

Implementing Interactive Self –Paced Learning Resources for Teaching Procedural Law

The study of procedural law is an essential component of the Bachelor of Laws degree at the Australian National University (ANU). Procedural law is complex, mainly statute based, can be difficult to teach and, sometimes, less exciting for students to learn. However, it is crucial for the understanding of the everyday operation of criminal law and for case preparation work in an environment when procedural law tends to change regularly. At the end of the 2003, the instructors of the undergraduate course, *Criminal Law and Procedure*, decided that they should teach the course differently in 2004. In particular, they thought that criminal procedure could be taught in a more consolidated, engaging and contextualized way.

The objectives of the course state that a student who completes the course should have:

- a sound knowledge and critical understanding of the relevant legislation and case law;
- an ability to apply this knowledge and understanding in such a way as to identify the legal issues
- presented by a factual problem;
- a familiarity with the more important debates about the purposes of the criminal law and the
- fundamental concepts which it embodies; and
- an appreciation of the broad political and social forces that shape selected areas of the criminal law.

The criminal procedure component of this course has typically been examined in a cursory and ad hoc fashion in the introductory lectures. The instructors have attempted to incorporate more procedural content over the years, recognising that the procedural topics are now prescribed by statute as a prerequisite for admission as a legal practitioner. The delivery of the procedural material, for both academic and professional competency reasons, needed to be reviewed.

After considerable discussion, the strategy adopted for Semester 1 2004, was to teach criminal procedure using an online self-paced learning module (“CrimPro”). This module consisted of a DVD and a companion WebCT course site which was provided for the 240 students enrolled in this compulsory course. The DVD contained a video recording of a dramatized criminal pre-trial and trial scenario and 26 questions related to the procedures depicted in the scenario were answered by legal prosecutors or a legal aid solicitor. Students studied the DVD, other documentaries produced by the ABC (Australian) television network, and the WebCT material (case law, legislation, and secondary material) during two self study weeks. During this period, students also participated in two small group seminars. Students were informed that there would be a compulsory problem based question in the final exam.

Primarily, the evaluation was concerned with student views in relation to two aspects of the use of the *CrimPro* module:

1. The learning experience
2. The use of technology

Results from the first evaluation suggested that there are ongoing challenges for students involved in self-directed learning, particularly for students challenged by new methods and philosophies of teaching and learning. The use of scaffolding to ensure that learners receive the appropriate support and assistance should be given high priority. Results also indicated that any scaffolding should include an explicit statement regarding the complementary nature of the DVD, the WebCT site, other resources and the seminars. This can be done as part of lectures given prior to the implementation of the *CrimPro* module.

This module was also the basis for the study of criminal procedure for an elective course, *Selected Topics in Criminal Law* in Semester 2, 2004. The *CrimPro* video component, which was previously distributed as a DVD to each student, was delivered using streaming technology. The same evaluation instrument used for the students enrolled in the compulsory undergraduate course was also administered. Utilizing the evaluation feedback obtained during the two semesters of 2004, the *CrimPro* module, with modifications to the delivery technology used and the level of scaffolding, will form the basis for the teaching of criminal procedures during Semester 1, 2005. Further evaluation will be carried out during 2005.

The challenges of producing this module and its impact on learning outcomes, as measured by the online evaluation instrument administered over three consecutive semesters, are discussed.