

Submit a good practice

General Description:

Title: Tutoring at IST

Keywords: 1st year students; student support; academic integration; improvement of teaching;

Starting date: 2003

Dimensions and categories:

(Click on the dimension and category/ies your practice is related to)

	Financial feasibility	Social and environmental responsibility	People	Recognition & Reputation	Quality Management	Infrastructure & Equipment	International orientation	Regional engagement
Education		x	x	x	x			
Research								
Knowledge Technology transfer								

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Webpage of the practice: <http://tutorado.ist.utl.pt/en>

Characteristics of the strategic management practice:

Executive summary (maximum 250 words)

The Tutoring Program (TP) aims at promoting IST student's academic success, therefore contributing to the overall efficiency of the school to graduate students at appropriate time, based upon the establishment of an early bond between first year students and an experienced professor from the student's chosen Programme. Since implementation of the Bologna Process, Tutoring activities have been introduced and disseminated among most IST Programmes as a way to support expected and needed

changes on the teaching and learning at higher education. Implemented for the first time in 2003, it has been improved yearly through assessment and review of practices, always keeping in mind the need to broaden the number of students who actually profit from the TP and to show improvements on academic results of participating students. IST Pedagogical Council is responsible for the alignment of TP activities with the organization of first year reception for the new students (including peer mentoring), early identification and follow through of students with academic difficulties and the promotion of workshops for students and professors on soft skills considered as useful for overall performance. Assessment of practices from 2003 until 2012 show that initially proposed aims are being met and have been improved over the years.

Focus of the practice (maximum 300 words)

(Describe the initial situation, the context and objectives. Along with the justification of its needs, the level of integration within the context and the value added)

The TP mission is to promote student's academic success, bridging the existing gap between High School and University. By investing on a policy that incites individualized support, the program guarantees Tutors' (Professors of IST) training and asserts the follow-up of the tutoring activities along the academic year. As such, the TP contributes for the maintenance of a teaching-learning process of excellence at IST.

The TP is essentially sustained by Professors' (Tutors) work, supporting students along the first two years of their Degree, enabling a close relationship between professors and students, and its main goals are: to support students' transition from High School to College; promote students' academic strengths; early identification of situations of academic underachievement; improvement of teaching quality in IST; support the activities related to Courses Coordination.

Before 2003, only peer mentoring existed to support student's transition and there were no specific measures to either promote student's academic strengths or to support student's with academic difficulties (the later particularly evident in their first years at the University). Although training activities for teachers had been promoted at IST before 2003, they were nor systematic nor were they directed specifically at training the teachers to become more able to deal with underachievers or to motivate newly arrived students to the Programme they'd just entered.

For a full description of the Program and of its main assessment results, including impact of Program activities on student's academic results please go to <http://tutorado.ist.utl.pt/en/avaliacao/>. TP has been considered as a Pioneer Program in the Portuguese High Education, and its experience and results have been widely disseminated either at national (e.g. publication of a book briefly describing TP results in its 8th year of functioning) and international level (e.g. TP also participated in the ATTRACT project, collaborating actively in the "What Works in Student Retention sub – report").

Implementation of the practice (maximum 300 words)

(Describe the implementation of the practice: actions, timing, resources applied. Degree of adjustment of the practice deployment with the objectives, areas and the planned approach)

The TP involves five main areas: training (learning to learn, soft skills, learning to think for students and practical tutorial models for teachers), follow up (meetings and coaching for teachers and students alike, including student delegates), monitoring (performance frame, academic course critical points), dissemination (institutional presentation, homepage, facebook, flyers) and assessment (internal and external).

Within the scope of the TP assessment, annual and semi-annual reports on the students, teachers and school activities are produced, gathering quantitative and qualitative data, collected among others by surveys. The results are only available in Portuguese and are summarized in the factsheet mentioned below. Each academic year, the TP staff prepares with Program Coordinators the tutoring activities for the ensuing year, taking into consideration assessment results from previous year, preferences and needs of the specific Course and Academic Area Management Board and, finally, Pedagogical Council Guidelines for that Academic Year.

An important part of the planning for each year involves the identification of the program tutors for that year (1 for each 15 students, approximately). A Tutor is a teacher at IST, teaching classes at the tutees Program, therefore occupying a privileged position to counsel and support newcomers to the university, mainly in what regards improving academic outcomes and during the process of decision making concerning academic life and future career choices alike. In order to monitor students results, the Tutor has access to his Tutees academic results during their first two years at the university (through performance frame).

A Tutor is a volunteer experienced teacher, motivated to help IST students, usually being he a former student at this school. The Tutor is available on demand for the student (in person, during classes, through the telephone and/or e-mail), and in the beginning of the first year by actively reaching the student, either during scheduled meetings or through e-mail contacts.

