Academic Skills: Implicit or Explicit?

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The problem

- Our students are engineers – very pragmatic people
- They do not appreciate the need to develop academic skills
- If we embed the skills training in the discipline-based material they do not notice it
- If we run a separate course they do not attend or they attend but do not engage very well

Old System

- Weekly tutorials –small groups (~12)
- Senior tutor
- Choice of topics to some extent student driven
- No assessment
- No published syllabus

Old System

Outcome – poor attendance, poor engagement, poor academic skills development

Old System

- Feedback from students:
  - Tutorials are a waste of time
  - I can't see the point of tutorials
  - Tutorials are good for some students but personally I don't need them
  - No time management again! We did this over and over at School
  - Scrap tutorials and give us more maths!

New Era



- Routes to Success!
- 15 credits, assessed module
- Clear focus on Academic Skills for SET subjects

New Era



Three sections:

- Getting started in HE
  - Know what is expected in HE; Use of resources; Understand yourself as a learner; Manage time and stress; Develop academic Integrity/learner ethics
- Making Progress
  - Structuring a problem; finding solutions; Identifying and correcting errors; familiarity with numbers; diagrams; laying out your work
- Sustaining Success
  - "When it gets tough…." maintaining motivation; Reflecting & monitoring own progress; Dealing with gaps in knowledge

New Era



- Assessment by portfolio in 3 parts
- Weekly sessions each focus on completion of a part of the portfolio
- Course finished by end of term 2 – if they haven't got academic skills by then it's too late

New Era



Feedback from students:

Bad Features of this course?

Routes to Success takes a lot of time and is rather useless.

Routes to Success.

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There's a lot of content to understand in a small amount of time and feel time is wasted on computer applications and Routes to Success which I don't really need for the future. This time could be spent on the other subjects which I feel are much more important to my future.

The content was at times a mystery. Some lectures were about absolutely nothing...

Can see the meaning to the course but should be optional to mature students as most already know this meaning and what's needed to succeed.

New Era



Nevertheless:

- the lecturers were rated well
- the quality of work the students produced in their reflective logs was (with few exceptions) of a very high standard
- The number of students that passed they ear went up and the number with marginal rather than catastrophic fail went up (don't know if this is related to RtS or not)

New Era



Success or Failure?