outlining her disagreement with Ewan’s assessment that was noted previously.

The importance of making student referrals to the Faculty’s Communication Skills Centre

In response to cases where a tutor focused their review on correcting grammar, sentence structure, and referencing, some posts suggested that a better approach would be to refer students to the Faculty organisation responsible for assisting students in improving their written and oral communication skills. For example, Rosie posted the following in response to Corey’s review: “Correction of the grammar issues in the introduction seems generous given the volume of marking when we go ‘live’. I’m not sure if it will improve the student’s future performance in academic writing. It is more likely that intervention by the Communication Skills Centre as Corey recommends will improve the student’s English skills.” Similarly, Brooke posted the following in response to Jenny’s review: “Given the level of urgency (the scholar scores a ‘fail’ on language and convention), it would be better to strongly emphasise the necessity to look for assistance.”

Feedback and Levels of Attainment

Figure 2 shows a sample of the feedback provided to students using the online rubric tool and the descriptors associated with each range. The level of attainment for each assessment criteria is indicated, along with the associated descriptor. In this instance, the tutor has provided feedback to the student to justify the level awarded for each criterion, along with global feedback. Positive aspects of the assessment are indicated, along with suggestions for improvement.

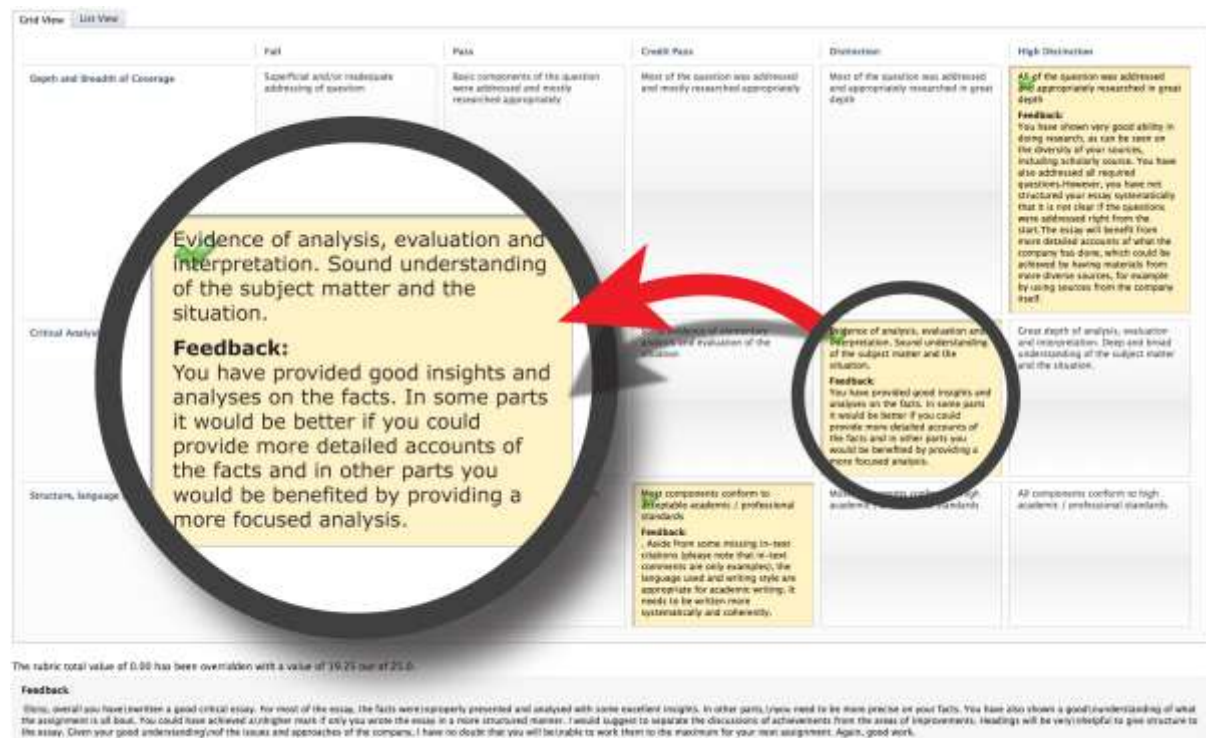


Figure 2: Feedback associated with each level of attainment in addition to global feedback

Levels of attainment for the entire cohort following moderation are shown in Table 1. The table shows the distribution across Fail (F), Pass (P), Credit (CR), Distinction (D), and High Distinction (HD) grade ranges. Within the Faculty of Business at the authors’ institution, Fail is an unsatisfactory level of attainment, whereas Pass and Credit levels denote that a student has met the stated learning objectives, and Distinction and High Distinction levels denote that they have exceeded these expectations.

