

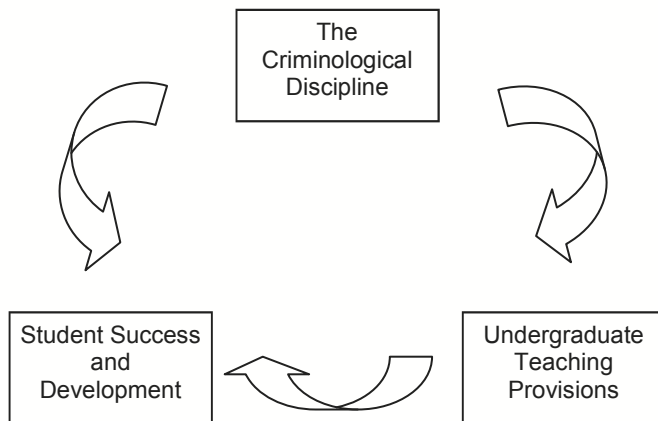
The Teaching, Learning, and Application of Undergraduate Research Skills within the Criminological Discipline



Commenced: 2006

What is it?

This project aims to investigate the complex relationships between the following three areas:



There seems to be some inconsistency between the research methods traditionally and currently adopted by criminologists in the field, the research methods currently taught to undergraduate criminology students and the research methods that such students can realistically utilise during their degree. These inconsistencies are not only sending mixed messages to criminology students but may also be hindering the student experience and understanding of primary research.

Research Questions:

- Are we equipping criminology students with the necessary skills to be successful autonomous learners?
- More specifically does the teaching of Level 5 Criminological Research Methods adequately equip students for the successful completion of primary research in their dissertation?

- Is learning and teaching simply about the dissemination of selective knowledge applicable to completing specific learning outcomes or should we not consider whether this knowledge is an adequate representation of the wider academic landscape?

What is involved?

This project builds upon the similar work of Todd et al (2004). The paper touches upon the difficulties students face with linking taught research methods and the successful completion of primary research in the dissertation. Although similar in methodological approach, and whilst acknowledging the relevance of the recommendations made, the research outlined in this brief adopts a notably different angle. This project narrows the focus of Todd et al's work in ASS to the specifics of Criminology as an academic discipline and pays closer attention to the utilisation of research methods. The three key areas identified above will be investigated. The academic discipline will be explored via an analysis of the views of the Criminology Subject Group. A questionnaire will assess not only their approach to research methods teaching and the dissertation, but also their experiences and principles as criminological researchers. The undergraduate teaching provision will be assessed via content analysis of dissertation assessment feedback for the 2005/6 cohort of criminology students. Finally the student experience will be investigated through a hermeneutic analysis of diaries kept by a sample of dissertation students undertaking the module during 2006/7. Knowledge of the research methods taught at Level 5 is gained via regular teaching and development of the specified module itself.

Why is the project important to the CETL and the University?

The dissertation is regarded as one assessment which places learner autonomy at the heart of its expectations. It is not only the accumulation of three years of learning, but it can also provide the stepping stone between the undergraduate degree and employment. In this respect it is important that the university, supported by the CETL, does all it can to ensure that students are well equipped not only to succeed but to make the most of this pivotal assessment.

What do you hope the project will achieve?

The concern surrounding the dissertation experience is heightened by the suggested move from a 20 credit to a 40 credit module (2007/8). Expectations of students within the university and externally will thus increase. The importance of providing satisfactory teaching provisions to meet this demand (either during Level 5 or in addition to provision at Level 6) is the overriding remit of this project. It is hoped that any findings from this research will influence the teaching of criminological research methods at Level 5 and will provide an empirical basis for acquiring additional resources for the Level 6 Dissertation. It is also hoped that the findings will add resonance to the relationship between taught criminology and the continuation of criminology as an academic discipline.

Links

Todd, M. Bannister, P. Clegg, S. Independent Inquiry and the Undergraduate Dissertation: Perceptions and Experiences of Final Year Social Science Students, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, June 2004, 29: 3

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