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MAINTAINING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AT THE NWU IN THE CONTEXT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

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Introduction

The NWU is a university in South Africa. With three campuses, eight faculties and 58894 students enrolled – 48913 contact students and 9981 distance students (NWU, 2024), most assignments are done or submitted online to the LMS. Online assessments, rather than sit-down assessments, offer a uniquely inclusive approach, but do allow for the temptation of academic dishonesty. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a drastic increase in plagiarism was noted. Although the NWU had a fairly straightforward Policy on Academic Integrity (NWU, 2024), there was no clear guidance as to how to implement the Policy effectively – how to manage instances of specifically plagiarism in a consistent manner. To address this issue, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) document (NWU, 2023) was compiled, along with an online reporting system called AIITSA (Academic Integrity Information Technology Systems Application). This system was implemented in August 2023.

If one could exist in two places in time, you would have known that whilst the NWU was working on a SOP and an online system to address issues of academic integrity, somewhere in San Francisco, USA, famously referred to as Silicone Valley, a company was developing a chatbot and released an early demo of this bot in November 2022 (Duarte, 2024). OpenAI's ChatGPT now boasts over 180 million *registered* users (Duarte, 2024).

As with most Western ideas and products, ChatGPT only truly took South Africa by storm during the tail-end of 2023. Students and academics started to use these new AI platforms (mostly LLMs) and in 2024, the true impact of this new tool on academic integrity could

be seen. AI generated assignments are submitted with no regard to any ethical standards, with students claiming the content as their own.

Results

Although the AIITSA system was never designed specifically for addressing the un-ethical use of AI, it was easy to adjust the process to include this new form of academic dishonesty. The rapid increase in the number of students being reported for the un-ethical use of AI also informed university management of the urgent need for official and approved guidelines for the use of AI for students in the Teaching and Learning environment. This document saw the light of day in March 2024.

The process of reporting students on the AIITSA platform has many principles, but this presentation will focus on the procedural fairness, educative nature and statistical value of the AIITSA system (NWU, 2023, p. 7).

The AIITSA system, being educative in nature, offers remedial intervention in the form of online and in-person courses. Amongst others, the aim of the SOP and AIITSA is to create a culture of academic integrity, and the statistics of its use confirm that it is effective in its purpose. The data indicates that once a student is reported and having done the remedial course, they are not likely to use AI un-ethically again.

There are, however, a few shortcomings to the system in terms of reporting specifically the un-ethical use of AI. With a university as large as ours, it is difficult to reach all lecturers to train them on the use of AIITSA as well as implementing the guidelines for the use of AI. This results in transgressions being managed inconsistently: some lecturers ignore the use of AI, some award a mark of 0 with no remedial intervention and some take drastic measures such as reporting the student to the Student Judicial Services (SJS).

Conclusion

On a positive note, the use of the AIITSA system has led to the availability of informative data. This has helped many schools and faculties to revisit their assessment strategy and Teaching and Learning practices and adapt it accordingly.

One of the student attributes of a NWU graduate is employability. The NWU remains committed to offering our students the opportunity to experiment with AI in all its forms, while being conscious of the dangers, the environmental implications and the biases of the tool. We aim to expose students to the ethical use of these wonderfully powerful tools, while adhering to the high academic integrity standards that we require of our students for them to become relevant contributors to society.

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Key words: Artificial Intelligence, academic integrity, un-ethical use, AIITSA.