KIFT ALTC SENIOR FELLOWSHIP: ARTICULATING A TRANSITION PEDAGOGY

LAW CASE STUDY

PREPARED BY LISA WESTCOTT ON BEHALF OF THE LAW FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAM TEAM

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01. At the outset, the author would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all members of the Law First Year Experience team, a team dedicated to enhancing and improving the transition to effective first year study and beyond for all commencing law students at James Cook University.

02. The team members who have been involved either in the original design and/or the subsequent implementation of the program are as follows: Professor Paul Havemann, Diana Henriss-Anderssen, Aidan Ricketts, Mandy Shircore, Dominique Thiriet, Kate Galloway, Rachel Bradshaw, Joanne Roebuck and Lisa Westcott. These team members have received assistance from a number of other dedicated staff members, including sessional staff members. All staff involved have played a critical role in either the design and/or the implementation and delivery of the program.

03. Professor Paul Havemann, Mandy Shircore, Dominique Thiriet, Kate Galloway and Rachel Bradshaw are to also be acknowledged and thanked for their input into, and/or feedback on, this case study.

04. The author would like to acknowledge the assistance and support provided by Professor Sally Kift in the design, development and implementation of the program. Aspects of the program design have drawn upon, and have been inspired by, Professor Kift's revolutionary work for the Faculty of Law at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

05. It should be noted that some of the material contained in this case study has been drawn from publications that team members have written on the program. These publications include:

Westcott, L., & Shircore, M. (2006). The experience of a small regional law school in preparing students for a journey through law. *James Cook University Law Review, 13,* 81.

Roebuck, J., Westcott, L., & Thiriet, D. (2007). Reflective narratives: A useful learning activity and assessment for first year law students. *The Law Teacher, 41*(1), 37.

06. Material has also been drawn from a dissertation paper (written by the author) titled: *Designing the curriculum of a first year subject for student engagement.* That paper was submitted for assessment in 2007 as part of a Master of Education qualification at James Cook University.

1. CONTEXT

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

07. The Law School at James Cook University is a relatively small regional school in North Queensland which services the local area. The School operates and offers its degree programs on both the Cairns and Townsville campuses. The programs are delivered by a complement of full-time, contract and sessional staff members including members of the legal profession. In the later years of the degree program there is a reliance on the use of video-link technology to deliver subjects across the two campuses.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

08. The Law School offers a standard 4 year undergraduate degree program, a 3 year graduate degree program for those who have a previous degree and a range of 5 or 6 year combined degree programs including combinations with Business, Science, Social Work and Arts. Full-time and part-time study options are available. In addition, a range of diplomas, certificates and postgraduate study options are also available.[1]

09. To ensure compliance for accreditation purposes, in each of the core degree programs (including in the law component of the combined degree programs) students are required to undertake a number of compulsory subjects. These compulsory subjects represent what are known in the legal discipline as the *Priestley Eleven*, that

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1   Further information on the programs can be found on the James Cook University School of Law website at http://www.jcu.edu.au/law/degrees/index.htm.

is, eleven core areas of knowledge.[2] There is scope for elective choice in the latter part of the degree program, albeit, that scope is somewhat limited.

10. During 2004, a new first year law program was designed. This new program was inspired by a curriculum review undertaken by, and a report prepared by, Professor Paul Havemann in 2003 at the request of the Head of School, Professor Stephen Graw. In his report, Professor Havemann recommended a range of new subjects and a new program structure. These new subjects and program structure were based on ideas that Professor Havemann had implemented as foundation Professor at Waikato University, an institution like James Cook University that also has a diverse student body.

11. The new program was implemented at James Cook University in study period 1 of 2005. In accordance with this new first year program, students who choose to study in either the standard degree program or the graduate degree program are required to undertake three prescribed subjects in each of the two periods of study. In study period 1 in particular, the three subjects have been specifically designed in an integrated and complementary way. The program of study for combined degree students differs slightly in that those students are required to undertake two of the prescribed subjects (taking the third in their second year of study).

12. The subjects that comprise the new law first year experience program are as follows:

Study period 1

13. **Legal Institutions and Processes** — in this subject students explore the various institutions and legal processes that impact on the development of the law in Australia.

