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Fighting Plagiarism One Teacher At A Time

The University of Iowa needed to address the problem of plagiarism, but they were realistic about how quickly they could achieve widespread adoption of any solution. They introduced Turnitin to the faculty in 2002 with just a



At a Glance

To ensure steady adoption, the University of Iowa focused on making it easy for professors to adopt the tool. The three key elements of their adoption plan were:

- *Training* - Regular training sessions at the start of each semester allowed interested professors to see if Turnitin was right for their own class.
- *Support* - With convenient phone and email support available, Professors always have the help they needed when they needed it.
- *Information* - A local Turnitin specialist is available to meet with departments to discuss Turnitin, answer any questions, dispel any misconceptions, and simplify adoption.

few professors participating, but by combining a little bit of patience with plenty of support, training, and word of mouth, they've watched usage grow slowly but steadily to over 100 active professors.

Finding a Campus-wide Solution to Plagiarism

When the Provost's office at the University of Iowa wanted to address the problem of plagiarism, they called Ken Clinkenbeard, a project coordinator with the university's ITS-Academic Technologies office. As a specialist in classroom technologies, Clinkenbeard has plenty of experience driving innovations up the adoption curve. He was therefore realistic about how quickly this would happen: "These things take their own time. My job is to plant the seed and let nature take its course."

Nurturing the Technology Adoption Curve

After a search of available technologies, ITS-Academic Technologies chose Turnitin, based in part on its ease of implementation and ease of use. When introducing any new technology, Clinkenbeard stresses the importance of avoiding as many roadblocks as possible, such as the need to install special software or learn a complex program. "Turnitin had the right level of sophistication, but was very much turn-key, and that was important to us."

Turnitin Success Story

University of Iowa

Although some professors were wary of new technologies and slow to incorporate Turnitin into their regular classroom workflow, it did not stop the introduction of Turnitin from having an immediate impact at the University. Because students knew their papers could potentially be checked, plagiarism rates dropped dramatically across the board, even though initial upload totals were not particularly high.

Just as important as avoiding roadblocks is creating an infrastructure that supports easy adoption. ITS-Academic Technologies created a phone and email support channel, a regular training calendar, and dispatched Clinkenbeard to give talks to interested departments. Beyond that, they focused on letting adoption happen naturally.

According to Clinkenbeard, this is the best approach when introducing a new technology to professors, because many of them will only be convinced about a new technology when they hear positive reports from their colleagues. “This is the case with any sort of technology adoption. You can promote it all you want, but some people just won’t start using it until they hear about it from Minnie down the hall.”

“Our first job is to find a technology that solves a problem and works the way it’s supposed to. Beyond that it’s really all about making it available and letting adoption happen naturally.”

Ken Clinkenbeard, Program Coordinator for Classroom Technologies, University of Iowa

Achieving Widespread Use

After the initial launch, there wasn’t a rush to start using it among the professors, but slowly and certainly, usage rose across the campus. Teaching assistants began using Turnitin to stop students from sharing work across sections. Single professors would start using it, and that would drive adoption across whole departments. The word got around.

Over the three years since its introduction at the University, the number of professors using the tool has risen from just a few to over 100, and the number of papers uploaded has risen from a handful that first semester to over a thousand last semester.

But even these upload statistics don’t tell the whole story. Many professors at the University only upload suspicious papers, but they tell their students that the uploaded paper could be their own. According to Clinkenbeard, that by itself is a powerful deterrent against plagiarism: “It doesn’t matter what the upload statistics say, Turnitin starts working that very first day in class.”