Table 1: Percentage of students performing at each level of attainment

Rubric Criteria	Levels of Attainment				
	F	P	CR	D	HD
Depth and breadth of coverage	10%	26%	33%	22%	9%
Critical analysis	11%	25%	37%	22%	5%
Structure, language, conventions	13%	24%	36%	21%	6%

The rubric was used as a framework for providing student feedback. In this instance, the rubric was not used to directly compute the overall mark awarded. However, the observed distribution for the levels of attainment is generally consistent with expectations, with the majority of student falling into the pass and credit bands.

Analysis of the Tutor Moderation Focus Group Data

Following the completion of marking, a formal focus group was held as a debriefing activity in conjunction with a regularly scheduled tutor meeting. Common themes identified related to the nature of multiple pathways for tutor-tutor interaction and the varied mechanism used by the tutor community to interact. The type of information tutors exchanged related not only to provision of rubric-focused feedback, but also included information about successful workflows given the idiosyncrasies of the online technologies being introduced for marking and the provision of feedback.

Multiple Pathways for Tutor-Tutor Interaction and Information Exchange

A variety of formal and informal communication pathways were available to the tutor community, including the tutor-only discussion board, veteran/novice moderation partner pairings, and moderated discussions during formal meeting. Together, these provided multiple opportunities for peer interaction and the flow of information between tutors. The collegiate and routine manner in which tutors shared information through these many channels was a common theme that emerged from the focus group. For example, commenting on information exchange between members of the teaching team, Sofia stated: “[the community shared information] through the tutors, hats off to them. They were talking to each other and letting each other know, I’ve learnt this in conversations. And when people would raise questions I’d be learning too, so I would be, ‘I’ll try this. I’ve just learned this.’ So imparting that information on an individual basis.”

Interestingly, there was evidence that the flow of information between paired veteran/novice moderation partners flowed in both directions. That is, veteran tutors learning from their more junior counterparts and other members of the tutor community. For example, during the focus group, one novice tutor said, “I learned a lot from her” in reference to the veteran counterpart with whom she was paired. The veteran tutor responded by saying, “I learned more from you.” Other examples of veteran tutors learning from other members of the community or adapting their viewpoint were also identified elsewhere in this study. Recall the experience of Ewan and Sienna in their disagreement regarding the mark they awarded the sample paper during the pre-moderation exercise. As has been noted, Ewan, the veteran tutor, changed his view to that of Sienna, the novice tutor, following a discussion with theirs peers that was moderated by the Unit Coordinator during a formal tutor meeting.

In some cases, it was reported that the interaction between veteran/novice moderation partners extended beyond email, discussion boards, and formal meetings. During the focus group, for example one participant said “Jenny and I are marking buddies, so we made it a habit to meet on each assignment, just take one day and discuss everything.”

However, some tutors reported working alone, but later coming together to share information at the formal meetings, held face-to-face and simultaneously through web conferencing. For example, one tutor said: “Yeah, we had that first meeting and then after that it was very much off you go. We have another meeting after you met [the first time]. We caught up but we all were learning on the job like, for instance, put your grading first [before entering feedback in the LMS rubric tool]. None of us knew that. So a lot of it was learning on the job, me included.”

For some tutors, the pre-moderation process conducted in the discussion board was an important exercise. It illustrated the potential for marking variation in the absence of a shared understanding regarding the meaning of marking descriptors, and fostered dialog amongst tutors that informed their marking. For example, during the focus group, one tutor reported that “... we put the paper up and then everyone can look at the paper and mark it to give some feedback. And there were some wide ranging marks for some of those papers. And there was

quite a lot of discussion before we actually starting marking.”