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2   Rule 6 *Supreme Court (Admission) Rules 2004* (Qld) provides for approved academic qualifications and refers to a satisfactory understanding and competence in certain areas of knowledge as set out in Appendix A to the Law Admissions Consultative Committee Report see further r 6(3)(b). Attachment A Appendix A sets out detailed descriptions of the 11 areas of knowledge which include criminal law and procedure, torts, contract, property, equity, company, administrative law, federal and state constitutional law, civil procedure, evidence and professional conduct including basic trust accounting.

14. **Legal Research, Writing and Analysis** — this subject focuses on the development of a range of skills including legal writing, legal research and analysis. These skills are developed in the context of content material dealing with sources of law, court hierarchy, doctrine of precedent and statutory interpretation.

15. **Contract Law 1** — this subject explores the law relating to the formation of a contract and the terms of a contract; there is a particular emphasis on aiding students with their problem-solving skills.

Study period 2

16. **Law Society and Change** — this subjects provides students with an opportunity to critique and analyse the law from a variety of perspectives such as age, gender and race.

17. **Legal Concepts** — this subject provides students with an introduction to a range of key concepts that underpin the law and the legal system. These concepts include legal personality and liability, the law of obligations and sovereignty.

18. **Contract Law 2** — this subject explores the termination of a contract, vitiating factors and remedies for breach of a contract. It builds on the problem-solving skills developed in study period 1.

19. In each of these subjects, students can expect to be engaged in face-to-face contact on a weekly basis consisting, for the most part, of a 2-hour lecture and a 1-hour tutorial. During these periods of time, students are exposed to a range of teaching and learning settings which have been designed specifically to enhance engagement opportunities. In addition to the on-campus face-to-face contact time, students are expected to spend separate study time on a range of activities including reading, preparing for face-to-face classes, attending to assessment requirements, and engaging in online environments using a variety of educational technologies.

Whole of program objectives and first year program objectives

20. The Law School defines its aims in the following way:

> *The School of Law at James Cook University aims to produce multi-skilled, versatile and ethical graduates. Our aim is that graduates will have the knowledge, skills and attributes …. to take their place in their chosen career path. Our degrees prepare people for the practice of law and also for work and service to a broad range of sectors. The School seeks to do that by imparting a strong appreciation both of the rule of law and role of law in its social, economic, environmental and political contexts.[3]*

21. From the more particular perspective of the First Year Program however, a number of core objectives that provide a framework for, and upon which the program anchors, have been articulated. These objectives were originally conceptualised by Professor Paul Havemann and Diana Henriss-Andersen on behalf of the first year team.

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22. They are as follows:
1. Effectively delivering a fully integrated first year educational package that implements (across all subjects) constructive alignment of learning outcomes, teaching settings, and assessment practices.
2. Implementing a whole of first year, student-centred approach to overcome the compartmentalisation of syllabus subject matter, learning and teaching settings, and assessment.
3. Enabling a transformative, transitional experience that sets the foundations for students to become self reflexive, independent, responsible learners and ethical scholars.
4. Enhancing the development of first year students' skills and capacities to reverse unacceptable rates of attrition in first year and later years.
5. Encouraging the development of broadly based legal, technological, critical and emotional literacy of students.
6. Facilitating an ongoing team-based approach to staffing and teaching the first year program that is explicitly inclusive of sessional staff to ensure their identification with, and ownership of, pedagogical aims of the program.[4]

23. In addition to these objectives, the design team also agreed on a set of key skills and attributes that were to be developed. These skills and attributes included: a capacity for self-directed learning; reading for comprehension; written and oral communication skills; interpersonal communication skills and teamwork; legal research both in traditional hard copy and electronic form; a capacity to identify legal issues and resolve legal problems; legal method and reasoning; critical analysis; value clarification and ethical awareness (Westcott & Shircore, 2006).

