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Introduction

Firstly, I am submitting this Final Report in order to fulfill one of the conditions of funding for the 2016 -2017 Fall -Winter – session of ECO 320, An Economic Analysis of Law course at UTM. Secondly, I would like this Final Report to serve as my submission to extend this project into the 2017-2018 year. We are interested in running the project again in 2017-2018, and hope the WDI Committee will use this Final Report in its deliberations.

Background

As explained in the 2016 – 2017 application, this course examines the economic basis for the law. The topics covered include economic analysis of property rights, liability rules, contract law, tort law, corporate law, law and financial markets, intellectual property rights, marriage, divorce, and bankruptcy law. In choosing their course paper topic, worth 25% of the total course mark, the student chooses any legal issue, rule, problem or case within this range and applies microeconomic analysis to their topic.

During the Fall–Winter session of 2015 2016, the Course had an enrollment of 75 students. During the 2016 summer session, the enrolment was approximately sixty (60) students. This enrolment dramatically increased to approximately 100 students in the 2016 -2017 Fall–Winter session. The current summer session has approximately 75 enrolled students.

I highlight the increased enrolment from the estimate of 75 students in the WDI application of last year to an actual enrolment of 100 students as the most important development in the past year. The current cap for 2017 – 2018 is also 100 students.

Project Action: 2016-2017

We followed the plan outlined in milestones as listed in the WDI application.

Milestone 1: Writing TA Training at RGASC

Adam Miettinen completed this TA training in September, 2016. Adam is a senior PHD candidate in the Economics Department. I should emphasize he performed well throughout the milestones. Both Adam and I agree that going forward, the RGASC TA training is both valuable and vital.

Milestone 2: Initial Interests paper (mid- or late October)

At least 90% of the students responded well to this stage and submitted their topic choice to the available portal on the course Blackboard. Only about five (5) students had to be redirected on their choices. Later, a small number of students requested topic changes when they encountered research “dead ends”. In the current summer session, we are asking students to submit samples of their preliminary research (one or two citations of relevant journal articles) with their topic selection in order to confirm the viability of their choice.

With Adam’s assistance, I responded to the student choices by email.

Milestone 3: Report on Preliminary Research (late January)

After Helen Kula’s presentation on course paper research, and over the Christmas break – we had students submit a one (1) page interim research report in order to track their research progress. As a follow-up, I had Adam do a quick “problem spotting” review of all the reports, of which we received. Approximately 60% showed good progress, 25% requested research help, and 15% required intervention.

As an added measure, not done in previous sessions, I invited students to “one on one” meetings with myself, arranged to assist directly with research problems. I arranged extra office hours during the month of February. Because these visits were not mandatory, I received approximately 50% response rate. The responders to this exercise ranged from those who were well ahead in their research and needed advice on finer points, to those who needed a major redirecting on their research, to some of the non-responders who needed major interventions to get their research under way.

The quality of papers that benefitted from this intervention was noticeable. These meetings were well received by the students and inspired greater confidence for them.

I am considering having all students attend these meetings in 2017-2018.

Milestone 4: Tentative Thesis Statement and Tentative Essay Outline (early March)

We encouraged students to use this step to submit a draft version of their paper. The further along in their draft – the more productive the feedback from Adam and

myself. Adam provided me with his feedback, which I combined with my comments into an email response to the students.

The problem of higher than expected enrolment became evident in this stage when the draft papers were submitted in March. At least 5% failed to make a submission by the required deadline. At least another 10% failed to do any meaningful editing, with serious cut and paste situations. Approximately 50% submitted passable versions to which Adam and I made written recommendations for improvement. Adam and I responded to all the submissions made, including the “cut and paste” cases with both appropriate warnings and recommendations. A few submissions at this stage (15%) were of very good quality, and required only minor “tweaking.”

End of the Road: Final Paper

The final submissions (approximately 100) were marked by myself and for the most part demonstrated substantial improvement from their draft submission. Past history shows that anywhere from 3% to 5% of final papers violate “turnitin.com” tests” and the Academic Code on plagiarism. This past year, six (6) students had to be reported this past session. All involved inappropriate cut and paste over at least 25% of their paper. At least four (4) developed a technique of changing alternate words in pasted portions in an attempt to fooling turnitin.com to underestimate correspondences.

Conclusion

Adam and myself accomplished what we planned to do, but the added enrolment increased the work of the TA by about 25%. Going forward, it appears that both professorial and TA intervention are appreciated by the students. We will continue to advertise the availability of RGASC programs and “drop-in” times. I have learned that I need to post this information more throughout the year. Here are two comments from the 2016-2017 ECO 320 student survey. There were no negative comments about the milestones:

“Prof was great! Very helpful with essay!”

” He helped students from day 1 with the course paper. Assured that everyone knew what they were doing and followed up individually with each one of us. In addition, is always mindful of students' workload and accommodates within reason.”

This second comment I believe reflects the benefit of the Milestone approach, so I believe it is worth continuing.

Robert B. Barber