SAFeSEA is a two year project funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. The project team includes staff from The Institute of Educational Technology at the UK’s Open University and members of the Computer Science Department at Oxford University.

The SAFeSEA acronym stands for ‘Supportive Automated Feedback for Short Essay Answers’ and as the name suggests, the aim of the SAFeSEA project is to develop an effective automated feedback system for university students’ as they are preparing essays for assessment.

The feedback is designed to help students’ manage their current essay writing task and to help students’ develop essay writing skills. This project grew out of our previous research with the Joint Information Systems Committee or JISC, that produced a roadmap for e-assessment and from our recognition of the challenges currently facing higher education today. With the growth in e-learning and a greater demand for institutional accountability, policy makers are looking for ways of offering better e-assessment that can provide real learning.

The SAFeSEA project also has implications for students’ in institutions. Recent results from the National Student Survey have shown that students’ want more timely feedback. Furthermore, students’ often find essay writing a daunting task, especially after a break in formal education. Students’, for example, might feel unfamiliar working in an e-learning context and therefore might find it difficult to get to grips with a new module.

Experts believe that automatic feedback on e-assessments will allow students’ in higher education to take more control of their learning, become more reflective and improve their skills. Our project aims to address these needs by building on existing state-of-the-art tools for automated feedback. Using automated analysis and free text entry responses, the SAFeSEA system will work to provide feedback and to scaffold learning through skills development.

This is an exciting project and one that ultimately seeks to aluminize pathways to enhancing the learning experience. We at The Open University and Oxford University are striving to keep at the forefront of student research. We believe that the SAFeSEA project will contribute to teaching and learning innovation, assisted by new technology.

Please browse our website for more information on the project. We would encourage you to follow our blog and to subscribe to our twitter feed and feedback is always welcome.

Thank you for watching this podcast, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Denise Whitelock