Student cohort and entry requirements

24. The backgrounds of students commencing study at the Law School at James Cook University are likely to be diverse. Statistical information indicates that students at James Cook University are generally more likely to be mature age

3   See the James Cook University School of Law website http://www.jcu.edu.au/law/.

4   James Cook University Teaching and Learning Grant prepared by Professor Paul Havemann and Diana Henriss-Anderssen on behalf of the team. These objectives will be discussed further below in the context of the principles that have been established by Professor Kift for the purposes of the case study.

and come from a lower socio-economic background, rural or remote area.[5]

25. It is also likely that commencing students may be less academically prepared when compared to their counterparts studying law at other Australian universities. For instance, the current (Queensland) overall position (OP) score for entry into the law degree program at James Cook University is 15 or an equivalent selection rank for alternative entry.[6] This is on a scale of 1 to 25 in Queensland with 1 representing the highest and best score achievable. By way of comparison, entry scores for the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland are 6 and 3 respectively.[7]

Role of the author in the program

26. At present, the author is a lecturer in the School of Law (30% appointment). She is also an academic developer in the University's Teaching and Learning Development Unit (70% appointment) where she is primarily responsible for the coordination and teaching of the Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary Teaching).

27. The author was involved in the design of the new law first year program in 2004. In addition, the author has been involved in the implementation, delivery and evaluation of the program from 2005 to 2007. In particular, the author has played a key role in the design, delivery and coordination of the subject *Legal Research, Writing and Analysis*. She has mentored the team of staff involved in the delivery of that subject on both the Cairns and Townsville campuses. She has delivered workshops for sessional staff and in 2006 created an online organisation for sessional staff. She is co-author of two refereed journal articles on the program and has delivered several joint and sole conference presentations on aspects of the program. She and other members of the team have been awarded a number of faculty-based teaching awards for the program. In 2006, the author

was awarded a Carrick (now Australian Learning and Teaching Council) Citation for an Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning, in part, for work related to the law first year program.

2. Transition and Diversity[8]

28. As recognised above, students commencing study in the law degree program at James Cook University may be diverse in terms of background and/or in terms of academic preparedness. The law first year program attempts to recognise and accommodate for this diversity by providing a carefully designed program which aids a smooth transition into and through the first year of law studies. A suite of strategies is employed to carry this goal into effect. Students are provided with key and relevant information on a timely basis and are assisted in their skill development. This is done in a progressive, supportive and scaffolded learning environment within the context of a core content framework. Illustrations of the types of support and scaffolding to ensure a smooth transition to tertiary study are evident throughout the program and some of these are referred to below.

29. Law First Year Experience team members play a critical role in the transition process, not only by participating in the university's orientation week and pre-orientation week activities, but also by extending and embedding orientation week activities into the first few weeks of study. For instance, writing workshops to address concerns with literacy levels are offered in orientation week in Cairns by Kate Galloway. These writing workshops are designed to provide students with an introduction to issues particular to writing in the legal discipline including appropriate referencing and acknowledgement of sources. Team members also contribute to university-wide preparatory programs

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5 JCU Student Profile extracted from DEST Statistics and personal observations.

6 Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre: www.qtac.edu.au.

7 Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre: www.qtac.edu.au.

8 These two principles have been dealt with together because of the high degree of overlap.

offered by Student Equity and the Learning Centre.[9]

30. To address the possibility of information overload in orientation week, a range of what may otherwise be specific orientation related activities are embedded into the first couple of weeks of classes. By way of illustration, in Legal Research, Writing and Analysis, during the lecture period in week 1, students receive advice from members of the faculty in relation to their enrolment and changing their enrolment. In week 2, students receive advice on time management from learning advisors. They receive guidance on note taking and writing and referencing for law. Students are also provided with an opportunity to meet with, and engage with peer mentors, a group of continuing law students who have signed up to assist first year students with their transition to tertiary study.[10]

31. The team involved in the delivery of the program aim to provide students with, as far as is possible, a consistent look and feel to study materials for the subjects. Examples include consistent looking subject outlines, the same PowerPoint materials for both Cairns and Townsville cohorts, use of the university's online learning platform, the provision of subject and weekly learning outcomes, the provision of information on skills and attributes being developed, the provision of assessment rubrics for assessment items and an agreed and consistently applied referencing style for all assessments.

