

Open Universities trial

Smarthinking at Open Universities Australia: Supporting learners's academic experiences to achieve better retention

Dr. Teresa De Fazio

Open Universities Australia

Partner universities:

- Curtin University
- Griffith University
- Macquarie University
- Monash University
- RMIT
- Swinburne University
- University of South Australia

Courses Represented:

- Arts
- Business
- Health
- Education
- Information Technology
- Law
- Sciences

Courses provided by 15 universities and colleges

Background on OUA

- Over 150 000 people have studied at OUA over the past 14 years.

OUA has over:

- 750 units to choose from
- 50 qualifications to choose from
- 100 subject areas to choose from
- 70% of female student enrolments at Open Universities Australia currently use FEE-HELP
- 55% of Open Universities as female students

Profiling OUA students



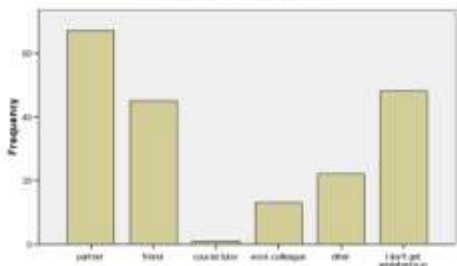
- Part-time
- Adult (over 22 years old)
- Female
- Male
- A proportion of Language background other than English (LBOTE) students
- International students
- University graduates
- Students with successful completion of matriculation equivalents
- Underprepared students (without a strong academic background)

= Non-traditional students

2/3 characteristics = At-risk student

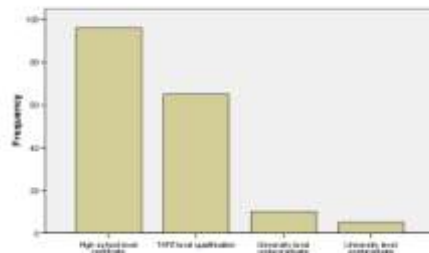
Students studying alone ...

8. Indicate who you would normally ask to read your draft (please indicate which response applies most)



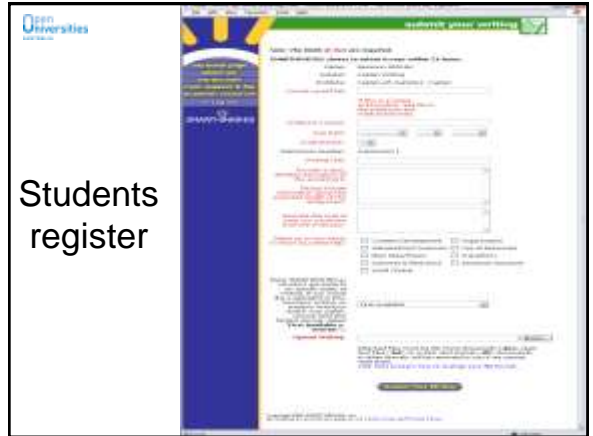
Academic background

6. Previous qualifications obtained (select the highest obtained)



Smarthinking.com as a writing support intervention
Online tutoring writing support service

- Students submit a piece of writing – up to 10 pages – for e-structor will review and provide feedback.
- 24 hour turn-around (24/7 basis)



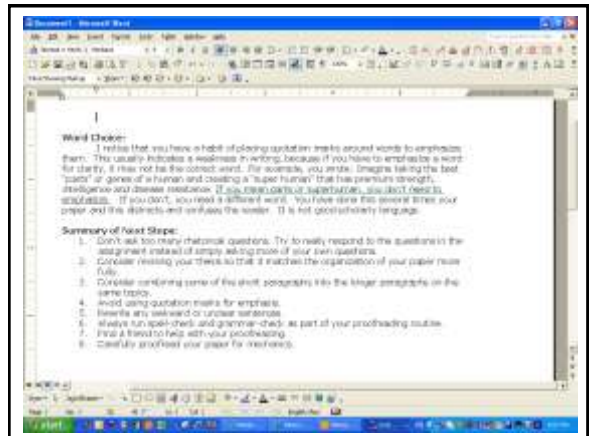
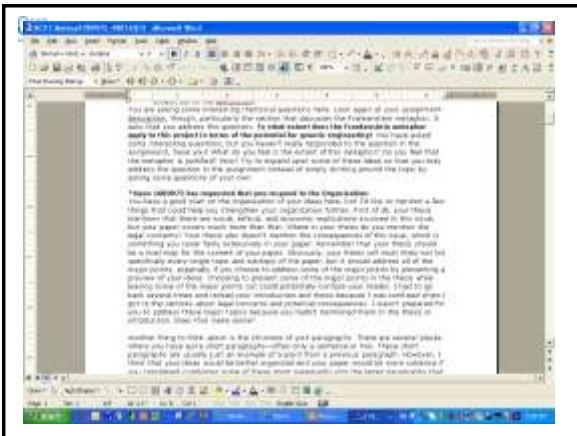
Students register

