

## Stakeholder Summary

### Integrating Online Writing Assistance into the Classroom Creates Challenges

In an effort to improve writing skills, the Writing Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University developed a series of free online resources and tools for students. However, a recent study by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) found that even when integrated into the classroom experience, only a small number of students actually used the tool as they felt it was not relevant to them, and those who did saw no impact on their grades. The authors feel further research is needed into how to best integrate the service into the classroom, including potentially assigning grades for its use.

#### Project Description

Wilfrid Laurier University's online assignment planner (AP) gives students access to timelines, resources and advice for information gathering, citations and effective writing. *Writing Instruction Using an Online Assignment Planner* examined students in four large first-year classes and one fourth-year seminar class. Students from the large first-year programs were randomly assigned to either a group with explicit integration of the AP into classroom activities, or a control group with no integration. The study tracked the number of times students accessed the AP, writing marks, conducted in-class surveys and professor interviews.

#### Findings

Only 5-15% of students accessed the AP tool and of those who did, less than 20% used it more than once. Integration of the tool into the classroom did not result in an increase in the number of students using the service. However, students in an AP integrated classroom who did use the resources used them more frequently than those in the control group.

While no correlation was found between use of the AP and improvement in writing grades, the perception of the tool by those who used it, both students and professors, was positive. One of the common reasons given for not using the AP was that students, particularly fourth-year students, felt it was only for students with poor skills and did not feel it was relevant to them. Students suggested that if marks were assigned for use of the tool they would be more likely to use it.

Both students and professors found the integration of the AP into the classroom was problematic. Students said they received little guidance or support in how to properly use it, while professors had a wide range of expectations for students' writing skills and each integrated the tool differently.

The study recommends further research into the supports that could be offered to professors to help integrate the tool into classes, including possibly assigning partial grades for AP use.

*Writing Instruction Using an Online Assignment Planner was prepared by Boba Samuels, Kelly McDonald and Emmy Misser from Wilfrid Laurier University.*