

Group B - Wednesday 9 July 11.30am to 1.00pm

Using Effective and Engaging Assessment to Scaffold Development of Legal Problem Solving Skills in First Year Law

Mandy Shircore

James Cook University

Abstract

Legal problem solving is arguably one of the most important skills that a student of law must learn. Despite this, law schools have traditionally placed little emphasis on how problem solving skills are developed. Students have often been left to acquire the skills themselves through legal skills text books or general tutorial discussions. In recognition that 'time poor' students of today are less likely to be motivated to 'self-learn' such skills, an effective and engaging assessment regime has been introduced into first year contract law at James Cook University, which aims to scaffold the development of legal problem solving skills.

As part of an integrated FYE program, the innovative program involves a number of highly authentic tasks which are relevant to the learner *at their stage of learning*. As the students' knowledge base, skills base and confidence develops, the tasks become more complex and the students are required to take more responsibility for their learning. Through the use of constructive alignment the assessment tasks are explicitly linked to the subject content and learning outcomes of both the contract law subject and the whole of the FYE program. Assessment tasks include email negotiation exercises, simple hypothetical memos from a Senior Solicitor to a trainee, peer reviews and group work assessed through the use of wikis. The results have demonstrated a higher degree of engagement with the subject as a whole and improved problem solving skills and academic results.

Articulating a Transition Pedagogy for Legal Education: What Might Good First Year Curriculum Design in Law Look Like?

Professor Sally Kift

Queensland University of Technology

Abstract

The first year program of the law degree bears a heavy, foundational burden. It must be carefully designed both to assist diverse student cohorts in their early learning development and also to support their learning engagement through the intentional integration and sequencing of desirable knowledge, skills and attitudes. Only with such detailed attention to design and delivery will the first year provide the necessarily stable platform on which the rest of the law curriculum can be built and mapped.

This presentation will examine the notion of an intentional "transition pedagogy" – a guiding philosophy for intentional first year curriculum design that carefully scaffolds and mediates the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts. Issues around the identification of generic first year curriculum design principles will be discussed and specific examples provided as to how these might be enacted in first year law curriculum design.
