

# The Criminology Student As An 'Autonomous Learner'

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## RATIONALE

The development of a new module at Level 6 called 'Key Issues in Contemporary Criminology' aimed to provide students with an opportunity to engage with contemporary issues within the discipline of criminology, by using portfolio assessment to establish an enquiry based learning approach that would enhance the students critical thinking and strengthen the academic relationship between staff and student.

## APPROACH

The research aimed to evaluate the student's development as an 'autonomous learner,' by reviewing their engagement with the discipline, their participation with the portfolio process and their interaction with staff and peers. The evaluation comprised a concept mapping activity, focus group session, reflective module evaluation questionnaire and staff review and reflection on the module's development and delivery.

## EVALUATION

### Learner Autonomy

#### student reflection:

- students struggled to define what it means to be an autonomous learner and how to assess if they are developing the skills and knowledge required to become autonomous in their learning;
- students perceived learning as the process of being taught and given information rather than critically exploring, challenging and developing their own independent ideas

#### staff reflection:

- assessing the development of an 'autonomous learner' is challenging; however, there were clear indications of student engagement, planning, organisation, reflection and independent thinking;
- the lack of student's foundational knowledge (or recognition of) inhibited their ability to engage fully in enquiry based learning processes and student led activities

### Portfolio Assessment

#### student reflection:

- students enjoyed and responded positively to assessment submissions given throughout the academic year and the development of a portfolio of activities as their assessment task (even though they were required to provide more content than traditional assessment tasks);

#### staff reflection:

- students engaged positively with non-compulsory submission of work where formative feedback was provided, although they struggled to effectively utilise feedback to develop and link future tasks and activities together

### Teaching and delivery

#### student reflection:

- students found the innovative teaching style, which incorporated a staff team delivering a range of topical lectures and jointly facilitating workshops sessions, unfamiliar and difficult to follow (i.e understand how all aspects of the teaching linked together);

#### staff reflection:

- although students struggled to fully engage with the teaching delivery, they showed interest in the discipline of criminology and developed innovative, creative research proposals and final portfolios

### Future considerations:

- staff need to support, and students need to recognise, acknowledge and acquire foundational knowledge to be able to effectively create and develop their own knowledge production and understanding of the discipline of criminology;
- teaching needs to be a 'suggestive' not a 'directive' process (in order to encourage and support the development of autonomous learning);
- when providing formative feedback to students, staff must not only provide comments that are reflective of the task completed but progressive for future activity and assessment development

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