The provision of rubric-focused feedback

In general, tutors in the focus group reported being comfortable interpreting assessment rubric descriptors. In part, this may be because rubrics have been used in this unit for the past five teaching periods, but also because they were the focus of discussion using the various formal and informal communication pathways available to the tutor community. One tutors said, “I found the descriptors fine. I mean, they’re really basically an outline between the five distinctions between terrible and brilliant and you interpret it how you interpret it, I guess. And we didn’t have any problems. I guess we have similar thoughts on what the descriptors [mean]...”

Focus group comments like these reflect, in part, that the online rubric tool was configured to support the provision of feedback against levels of achievement for individual assessment criterion, rather than as a means for calculating and allocating a mark. That is, tutors were instructed to provide feedback based on each rubric criterion and associated level descriptors, but the final mark was not directly computed on the basis of this. In part, this was an intentional part of the assessment design. The aim was to focus student attention on the feedback they received, rather than on the number of marks awarded for attainment of each criterion at a given level. One tutor described a process in which he referred to the descriptors rather than the titles for the corresponding level of attainment, the latter of which better reflect the nomenclature associated with a mark band (e.g. Fail, Pass, Credit, Distinction High Distinction). He said, “I went to the grade related descriptor and checked to see if the paper satisfied that, within those parameters.... I probably kept that more in my head than the titles that were on the rubric.”

“My biggest problem,” said one tutor, “it’s got nothing to do with the rubric... [My biggest problem] is working out the workflow. That’s taken me a couple of hours to fathom out which is the best process for me.” The rubric tool, for example, prescribed a particular workflow that some found to be problematic. “The problems that I had for quite a few days was I didn’t want to put the grade in,” said on tutor. “I wanted to put the [feedback] comments in but it wouldn’t save my comments until I’d put my grade in because my comments were always going to stay. My grade, I just wanted to mark a few first before, to give myself an idea of where they were on a scale. And the rubric wouldn’t allow me to do that. I spent absolutely hours trying to work out what I was doing wrong. I thought I was totally incompetent.” Later, following consultation with a senior tutor, he learned that there was a prescribed order to the operations he was trying to perform.

Some tutors described how the online rubric tool assisted them in providing feedback that was aligned with the rubric descriptors. For example, one tutor said, “I’d always click on ‘show description’ and ‘show our feedback,” so viewed it in a way that I could see my feedback as I was entering it in. And I guess, for me, as a first marker, it was structuring my feedback into those three criterias [sic].”

Although the assessment rubric was intended to guide the provision of feedback rather than the calculation of an overall mark, it was clear that at least some tutors used it for the later. For example, one tutor said: “... I used three [rubric criterion] sections independently and gave feedback on three sections independently. So I marked them all at 33.3 effectively. So if they were a distinction in this area I had a comment on why, so it did relate to that content on the rubric. And the same with the middle component and the same with the language structure, so some I might have had a fail with the language but a pass in the other two areas or some were even a credit, pass, distinction. But it averaged out to their grade, so I didn’t find that a problem at all because I marked the independent sections.” One participant expressed concern that if the assessment rubric had been used for calculating the mark rather than guiding the provision of feedback alone that it may have skewed the results distribution. He said: “I think if we just marked basically, responded to those descriptors, we wouldn’t have given out very many high distinctions. Because it talks about ... I can’t even remember the words but they’re words that preclude much of the material that was submitted. But we’d have to interpret that material in the context of where these students are at and within their cohort. So exceptional or exceeds academic standards, or whatever the words are...”

Workflow and technology issues

A significant portion of the focus group discussion centred on issues related to how technology impacted workflow and the provision of feedback. Issues included the order of operations and the time taken to provide feedback using the online rubric tool, and the process for providing audio feedback for tutors who chose to supply their feedback in that format.

