

NEOS Mini-Conference Lightning Strike Session

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## **APA... help! Managing student expectations of citation assistance**

### **Context**

NorQuest: We are located across the street. Recent numbers from winter term 2017. NorQuest College has 10, 439 full-time and part-time credit students. We offer 23 post-secondary career credentials (most based in healthcare, business, and community development) and 7 foundation programs which include GED and ESL/LINC. 58% of our students are born outside of Canada.

Librarians & APA: NorQuest currently has three librarians (introduce us) to serve these students. Librarians are responsible for teaching IL skills to classes of students, liaising with faculty, developing online learning objects, collection development, and reference services. We also offer office-hours style one-on-one appointments through the Writing Centre.

Writing Centre: The NorQuest Writing Centre was created in 2014. The Writing Centre is a partnership between the library and the Tutorial Centre, which aims to help students develop the skills to become more confident, independent writers. Students are able to book an appointment using an online software for a half-hour face-to-face or online consultation with a librarian or a tutor. The consultations are free and available to students in all programs.

Writing Centre appointments: In a WC appointment, students can work with a tutor on various aspects of the writing process, such as developing a thesis statement, brainstorming an essay, or improving their grammar. The librarians will work with students on skills such as developing a research question, effective searching, evaluating sources, and APA citation.

### **Issues**

“Just check it over” – proofreading: The Writing Centre’s focus is a long-term one, which aims to teach the students the skills they need for writing throughout their academic career and beyond. The focus is not just on the assignment, but on the student as a writer.

However, we often get requests for proofreading, or as the students are more likely to phrase it: can’t you just check it over?

This is particularly the case with APA format. Students frequently have the expectation that we will check over their APA citations and find the errors for them. But this type of request is not only an unreasonable demand on our time, but also an academic integrity issue. By correcting the work, the work becomes ours, rather than that of the student.

In recent terms, we found that more and more students were making the request for proofreading or checking of their APA. As such, we developed several approaches to help us manage student expectations, and create advanced messaging that clearly outlines the role of the Writing Centre.

### **Managing student expectations**

Yes with Conditions document: As the NorQuest tutors had already dealt with expectation management issues in the past, we were able to adopt some of their methods for dealing with students asking for proofreading services. In order to create a positive experience in the Writing Centre, the tutors focus on saying “yes with conditions”. They created a document with suggested ways of approaching this issue in order to avoid having to repeatedly say no to students, or placing too much emphasis on what we cannot do versus what we can do. Some suggestions from the tutorial document included creating clear goals for each appointment, specifying where the student is at in the process, and focusing on how the student can improve their skills by highlighting the most important issues.

Class presentations on WC: In order to clarify the WC services, we began to formally offer brief visits to classes to describe the WC services and show students how to make appointments.

Messaging to faculty: In addition to information about having us come for a class visit, we've also emailed faculty an infographic poster about what the WC does. The poster emphasizes the student learning aspects of the WC, and makes a very clear point that we are not a proofreading service.

Face-to-face interactions: In our face-to-face interactions with students, we have tried to make sure that our approach to the appointment revolves around specific questions that the student has about citation. For example, if they ask "can you check this reference", we would ask them "is there a specific aspect of the reference you aren't sure about?". Or if they want us to check their whole reference list or all of their in-text citations, we will say "I'm not able to check them for you, but I can teach you how to check them yourself against an example. Let's do the first one together". If pressed, and if the student insists on us checking their work, we will remind them that this would be an academic integrity issue, as the work becomes ours if we correct it.

Handouts for appointments: We have also taken to bringing a research checklist with us to each appointment. In addition to common questions about document formatting, the checklist specifically highlights things to look for when creating in-text citations and references. Students have reacted very positively to having this physical list to use and to take away from their appointment.

Adopting APA Style Central: Starting in the fall term 2017, we will also be promoting the use of APA Style Central, which is a software created by the American Psychological Association itself. It comes a bibliographic management software (like Refworks or similar) with a word processor, and automatically performs some of the formatting required by APA, such as running heads and paragraph spacing. We are hoping that student adoption of this tool will lead to us having to answer fewer formatting questions (like where to place periods, commas, how to insert page numbers), thereby allowing librarian time to be used for more abstract or difficult concepts beyond these simple formatting issues.

**Questions?**