Supporting Students Beyond the Course

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In previous sessions, we have seen...

- What student support responsibilities tutors, demonstrators and TAs have, and their limits
- What tutors could do to help students develop study skills in order to prevent poor presentation, incomplete work and plagiarism in coursework
- Briefly, how tutors and demonstrators could help students develop problem solving skills
- An enumeration of some sources of support in our university
Schedule

• Why is support beyond the contents of the course important for students?
• Support boundaries
• **Academic support** - How can we help students develop their study and related skills, especially if relevant for assignments? What do the Personal Tutoring System and Institute for Academic Development (IAD) offer?
• **Personal support** - Which university services should we direct students to? Focus on those which are more relevant to us.
• General tips and tricks for responding to support requests
Why is support beyond the contents of the course important for students?

- In small groups, take a few minutes to discuss this question
Why is support beyond the contents of the course important for students?

- Students need knowledge, but also academic and related transferrable skills in order to solve complex tasks in labs, tutorials, assignments, exams.
- Especially in first years, students may be unaware of what is expected of them and how they are supposed to study.
- Students may easily become anxious or concerned at different stages in their studies (e.g. by exams, gaining qualifications for jobs, money matters, etc.), and/or have social group problems and tutors and demonstrators may feel more approachable (closer in age, enthusiastic, there to help).
Are we (tutors/demonstrators/markers/TAs) well placed for providing guidance?

• Yes, much more than we sometimes appreciate because:
  • We have the knowledge but also basic skills required for the course
  • It is our responsibility to know of its requirements and what is expected of students!
  • We may have taken the course ourselves, and thus be able to advise on studying for it
  • We have surely accumulated experience about studying in university in general
  • We know more about where to find help in case of difficulties

• Difficulties: our enthusiasm and good results in the course may differentiate us to students, not prescribing ‘recipes for success’, level of support vs. time
Support boundaries

• It is not our responsibility or appropriate to provide support on matters not directly related to the course work.

• For personal matters, you should not try to advise or ask for many details; Instead, it is best to direct the student to a university service which is specialised in the kind of support that they need.

• If not sure about the right service, direct the student to the personal tutor.

• It is not in your interest or the student’s to agree to meet on a regular basis; this is the role of the counselling or medical services.
Academic support
Academic support

• In small groups, write ideas on poster paper for helping students develop:
  • Problem solving skills (essential in Informatics courses)
  • Academic writing skills (for writing essays, articles, etc.) including referencing skills (and avoiding plagiarism)
  • Presentation skills
  • Skills for tackling coursework/exams (thus improving self confidence)
1. Some ideas for helping students develop problem solving skills

- **If you see students in class (tutors/demonstrators/some TAs):**
  - Encourage reading the problem carefully to uncover keywords, unnecessary or unclear information
  - Encourage working backwards from the goal
  - Give students time to come up with ideas for tackling the problem
  - Break difficult tasks into subtasks to tackle in turn, using step-by-step approach
  - Ask students for ideas on how to proceed rather than solutions
  - Ask students to articulate assumptions
1. Some ideas for helping students develop problem solving skills

• Prompt students to explain their thought process and evaluate progress
• Develop analytical thinking by encouraging students to ask questions and redirect them to the class
• Discuss different ways of solving a problem
• Ask specific questions to test for learning
1. Some ideas for helping students develop problem solving skills

• **If marking:**
  - Put value on steps and argumentation (consult with CO/TA!)
  - Break your feedback into the different steps
  - Use questions to get students thinking about cases not considered
  - Comment on the clarity of the student’s thought process

• **If you design course material as a TA**, you could explicitly break tasks and request certain contents, especially for first year students and first tasks
  - Encourage students to attend IAD courses on problem solving
2. Some ideas for helping students develop academic writing skills

- **If you see students in class:**
  - Bring examples of academic writing and discuss structure, contents, layout, presentation
  - Advise students on standard structure (Introduction, Related Work, main body, Conclusion, Acknowledgements, References), its purpose and importance
  - Help students prepare a plan for sections and paragraphs
  - Emphasise the importance of summaries, linking and signposting words
  - Ask students to practice writing abstracts (being convincing while brief)
2. Some ideas for helping students develop academic writing skills

- Remind students about plagiarism and its consequences
- Advise them to make a note of all sources used (ideally, in a database) and cite them in the text, using quotes for the author’s direct words
- Provide examples of referencing styles
- Explain to students that they should write in their own words for their own purposes, and not just report what others have said

- If you mark academic writing:
  - Touch on all of the issues from above and point the student to useful online resources
  - We are required to report plagiarism
2. Some ideas for helping students develop academic writing skills