32. Providing an environment that not only encourages academic integration in the early part of the program but also social integration is important in the first year law program. Critical aspects of the program in this regard include: assisting with the development of relationships with peer mentors; providing an environment for students to introduce themselves online (via blawg entries for *Legal Institutions and Processes*); encouraging email dialogue to complete negotiation tasks for *Contract Law 1*; and offering a variety of ice-breaker activities in both early lecture and tutorial settings including a short adversarial process role play.

33. The content and skill development addressed in the program itself has also been designed to aid in transition and accommodate diversity in the student cohort. Students are provided with an integrated complementary package of learning that lays a sturdy foundation for subsequent law study emphasising key skills such as effective oral and written communication skills including legal writing and referencing. Reading and comprehending legal texts, legal problem solving and an ethical awareness are also critical skills being developed in the program. A range of 'low stakes', early and formative assessment tasks are embedded throughout the program in acknowledgement of different starting points, approaches to learning and strengths and weaknesses.

34. Since the first year of its implementation, students enrolled in the first year law program have also been sent weekly emails by first year experience coordinator/s. These emails are sent on a weekly basis in study period 1 and then more occasionally in study period 2. They are modelled on those designed by Professor Kift for QUT law students (in turn modelled on Deakin University's 'Infoflow Program': Kift, 2004). The emails are designed to be a timely push out of information that students may need for that week or the coming weeks. The emails have included, amongst other things, information about upcoming study skills or library workshops, reminders about cut-off dates and study tips. The role of the first year experience coordinator/s has been in place and has been supported since the program's inception. It extends beyond the sending of weekly emails to include other tasks such as generally supporting students, liaising with university administration in relation to at-risk students, and working with team members to ensure there are no clashes in assessment due dates.

35. Additionally — and more recently — the School has employed Indigenous Coordinators on both the Cairns and Townsville campuses. These coordinators

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9 For example, Uniprep: see further http://www.jcu.edu.au/studentequity/uniprep/index.htm and Freshstart.

10 For further information on the peer mentor system see the James Cook University website, http://www.jcu.edu.au/learningskills/mentor/

provide support to Indigenous students. This includes contacting students regularly, assisting students with making links to the university services, organising tutoring and also holding functions for students.

3. Design

36. As indicated at the outset, the design of the law first year experience program anchors upon a number of core objectives and seeks to develop an agreed set of skills and attributes.

37. In its initial design and subsequent refinement, members of the team involved in the three subjects that form the program for the first study period in particular, have been keen to ensure that the program provides a constructively aligned (Biggs, 2003) package of learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessments, not only within the individual subjects but across subjects. This level of alignment and integration can be seen in the subjects *Legal Institutions and Processes, Legal Research, Writing and Analysis* and *Contract Law 1*, where there are a number of broad module headings within which certain themes dealing with the content material are developed across subjects. The modules are:

1. An ethical orientation to the law and to the study of the law
2. Governance as a conceptual tool (sources of law)
3. Governance through adjudicative law
4. Governance through legislative law.

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subjects that bear no relationship to each other, but rather in a more holistic manner (Westcott & Shircore, 2006). In this respect, the complementary subjects provide students with the opportunity to engage with a core of relevant content material from a variety of perspectives, allowing for a recursive and excursive[11] analysis of the material. To assist in understanding, students participate in a range of learning activities including buzz groups, debates, small group work, role plays and discussions as well as online activities; where possible, practical, authentic, real life activities are utilised to illustrate the points being made. Skills and material learnt in each subject are referred to in each other subject and are further developed. For instance, in *Legal Research, Writing and Analysis* students learn basic research skills for both hard copy library resources and electronic sources. In the other subjects that make up the program, this basic core skill is repeatedly further developed and built upon.

39. By way of a further example, in the module 'Governance through legislative law', students consider the legislative process in *Legal Institutions and Processes*, consider how to interpret and apply legislation in *Legal Research, Writing and Analysis* and in *Contract Law 1* students consider and question the intervention of legislation in contract law (Westcott & Shircore, 2006). This level of integration and the reasons for it are made explicit to students in the early weeks of the study period. In each subject, students receive information on how each of the subjects forms part of the integrated program. This is coupled with a discussion on administrative information about the

11 This terminology is used in the context of promoting learning of threshold concepts (Land, Cousin, Meyer, & Davies, 2004).

subject and a discussion about each of the assessment tasks for the subjects.

