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## Using the student lifecycle approach to enhance employability: An example from Criminology and Criminal Justice

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Universities are increasingly focusing on the employability of students after they graduate from their studies. While practicums is one way of enhancing students' employability, the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice embeds employability throughout its degree programs using a range of strategies. These methods are based on the student lifecycle approach embedded into the Employability Framework. Therefore, students are able to undertake activities that enhance their employability as they transition into university, transition through their degree program and then transition out of university and into the workforce. Alumni are involved within approaches located in the transition up and back stage of the student lifecycle. This paper uses the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice as a case study for how employability can be scaffolded throughout an undergraduate degree program. It clearly indicates that students can begin to develop their understanding and skills in the area of employability within criminology before they start their degree, throughout their studies and after they graduate. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, Special Issue, 2017, 18(2), 141-151*)

Keywords: work-integrated learning (WIL), employability, student lifecycle, criminology

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Universities are progressively more focused on improving the employability of their students (Clarke, 2017; Qenani, MacDougall, & Sexton, 2014; Rothwell, Jewell, & Hardie, 2009). Despite this emphasis, there is no consensus in the literature regarding what constitutes employability. For example, students believe that employability is a short-term idea that is focused on gaining a first graduate position. However, while the ability to obtain employment (but not necessarily being employed) is a key element of employability, having skills and certain personality characteristics are also a key part (Tymon, 2013). The types of skills that employers believe are important for graduate employment include communication, teamwork, information technology and organization (Bennett, 2002).

Work-integrated learning is a process where students are given an opportunity to develop connections between the knowledge they have learnt while at university within a workplace (Beattie & Riley, 2015; Jackson, 2015b; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). There are a range of ways that work-integrated learning can be enacted. These include work placements, internships, practica, supervised practice and simulations (Smith, 2012). University students believe that work placements, for example, are critical in developing their employability (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Tymon, 2013). They are able to identify the benefits of participating in a placement (A. Bates & Bates, 2013). These types of work-integrated learning courses are becoming increasingly a required part of Australian tertiary degree programs. However, collaborations like these may be less frequent in other jurisdictions (Bilsland & Nagy, 2015).

There are numerous benefits associated with work-integrated learning. These include the enablement of self-efficacy (Coll, Zegwaard, & Lay, 2001; Freudenberg, Brimble, Cameron, MacDonald, & English, 2012) including work self-efficacy (M. Bates, Thompson, & Bates, 2013; Raelin et al., 2011; Raelin et al., 2014; Thompson, Bates, & Bates, 2016) and career decision self-efficacy (Reddan, 2014). Work-integrated learning is also associated with selecting (Jackson, 2015a) and clarifying (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011) career choices as well as

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professional identity and socialization (A. Bates, Bates, & Bates, 2007). They also appear to improve academic results (Jones, Green, & Higson, 2017). Traditional work-integrated learning courses such as placements are resource intensive and frequently require staff to undertake different roles and responsibilities than those who teach more traditional academic subjects (M. Bates, 2011). Therefore, we need to consider alternative methods of improving the employability of students by embedding a range of opportunities throughout their studies.

## EMPLOYABILITY

There is some confusion regarding the concepts of employability and employment, despite the fact that they are very different. Employment involves an individual holding a job while employability is when an individual is capable of being employed (Oliver, 2015). A person can be highly employable while not holding a job (Jackson & Wilton, 2016) for reasons such as family commitments. Additionally, employability is a complex concept that is continually evolving (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2016). Research suggests that employability contains sub-areas: collaboration and teamwork, informed decision making, information literacy in context, commencement readiness, lifelong learning, professional practices and standards as well as integration of theory and practice (Smith et al., 2016). Clarke (2017) argues that employability has broader factors including social capital (e.g., networks, social class and university ranking), human capital (e.g., skills, competencies, work experience), individual behaviors (e.g., career self-management, career building skills) and individual attributes (e.g., personality factors, adaptability, flexibility).

Students are aware that, in conjunction with their educational institution, they have some responsibility for their employability (Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2016). Various factors affect students' perceived employability including their prior work experience and particular types of work-integrated learning (Jackson & Wilton, 2016). As well as through placements, employability can be enhanced through simulations (Strachan, 2016) and work experience within the field that they are studying, working outside the field that they are studying, volunteering and being members of student clubs (Sin et al., 2016). Research suggests that there are six curriculum elements within a work-integrated learning course that contribute to the students' employability. These are: authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on integration and assessments focused on integration (Smith et al., 2016).

## STUDENT LIFECYCLE

The student lifecycle (Figure 1) is important in enhancing how we understand students' engagement and achievements within their studies by identifying their needs as they progress through their university degree (Burton, Chester, Xenos, & Elgar, 2013). The student lifecycle focuses on four key transition times within each person's university career: transition towards, transition in, transition through and transitions up, out and back (Lizzio, 2012).

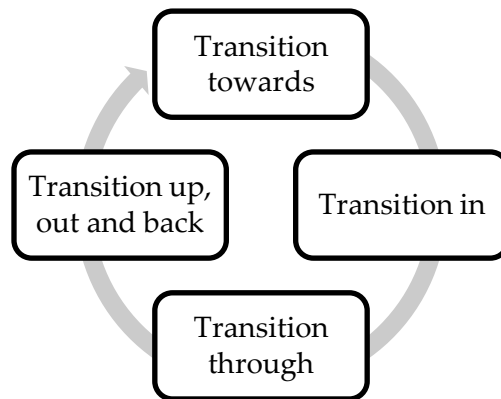


FIGURE 1: The student lifecycle (adapted from Lizzio, 2011)

The first stage, *transition towards*, refers to students before they start studying and refers to their ambitions and investigations before making a decision about what they will study (Lizzio, 2012). The second stage is *transition in*. In this stage, commencing students commit and prepare for their studies. The third stage, *transition through*, is focused on continuing students. In this stage, students build towards success in their studies. The final stage is *transitions up, out and back* and is where graduates and alumni focus on their future achievements and how they can continue their association with the university (Lizzio, 2012).