• If you design course material as a TA:
  • Include clear requirements for the structure, content, layout and presentation of coursework including academic writing, especially for students who are new to it
  • Provide links to useful online resources
• Point the students to IAD LearnBetter and “Good Academic Practice” resources, and encourage them to attend IAD courses on academic writing
3. Some ideas for helping students develop presentation skills

- Remind or help students work out a plan for the presentation (purpose, structure, audience, duration), discuss how it will be assessed
- Discuss with them what makes for a good presentation (e.g. designing slides, keeping track of time, intonation, tone, facial expression, movement, eye contact, posture, etc.) maybe by watching online presentations (e.g. on TED)
- Point the students to online examples of very successful presentations
- Encourage them to rehearse (with colleagues/in the mirror), give feedback
3. Some ideas for helping students develop presentation skills

- When you give feedback, offer suggestions for improving presentation.
- If the quality of the presentation is not assessed, discuss with the CO offering bonus marks for good presentations as extra motivation.
- If you design the requirements for the presentation as a TA:
  - Make the criteria for a good presentation (even by including the marking scheme) clear.
  - Provide links to useful examples and online resources.
4. Some ideas for helping students develop skills for tackling coursework

• **If you see students in class,** provide them with all the necessary information:
  • What is expected, assessment criteria, format, deadlines (essential for you to know!)
  • Solve tasks in a similar way, using the same format in class
  • If sample solutions are provided, advocate for them to be in line with assessment
  • If possible, make reference to and discuss past exam papers
4. Some ideas for helping students develop skills for tackling coursework

- **If you are a marker:**
  - Praise good parts and offer suggestions for better meeting expectations in feedback
  - When discussing feedback, prompt the student to help him/her develop ideas while being strict about requirements
  - If marking follow up assignment, comment on the progress made by the student and praise good progress
4. Some ideas for helping students develop skills for tackling coursework

• If you design the coursework as a TA:
  • Do your best to write clear instructions and be open to update them if necessary
  • Consider including frequently asked questions
  • Develop a detailed marking scheme first and structure it according to it
  • Keep clear links and be consistent with lectures/labs/tutorials
Sources of academic support

- Individually, spend a few minutes browsing the IAD website (http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development) for information on the courses and resources for study skills support for different students
The Personal Tutor System

• In small groups, browse through the personal tutoring statement and links and look for answers to the following questions:
  1. What is the role of the personal tutor?
  2. What does he/she help students with? How can he/she be contacted?
  3. How frequently do personal tutors meet with their students?
  4. Who is responsible for administration/teaching matters/academic advice/personal advice?
  5. How quickly should the personal tutor respond? What if he/she is unavailable?
  6. Is information discussed during personal tutor meetings kept confidential?
Personal support
Sources of personal support

- The Personal Tutor System
- University Student Services
- The “Helping Distressed Students” guide developed by the Student Disability Service
Sources of personal support

• Individually, think about a scenario in which you are asked for help on a personal matter by a student. Use the diagrams in the “Helping distressed students” guide to find a university service which could help the student.
(taken from “Helping distressed students” guide)
Sources of personal support

- Individually, use the previous figure and the Students Services webpage to select and browse through the webpage of one service which could be relevant to your students. What courses and resources do they offer? Share your findings with the class.

- Recommended: Disability Services, Student Counselling Service, The Advice Place, Careers Service.
Tips and tricks for responding to student support requests

• Listen to the student to encourage him/her to explain and not make a wrong impression!
• Avoid taking notes (distracting!) unless absolutely necessary (ask for agreement if so)
• Whether you like the student and the issue raised is irrelevant
• Avoid trying to comfort the student by making the issue seem nonsignificant (e.g. “You will manage, don’t worry!”); you should keep opinions to yourself and not act as a counsellor.
Tips and tricks for responding to student support requests

• Classify the problem to decide whether:
  • you can solve it (e.g. provide resources)
  • you need to direct the student to a university service
  • the student can cope

• Be discrete, but do not promise complete confidentiality and advise about the need to contact the PT/CO; encourage the student to contact them if his/her performance may be affected.
Resources

- Slides and other resources on Informatics homepage – Staff Intranet – Student Services – Teaching Support – Training
- “Tutoring and Demonstrating: a Handbook” chapter 7 (“Supporting and Advising Students”)
- “Advising students on personal and academic matters” material on the “IAD Resources on Tutoring and Demonstrating” channel in Learn
- IAD course “Advising on personal and academic matters”, Wed 15 March
Resources

- University Student Services
- The “Helping distressed students” guide for staff of the Student Disability Service