There was disagreement amongst the tutors regarding the length of time that it took to mark. “So basically we are given 15 minutes to do a marking and this clearly exceeds 15 minutes,” said one tutor. While some agreed,

others did not. While individual tutor competence with information technology-based tools may be a factor in this, workflow was also seen to impact the time it took to mark each assessment. One tutor said, "...I found that I was creating my own bank of [feedback] comments and that sometimes I'd pull them together, this bit from there and that bit from there." This was reminiscent of an approach that had been taken during previous teaching periods when an MS Word version of the rubric was used in conjunction with a bank of common feedback statements that could be cut-and-pasted into the correct place on the rubric feedback sheet that was returned to students. The Unit Coordinator commented that the unit had moved away from using a centralized bank of tutor feedback statements, as it had grown too large to be practical, was too impersonal, and not in the tutor's own voice or style. "So that big bank of comments that we've previously had in the previous version didn't always suit the tutors," she said. "Because some would look at it and just go, 'I can't make that comment. It's obviously not from me. This is from a middle aged woman making a comment, or a middle aged guy'."

All tutors supplied students with global feedback, guided by the level of attainment they had selected for each assessment criterion in the online rubric. Some tutors also provided feedback at the detail of each rubric cell to further justify why the assessment was deemed to demonstrate performance at particular level. This difference in workflow may have contributed to variation in the time to mark an assignment in some cases. "... I think there's a bit of a misunderstanding. You don't have to give comments on every box in the rubric, as far as I understand," said one tutor. She continued saying, "One global comment is fine in the selection of the areas. So it's actually a time saver because you don't need to copy and paste the rubric and then go to Word and click the different colour to highlight it [as was done when we used the MS Word rubric in the past]. You just click three times..."

Discussion

The educational design of the unit in this study involved engaging students through a variety of communication channels and activities that use technologies like Facebook, Twitter, Hotseat and Voicethread. These were used alongside more traditional forms of communication and engagement that included classroom-based discussions and group presentations. As described in the Unit Outline, co-curricular participation in the activities of the student Debate Society encouraged to assist students to further develop their communication skills. To a great extent, providing students with multiple learning experiences and modes of engagement was an intentional part of the educational design of the unit. This approach was based on research that shows that students tend to gravitate to different kinds of learning resources and experiences based on individual learning styles and preferences (Allert, 2004). It was also based on the philosophy that it is best to provide a range of these to suit the needs of a diverse cohort (von Kinsky, Ivins, & Gribble, 2009). This same philosophy has transcended the boundaries between student and learning facilitator, leading to a range of communication and interaction strategies designed to engage a diverse tutor community while fostering a team approach to marking and assessment.

Just as students gravitate towards those activities that match their individual learning styles, preferences, and perceived learning needs, so to did members of the tutor community. For example, the focus group demonstrated that some veteran tutors had the capacity and ongoing desire to improve their skills and learn from other members of the community, including from their more junior peers. In contrast, other veteran tutors demonstrated a "know-it" attitude, and felt less inclined to participate in community exercises having participated in similar activities during prior semesters. Encouraging these veteran tutors to remain active participants in ongoing tutor community activities remains a challenge in some cases.

Additionally, tutors generally possess a variety of attitudes regarding the use of technology (Dooly, 2009; Kessler, 2007). This can be due to a variety of factors including gender, confidence (Guichon & Hauck, 2011) and the amount of time a tutor has been working in the role. The extent to which a tutor's level of information technology competence impacts participation in the pre-moderation discussion board activity is unclear, and represents an opportunity for further research. Interestingly, the tutor responsible for the fully online implementation of the unit discussed in this study did not participate in the pre-moderation discussion board forum.

Whilst a strong collegial team exists, an element of resistance to the introduction of the new technology was evident in the present study. New tutors generally accepted that the technology was required to complete their role. At the onset of the present semester, however, the Unit Coordinator noted that some veteran tutors expressed a preference for continuing to use the old MS Word-based assessment rubric. The intention was to address this by emphasising the benefits of using the new tool during a training workshop. Indeed, Despont-Gros, Mueller and Lovis (2005) suggest that acceptance of change and the successful use a new information

system is better achieved if it is perceived to have a positive impact upon an individual's work. Consequently, the training workshop emphasised how the new technology was to be employed on an operational basis and with respect to the management of workload. This included a presentation on the online rubric tool and a live demonstration provided by a University expert. The relevance of the online rubric tool was also discussed in the larger context of the business faculty's Assurance of Learning initiative.