40. A more holistic view of the law and students' legal studies is also encouraged in subjects that form part of the second study period. For example, in *Law Society and Change*, students consider legal issues from a variety of key, and somewhat controversial, perspectives. Also, in *Legal Concepts*, students are exposed to a range of key concepts that underpin the legal system. An analysis of these key concepts at this early stage exposes students to the many and varied areas of the law that they will consider in subsequent years of the law degree program, but in a holistic way.

41. In designing the program, the team have also been cognisant of the different approaches to learning that students may adopt and have sought to ensure that the learning environment maximises opportunities for deep approaches to learning as opposed to surface approaches (Ramsden, 2003). A reduction in the amount of content to be covered, and a lesser emphasis on actual content, coupled with an increased focus on skill development, has aided in meeting this goal. The program has been specifically designed to provide students with many opportunities to develop skills, practice tasks, and improve on task and skill development with 'low stakes' risks attached. For example, in *Legal Research, Writing and Analysis*, a weekly reflective narrative task[12] which is assessed only from a summative perspective in relation to actual completion and timely submission each week, has been specifically designed to encourage a process for writing, reflection and referencing on a weekly basis (Westcott & Shircore, 2006; Roebuck, Westcott, & Thiriet, 2007). Further, a tutorial portfolio assessment piece for *Contract Law 1* provides students with an opportunity to be summatively assessed on work that, prior to submission, they have had the benefit of receiving formative feedback and instruction on (Westcott & Shircore, 2006).

4. ENGAGEMENT

42. Tinto (2003, p. 3) argues that 'students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that provide academic, social and personal support … [and that such] support needs to be readily available and connected to other parts of the student collegiate experience, not separated from it'. The research is also consistently confirming that we need to find ways to replicate the sense of university community which in times past has existed naturally (McInnis, 2001, pp. 9, 11).

43. A number of opportunities for support and engagement with the academic and social environment form part of the law first year program at James Cook University. The non-exhaustive list of strategies outlined below are embedded progressively and in a timely manner in recognition of the fact that 'the first-year experience evolves and changes both temporally and culturally' (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006, vii).

44. To encourage engagement with faculty registrars about their enrolment, students are provided with an in-class opportunity to hear directly from faculty registrars on the enrolment, change, and withdrawal processes. Opportunities to engage with the university's support services, including with staff from the university's Learning Centre, to learn about time management are also embedded into class time. Specific library research skills tutorials delivered by the law librarian provide students with the opportunity to engage with library staff whilst developing research skills critical to their success for subsequent study. Peer mentors are invited to visit during lectures. In-class time is allocated to allow the mentors to break up into small groups with the students, giving students some background information on the value of the mentor system and also assisting the students to set up study groups.

45. A non-compulsory court tour at the local court house provides students, not only with an opportunity to meet with and engage with members of the local judiciary, but also an opportunity to engage as a group, outside of the university campus. This resonates with Krause's suggestion

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12 See assessment below for further detail on the reflective narrative.

that 'opportunities for civic engagement with communities beyond campus' is a way in which we can assist with engagement (Krause, 2007, p. 9).

46. Numerous other opportunities for further engagement either through small group work or even via online environments (technologies such as blogs and wikis) are embedded in the subjects. These opportunities provide students with many occasions to discuss, clarify and practice what is necessary to successfully complete the subjects whilst at the same time, providing students with many opportunities to simply 'engage' with other students.

5. Assessment

47. *The first year experience in Australia: Findings from a decade of national studies* report identified that in relation to assessment, '[m]ore than one-third of students … are likely to have confronted the reality that they are not performing as well as they expected' (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005, p. 23). The report further suggests that this is a traumatic adjustment for students (Krause et al., 2003, p. 23). We also know from the research that students focus their learning around assessment (for example, Gibbs, 2006). Careful consideration of what steps can be taken to ease students' adjustment to university assessment processes, without being criticised of spoon-feeding is critical. The team involved in the design and delivery of the program are keen to mitigate against this traumatic adjustment and as a result have employed a number of strategies addressing assessment. Set out below are some examples of these strategies:

- Team members liaise with each other to ensure that the assessment is appropriately staggered throughout the study period and that there are no clashes in due dates. Assessment tasks are designed so that they are aligned with learning outcomes and teaching and learning activities. Tasks are incremental in terms of weightings, type and degree of difficulty and the nature of the skill being developed

and tested. The range of tasks is also designed to permit optimal opportunities for the provision of both formative and summative feedback with a view to enhancing student engagement with the subjects. Where possible, tasks are designed so that they represent authentic and real life scenarios.

