



Sentencing policy

Author: Mike Stephens

Dept of Social Sciences
Loughborough University

This case-study describes the use of a VLE known as LEARN to provide an information base for students studying a Criminology module. The aim is to use the facilities offered by e-learning to provide students with a large amount of text-based information in an accessible form and to offer an interactive exercise on-line for follow-up discussion in seminar groups.

The space includes:

- A discussion forum which the lecturer uses for messages regarding administrative matters; hand-outs (provided after lectures); up-to-date information for example television programmes to watch or useful articles in newspapers
- An on-line exercise
- Links to relevant web-sites
- The course bibliography, linked to the library's online facility

The only paper material provided is a course hand-out at the beginning of the module

The exercise

The students are provided with:

- An actual, but anonymised, pre-sentence report from the Crown court
- Information on theory of sentencing procedures
- A set of instructions about use of the pre-sentence report
- A list of sentences and explanations which include guidelines about the appropriateness of the sentences in this case

The first stage of the exercise requires the students to select a sentence and prepare an explanation for their choice. Students are then able to press a button to discover the judge's actual decision and to find a list of questions for them to think about. This is the second stage of the exercise.

The students complete the exercise individually on-line and bring their notes to a seminar where they discuss their decisions. This can be followed up with another case from the magistrates court in which students role-play the panel of three magistrates and agree a sentencing decision.

Benefits

- The web allows for more detailed explanation than is possible in a lecture. A large amount of information can be made available, but accessed by students in manageable chunks.

- The facility allows students to work individually at their own pace, finding their own way through the material.
- The material can be up-dated easily.

Sentencing policy

- No copying and manual distribution of materials is required.

Challenges

The on-line exercise works well, but getting students to make their own personal contributions to the Discussion Forum is proving elusive.

Although students have not referred to any problems in their evaluations, colleagues have suggested that the use of the VLE has devolved printing costs from the university to students

Learning the skills and developing on-line learning is time-consuming for the lecturer and time allocations for teaching do not provide a reward for this kind of development.

Mike Stephens
Senior Lecturer
Room U3.19
Brockington
Department of Social Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire
LE11 3TU



The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)
University of Southampton School of Social Sciences
Southampton
SO17 1BJ



Printed on recycled paper