Despite this training, the workflow employed by individual tutors and the impact of the rubric tool on marking time was seen to vary. To some extent, this may be because the online rubric tool was not used in conjunction with the pre-moderation exercise. Instead, tutors appended a marked up MS Word version of the rubric to the sample of prior student work, as was the practice in prior semesters. This placed the emphasis on the feedback tutors provided on the past student paper in the exercise and was easy to implement in the context of the discussion board. However, this did not provide hands-on exposure to the new online rubric tool, or an opportunity for tutors to discuss the workflow associated with the new technology based on personal experience prior to the commencement of marking.

That is not to say that implementing the pre-moderation exercise in the discussion board was unsuccessful. The new version retained the original activity in which tutors practiced marking and providing feedback on the prior student paper. In previous semesters, tutors sent their assessment and feedback on the paper to the Unit Coordinator. She later summarised the feedback of the entire tutor team before they began marking. In this sense, the discussion board version of the pre-moderation exercise was consistent with the values and practices of previous semesters. However, in the original version of the exercise there were no structured opportunities for tutors to interact or discuss the exercise as a community. Implementing the activity within the discussion board extended the exercise to one that fostered interaction and discussion amongst the tutor community. Individual tutors still provided a mark and feedback on the prior student paper, but were effectively given the responsibility of analysing the contributions of their peers for the benefit of the entire community, which was originally a responsibility solely vested in the Unit Coordinator.

Participation rates in the new version of the exercise were very encouraging, with 78% of those posting their assessment and feedback on the past student paper also commenting on at least one post made by a peer. While not all tutors posted within the forum, the extent to which lurkers may have benefited from reading the posts of their peers is not clear, nor is the extent to which this may have informed the offline dialog amongst veteran/novice moderation pairs. This highlights the need for periodic synchronous meetings, whether they occur face-to-face or via web conferencing, as an opportunity to consolidate community views and share the interactions that have taken place both within and outside the discussion board forum. Increasing participation rates amongst all members of the community will remain a goal of the exercise, as it is adapted in future semesters.

Moreover, implementing a robust moderation process has been a goal of this unit, with the aim to provide students with more consistent, timely, reliable and relevant feedback. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this has led to a significant reduction in appeals and discussion amongst students about mark variation, and represents an opportunity for further research. The collection of meaningful analytics that demonstrate the effectiveness of the evolving moderation process and the quality of its outcomes will remain also an important consideration as the moderation process evolves. This is not only because of the teaching and learning implications, but also to demonstrate compliance with university policies (Curtin University, 2011) and the expectations of regulatory agencies (TEQSA, 2012) and accrediting bodies (AACSB, 2012).

Conclusions

The use of assessment rubrics has the potential to reduce the time taken to mark assignments while providing more consistent feedback to students. However, the present study has illustrated the importance of establishing efficient workflows based on the experience and shared expertise of the tutor community, particularly when it involves the introduction of new technologies like the online assessment rubric.

Moreover, the research presented in this paper corroborates prior work demonstrates the value of marking briefings and tutor training (Crotwell Timmerman, et al., 2011), and of group activities and discourse that fosters the emergence of a moderation community of practice (Price, 2005).

This paper has described a moderation community of practice that provides members of the community multiple opportunities for interaction and engagement. The goal has been to foster a community of practice in which all members of the community take responsibility for the consistency and quality of the feedback provided to

students. This reflects the evolution of moderation processes in a unit where there has been a culture of open communication amongst the tutor community for several semesters.

The establishment of the pre-moderation discussion forum was seen as an extension of this culture. It was not the intention to extinguish tutor interaction through other communication paths, nor has it. The data suggest that tutors engage with the established processes and interaction opportunities to varying degrees. Formalising participation expectations, establishing mechanisms to share tacit knowledge and managing offline communication within the wider tutor community will remain an ongoing challenge for the Unit Coordinator.

The pre-moderation discussion board forum was designed to complement existing moderation strategies and provide a range of opportunities to meet the needs of a diverse tutor community. The analysis of the discussion board forum and of the focus group held during the end of semester debriefing has provided data that will inform future iterations of these processes as the moderation community of practice described in this paper continues to evolve in future semesters.

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