Achieved results (maximum 300 words)

(Describe the achieved results in relation to the planned objectives, also with the changes introduced during the practice implementation. Additionally it values the contribution of qualitative and quantitative data that demonstrate the fulfillment of the objectives)

Between 2003/04 and 2010/11 academic years, the number of tutees that participated in the tutoring program grew at a rate of 21,6%, the number of tutors grew at a rate of 49,7% and the number of Programmes covered grew at a rate of 72,0%. Between the same academic years, covering a total range of eight years, 42 training actions aimed at teachers were carried out, reaching a total of 377 participants; 124 training actions aimed at students were carried out, reaching a total of 1110 participants.

In the 2010/11 students annual survey, 89,7% of the (1st and 2nd year students knew the TP, 56,4% participated in the program, 54,7% considered the Program useful or

very useful, 46,4% received at least 3 e-mails from his/her tutor, 20,1% did not participate in the program because they considered it unnecessary, 66,2% feel they can count on their Tutor presently and in the future. The three areas of the TP the students' value the most are: support/information about IST, academic adaptation/integration and contact with somebody experienced (Universe: 1419 students, Sample: 616 students and response rate of 43,4%).

In general, planned objectives, mission and goals for the TP have been reached, incremental changes being introduced every year following end-of-the-school-year assessment, although improvements, there is still need to promote a more broad acceptance of the Program, expressed by even higher rates of students participating, as well as a higher rate of contact hours between students and their tutors, preferably leading to an early identification and intervention with the academic underachievers and to a measurable impact on their academic results.

From 2008/09, the TP also initiated collaboration with the Course Unit Quality System for the identification and documentation of Best Teaching Practices, by this way reinforcing its role at improving teaching quality at IST.

Assessment and review (maximum 200 words)

(Describe the evaluation process and review and proposals made for improvement identified and introduced into the practice. And the degree of learning from the results obtained and not obtained)

A broader acceptance of the TP seems to be dependent upon finding a way of having all the students from each Programme attending regular meetings with their Tutor through at least their first two years at IST, or until they have reached full integration (measured by academic results as well as subjective wellbeing). Since in southern European countries (as opposed to northern European countries) there's not an active culture of Tutoring practices in Higher Education, GATu team has been trying some strategies to improve contact hours between tutors and tutees along the first year of the students stay in IST. In the Mechanical Engineering Programme this contact hours have been made compulsory through the attribution of tutors to student tutees at the Portfolio course (1st year, 2nd semester) since 2006/07 academic year - the tutor is responsible for orienting his 15 or so students in their final Portfolio presentation.

In order to benefit from the positive 2nd semester experience and to expand it over to the 1st semester, in the 2010/11 academic year, a new Course was included – Introduction to Mechanical Engineering - following approximately the Portfolio format, and reinforcing the training of student's soft skills (time management, team work and communication skills) and the motivation for the Programme (through lab visits and seminars run by professionals in the industry and other areas relevant for the profession). Results from this improvement are encouraging.

Innovative character and transferability (maximum 200 words)

(Describe the aspects of internal innovation (at the institution) and innovation as respect to the context (at the university system) of the practice. As well as the elements and aspects that can be applied to a different context and possible recommendations that should be taken into account in a benchmarking opportunity)

The combination of tutoring practices with soft skills training within a first year introductory course is, as far as we know, unique either for the university system and for the IST (no other courses at this institution combine these two elements, although a general form of tutoring is present in most IST Programmes). Qualitative data collected through the years show us that hours of contact and quality of contact between tutor and tutees in the beginning of 1st year improves if tutors are teachers from the students Programme and if they meet regularly with them during academic activities (e.g. project teachers at Architecture Programme, or Lab teachers at Chemistry Programme), as is also the case with Portfolio and Introduction to Mechanical Engineering. These courses are mandatory, 2 classes/week, 1h30 each with a weight of 1,5ECTS assessed by a group project composed by a written paper and an oral presentation, and 3 types of classes compose it – working, seminar and tutorial plus research labs visits at IST. Tutorial classes are taught both by tutors and GATu team members (mainly psychologists). Results are encouraging showing the students are satisfied with the tutorial classes, particularly with the writing and presentation skills classes considering them useful for their future academic and professional life. A good, strong and respectful collaboration among tutors (Engineers) and Tutoring team (Psychologists) is needed, with a great effort being made at the preparation of joint classes, taking advantage of different sources of knowledge. A Strong belief of Programme Coordinators and the School Pedagogical and Academic Boards in the advantages of the Program, is reinforced each year and reliability in this practice in other institutions is evident in various requests made by other Portuguese HEIs in order to better know IST's Tutoring model.

Upload supporting documents (max 5MB)

For a quick view of the evolution of the Tutoring Program since 2003 until 2012, see http://tutorado.ist.utl.pt/files/FactSheet_04_12_EN.pdf .

Authorization to publish this practice in EUSUM website?

- Yes