International Law Students in Transition: Challenges and Fears

AHSS Teaching Day 2015
University of Limerick

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Introduction

• University of Limerick’s Strategic Plan 2011-15: Goal 3
  – To sharpen our ‘international focus in all areas of activity’
  – Very competitive market
• Liaised with International Ed Division
  – IED highlighted the insecurity of law students; feelings of lack of preparedness for study in English (or in Ireland)
Legal English Project

• Applied for AHSS funding to run dual focused project
  – Part I: Workshop on Legal English and the Legal Databases
  – Part II: Empirical Research

• Aims
  – Quite broad, student-centred learning environment for current cohort
  – Capture students’ views, fears, expectations
Detail of the Project

- **Full-day programme: Week 1**
- Morning: Seminar/Workshop
  - Introduced students to the Irish legal system
  - Key legal terminology in English
  - The main sources of law in Ireland
  - Introduced students to important Irish terms which they would need to understand the operation of law in Ireland (Oireachtas, Gardaí etc)

- Detailed workbook (TAs designed)
  - Activity-based sessions
Detail of the Project

• Afternoon: E-learning Workshop
  – Moved to a computer laboratory
  – Introduced the students to the key legal databases
  – Highlighted key features of library website
  – Built student confidence in navigating the key law resources
    • For example: finding cases, legislation, academic articles
    • Activity-based again
Detail of the Project

• Gave them opportunities through to get to know each other, the various nationalities represented and the different legal systems
  – Took a inclusive comparative approach to delivering the programme

• Brought the students to lunch in the Pavilion
Detail of the Project

- **Exam Preparation Seminar: Week 11**
- Not in the original plan – Supported by School of Law (2 hour session)
- Held in response to student feedback and concerns
- Was one of most enlightening parts of the project
- Serious issues with assessment literacy – major cause of stress
Detail of the Project

- **Empirical Research**
- Asked the students to complete a questionnaire at three points in the project
  - To gain a deeper appreciation of the difficulties encountered by the visiting law students
  - To measure the effectiveness of the programme
- Obtained Ethics Approval
Attendance & Feedback

• Attendance:
  – Almost complete attendance of Law students (17)
  – Non-law link students? Source of tension

• Feedback:
  – 100% of students who completed the exit survey at the end of intervention in week 1 stated that it “definitely” helped them feel more prepared to study law in English
  – Desire for more interventions across term if possible
Feedback

• Students felt the interventions enriched their international education experience
  – ‘[M]ore than just a number’

• Institutional recognition of their specific needs was appreciated by the students
  – ‘The staff really tried to identify the challenges which exist for International/Erasmus students and were always helpful... The workshops were ... greatly appreciated and extremely helpful’
Look to the future

- Results of the empirical research highlighted often low confidence levels of incoming international students and their desire for greater assistance at both the early stages of their study and, notably, as they approach exams – ‘assessment literacy’

- Integration with domestic students...
  - Incorporate IED Buddy System in future iterations
Look to the future

• Worthwhile project which could be replicated across other programmes...

  – Principle 3: ‘Good teaching across cultures will provide context-specific information and support’

• Discipline specific assessment information (terminology, style, seminar/workshop)
Conclusion

• Positive student experience (supported by AHSS) which reflected on wider UL community...

• IED support for workshops to run again in 2015/16!
THANK YOU