- For most assessment items, students are assessed with reference to 'criteria-based' (Sadler, 2005, p. 178) assessment grids. These grids are discussed with students in the large lecture environment at an appropriate time to the assessment due date (Krause, 2003, p. 10 suggests 'reiterat[ing] expectations at appropriate times') and are designed in an attempt to make explicit to students what they need to do to complete the assessment item successfully (Kift, 2003). The criteria grids also allow team members to provide students with comprehensive and timely feedback on their work.

48. Some illustrations of assessment items that are staggered throughout the program are as follows:[13]

- In the subject *Legal Institutions and Processes* students are required to submit four blawg[14] postings for assessment.[15] This task not only requires students to engage with content material relevant to the subject but also uses technology for social and academic engagement purposes. The first of the four postings provides an opportunity for social engagement. In this initial post, students are required to introduce themselves to other students and to provide some background information about themselves. In the subsequent postings, the tasks are more difficult. For instance, students are required to write a court report after visiting the local court and observing proceedings, a critique of a news

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13 This is not an exhaustive list of the assessment tasks.

14 A law blog

15 This assessment item has been designed by Kathrine Galloway and Dominique Thiriet.

report, and a comment on research material relevant to a particular topic. Students can choose the order in which they undertake these tasks allowing for control over the learning process. Word counts (from 100 to 400 words) and weightings (from 5% to 15%) provide students the opportunity to complete a number of 'low stakes' components across the course of the study period.

- The subject *Legal Research, Writing and Analysis,* requires students to complete a reflective writing portfolio undertaken weekly for a 10-week period. For the purposes of this task, students are required to submit on a weekly basis a 250-word typed written reflection. The task is multi-faceted. It provides students with an opportunity to reflect on content material that they have covered in lectures and tutorials, on skills they have developed, or even on the law in context (Roebuck et al., 2007, at 42, citing Webb & Maughan, 1996, p. 283). It requires students to practice writing for the discipline of law on a weekly basis and it also requires students to practice their referencing skills. The task is both formative and summative in nature. Students receive weekly formative feedback via a rubric on the quality of their writing, reflection and referencing. In addition, students receive a 'low stakes' summative mark each week for timely completion and compliance with instructions.

- In *Contract Law 1* students are required to submit a tutorial portfolio.[16] The portfolio provides students with an opportunity to showcase, and have assessed, their work relating to tutorial questions that have been discussed in class with their teacher and their peers. Students are given scope to select the items on which they wish to be assessed for summative purposes, allowing them to have some control over the process and their learning.

- In *Law, Society and Change* students are required to complete a case note and critique[17] as an assessment item. This task builds on skills developed in *Legal Research, Writing and Analysis* where students were introduced to core skills on researching and locating case law and writing case notes. The assessment task requires students to demonstrate oral and written communication skills as well as research skills. The context for the task is provided by a case that is applicable to key concepts that are being covered throughout the subject.

- In *Legal Concepts* students are required to complete an in-class test that examines an understanding of the core concepts that have been covered to that point in time. Students are also required to write an essay on one of the tutorial questions that they have had the opportunity to discuss in class with their teacher and their peers.[18]

- In *Contract Law 2* students build on the problem solving skills that they have acquired in study period 1. Students complete assessment tasks in groups and use wikis to evidence their engagement in group work activities.[19]

49. In addition to the assessments outlined above, students are also required to complete examinations in the university's scheduled examination periods. Assessing by examination allows the team to meet the university's invigilated assessment requirements. In some of the subjects, students are also assessed on the oral contributions that they make to their tutorials.