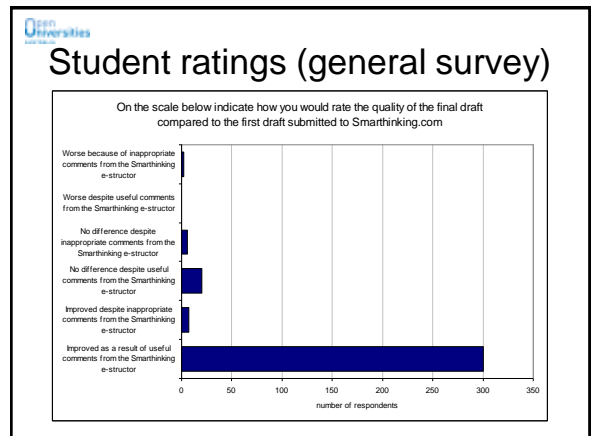
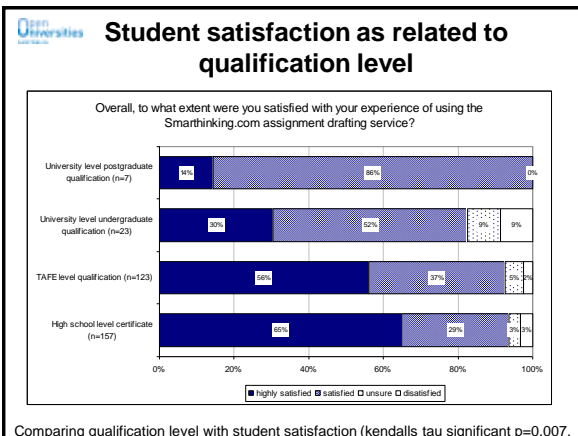
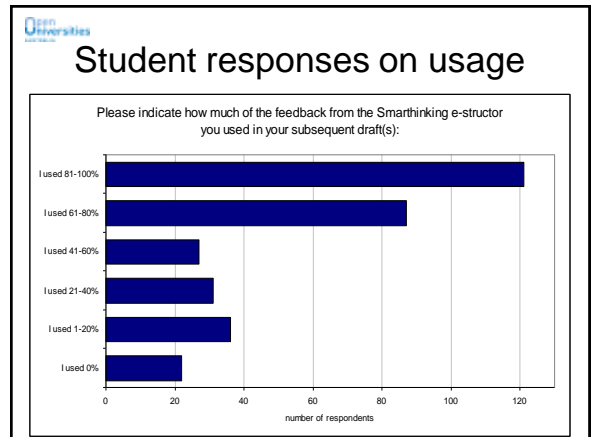
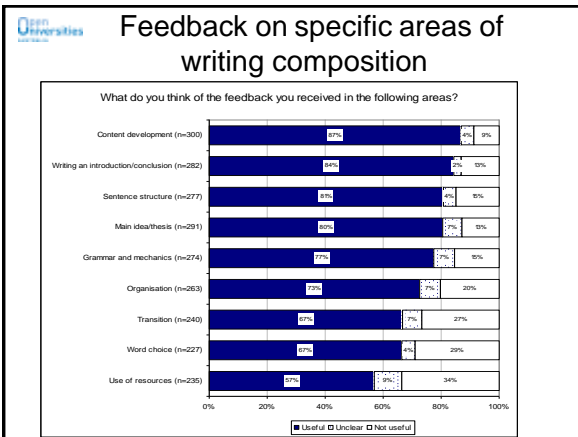
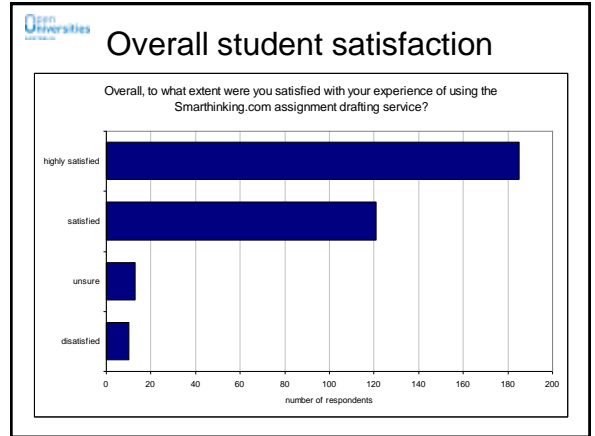
Trial
 Improving student satisfaction with feedback