50. While at first glance the assessment requirements set out above may appear onerous, in most instances, they have been specifically aligned with the various learning activities taking place throughout the course of the study period. They therefore permit opportunities for practice

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16 This assessment item was originally designed by Mandy Shircore and Diana Henriss-Andersen.

17 Kathrine Galloway designed this assessment task.

18 Both of these assessment items have been designed by Professor Paul Havemann and Rachel Bradshaw.

19 This assessment task has been designed by Mandy Shircore.

(Christensen & Kift, 2000, p. 217) and as a result are designed to avoid shock and surprise at being assessed on something unexpected (Krause, 2007, p. 10). They are designed to assess students progressively and some components are designed to assess students on the work that they would be required to complete in order to otherwise generally be prepared for the subject: for example, students would be expected to be prepared for and to participate in tutorials. Pursuant to the assessment regime described, a component of a student's overall marks for the subject is awarded for completion of this work.

6. Evaluation and monitoring

Evaluation

51. The effectiveness of the program is systematically evaluated in a number of ways. From a student perspective, the university provides staff involved in the program with student feedback about the subject (SFS). Students complete the feedback about subject survey online. Staff can also apply to have students provide feedback on the teaching of the subject (SFT). These surveys are completed in class time.

52. In addition to collecting feedback from students, the team members have met to reflect on the effectiveness of the program.[20] The reflection workshops, usually a day in duration, are designed to provide the team with an opportunity to review each of the subjects, including the learning outcomes and the assessment, and to share what has and has not worked. The workshops provide a forum in which staff can engage in an ongoing process of reflection, adjustment and refinement as well as offering an opportunity to ensure that team members continue to have a shared understanding of the common goals and objectives of the program.

53. At a more subject specific level, members of the team liaise with each other on a very regular basis to discuss the weekly

20 This review process was initiated by Professor Havemann.

materials, assessment tasks and general running of the subjects to ensure that a consistent and similar learning experience is being delivered to all students.

Monitoring

54. A number of strategies are employed to monitor students' progress and attendance. These include early checks of class lists for attendance and checks of results on early assessments. These checks allow team members to identify, contact, support and provide timely information on assistance available to those students who are missing classes or have not performed well on assessment items.

7. Implications for implementation

55. The integrated first year program for commencing law students as described above requires a significant investment in terms of both tangible and intangible resources. Set out below are some comments on the implications for implementation of the program (Westcott & Shircore, 2006):

- The core team of academics involved in the law first year experience program have either self-selected to work in the program and/or were involved in first year teaching prior to the implementation of the new program.
- The team were fortunate to receive two small grants to assist with the original design of the program.[21]
- The success of the program requires ongoing administrative support: for instance, appropriate timetabling of subjects is critical to reflect the integrated nature of knowledge building on a weekly basis.
- Program success relies heavily on all who are involved to work closely together to refine and reflect on the

21 The grants (one university based and the other faculty based) were applied to expenses associated with teaching relief, staff training and travel, a support person and evaluation of the program.

effectiveness of the program and to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the objectives and goals.

• Reward and recognition for work on programs of this nature is critical. The team members have received a number of faculty based teaching awards acknowledging their efforts.

• Ensuring that all members of the team, and in particular sessional staff members, are aware of the goals and objectives of the program is critical. In the initial years of the program, members of the team delivered a series of workshops for sessional staff to familiarise those staff with the objectives of the law first year program and to share with them the desired method of instruction and delivery. These workshops were offered in addition to the university's induction workshops offered for sessional staff, which staff are required to complete for ongoing appointment. In addition to this, in 2007, an online organisation for sessional staff was piloted by the author (Westcott, 2006). The online organisation operated through the university's learning management system. It provided sessionals with an online repository of information to assist them with their work, recognising that they, like the students they were teaching, may be diverse and have special needs in terms of their effective transition to successful university sessional staff members. The repository sought to bring together otherwise fragmented information such as class and examination timetables, how to get paid, who is teaching what, and links to services such as the Teaching and Learning Development Unit. A second aspect of the repository consisted of a blog where the author made entries staggered throughout the course of the study period commenting on and providing information on issues that were relevant at the particular point in time. Topics included information on pre-study period activities, how to assess tutorials, how to provide

effective feedback, reflection on assessment, and examination and study tips.

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