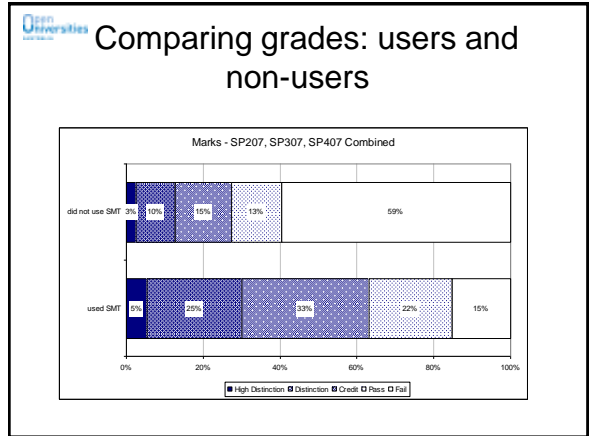
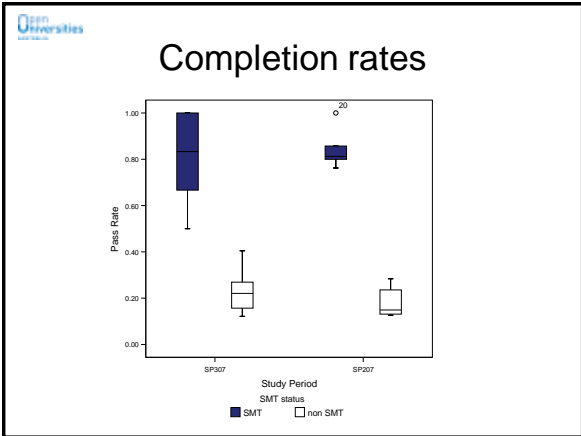
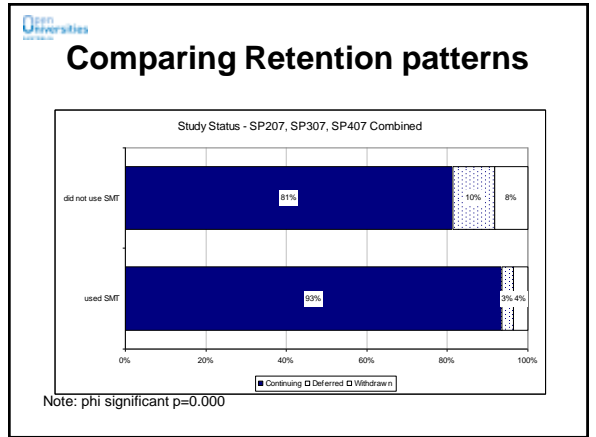
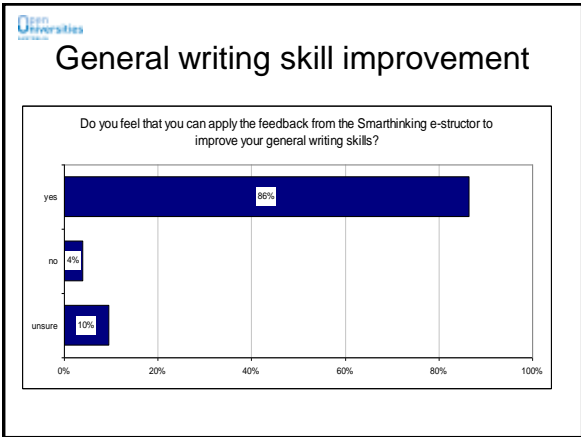
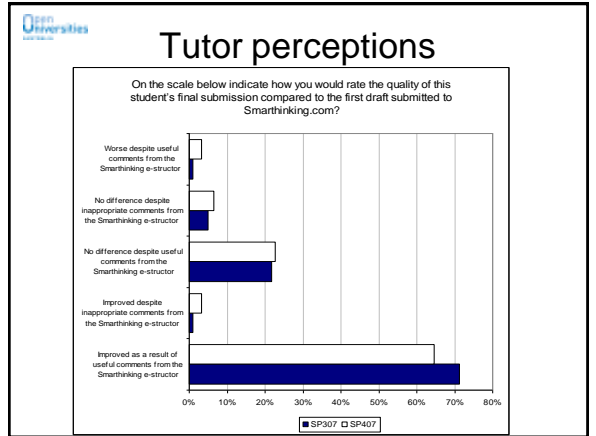
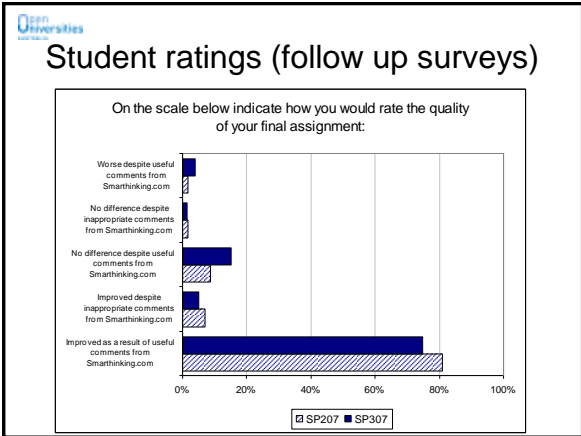
- ❖ Improving feedback to students
- ❖ Reducing withdrawals
- Timeline:
- Study Period 2, 2007 Trial of Online Writing Lab
- Study Period 3, 2007
- Study Period 4, 2007
- Study Period 1, 2008 Trial of all services in first year core level units
- Study Periods 2-4, 2008 Trial of all services in all units

Trial methodology

- Tutor evaluation of Smarthinking e-structor feedback: relevance, appropriate, suitability as a value-added learning support service.
(Data collected via interviews throughout study period and an electronic survey)
- Student evaluation of Smarthinking e-structor feedback: relevance, guidance in developing academic writing skills, suitability. (Two surveys)
(Data collected via study period and electronic surveys)









Student comments on e-structor feedback:

- I found the comments positive and helpful, would consider using again. I was a little sceptical about the idea at first.
- I really struggled with this. after getting back my essay with the notes, it made it so much easier to get my head around it.
- Enabled me to realise that my conclusion didnt conclude anything. Helped me to restructure the final paragraph, so my conclusion related back to the essay question more appropriately
- The feedback I received (copy below) highlighted my ignorance of the proper use of commas, and a deficiency in grammar skills generally (I had never heard of a subject-verb agreement error before!). The feedback therefore proved very useful in revising my draft, and highlighted the need for me to place greater emphasis on this area of my essay writing in future.
- Extremely helpful as I normally do not have any help to proof read my assignments.
- What I like about Smarthinking was that they gave feedback on things I had done well, as well as on things that could be improved. I find that very, very helpful!
- They also helped me with the organisation of my essay. I had paragraphs in it that didn't flow, and weren't real paragraphs. I also had one quote hanging there 'in midair' so to speak. With their help I was able to get it into a logical order. Great!



Tutor comments on e-structor feedback:

- The contribution of the Smarthinking e-structor has supported some of my own comments about this student's work (the intro mainly).
- good instruction regarding intro structure and thesis placement.
- e-structor points out where transitions do not work and where the thread of the thesis is lost.



OUA Student discussion list posting

"When doing my first unit, SSK13, I used Smarthinking. I found it to be excellent and if I had to pay for it to get me from a credit to an HD then I would.

We pay for text books and programs and of course the unit fees so why not pay for a tutor that answers your questions while Australia sleeps.

I submitted 3 out of 4 assignments at 10pm and received them back by early the next morning.

Because I have not been at school for over twenty years it was important for me to understand what was expected of me and Smarthinking provided that.

It's not for everyone but I found it invaluable. Especially their tutorials"

(Student posting on the general OUA student discussion list – SP3, 2007)



Thank you

Dr. Teresa De Fazio
Research Fellow/APS Project Manager
Open Universities Australia
Ph: 61-3-8628 2528
Teresa.defazio@open.edu.au