The *transition in* stage of the student lifecycle has been considered in previous research with a focus on improving student engagement and retention (Chester, Xenos, Burton, & Elgar, 2013; Taylor & Harrison, 2016; Wilson et al., 2016). The student lifecycle has also been used to guide interventions for students (Tower, Walker, Wilson, Watson, & Tronoff, 2015). While students may initially be focused on developing their student identity, as they progress through their degree program they increasingly concentrate on their graduate identity (Lizzio, 2011).

#### EMPLOYABILITY FRAMEWORK

The Career Development and Employability Framework (Figure 2) developed by Griffith University's Careers and Employment Service (2015) provides guidance regarding how career development learning, industry connections and student actions work together in order to advance a student's graduate career. The framework is integrated with the Student Lifecycle so that the timing of various actions within a degree by students and staff are clear.

Students are able to undertake activities at all stages of the student lifecycle to improve their employability (Careers and Employment Service, 2015). During the transition in stage, students can become aware of possible career options and methods that they can use to increase their employability. Students should develop professional networks (in person and through virtual means such as LinkedIn) during the transition through stage. This will help them to better connect with those employed in their aspirational field. It also assists with their developing professional identity. In the transition out stage students should start to feel as if they have some professional mastery and be taking steps to gain employment or further study. The final stage, transition up, is more focussed on the students establishing themselves in their graduate role and then inviting them to re-engage with the university in order to

mentor students, provide guest lectures or supervise internships (Careers and Employment Service, 2015).

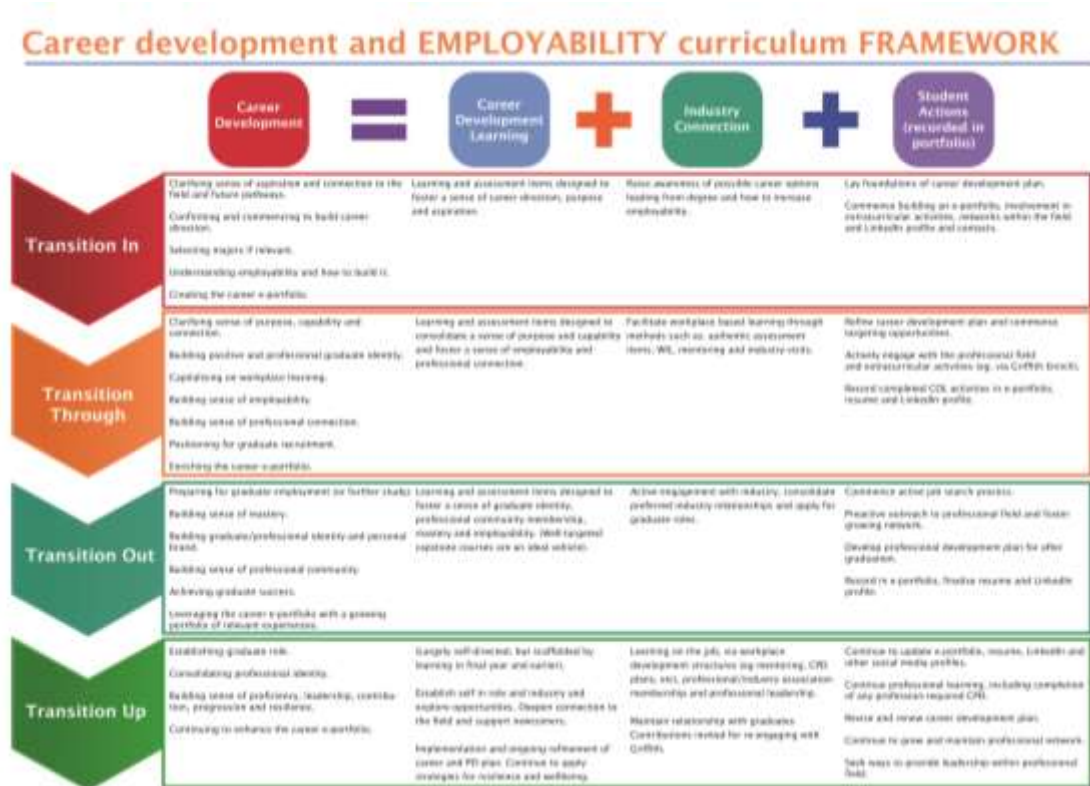


FIGURE 2: Career Development and Employability Curriculum Framework (Careers and Employment Service, 2015)

### CASE STUDY

The interest from students regarding studying criminology has been increasing for some time (Tontodonato, 2006). Griffith University established a degree program in Criminology in the early 1990's. Since the establishment of the program, the criminology community at Griffith University has grown to be the largest in Australia and one of the largest in the world (Wimshurst & Ransley, 2007). Griffith University adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to criminology and therefore includes courses on research skills, the legal system, psychology and sociology, as well as more traditional criminology courses (e.g., in policing and corrections). As well as a three-year degree program, the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice offers double degree programs in human services, psychology, forensic science, law and information technology. All of the double degree programs, with the exception of law, take four years full-time (or equivalent) to complete. Law takes five and half years full-time study (or equivalent) to complete. Approximately half of the 1,280 students enrolled in 2014 were completing the three year degree program with the remaining students studying in a double degree program (Wimshurst & Manning, 2015). Wimshurst and Allard (2007) suggest that criminology schools should focus on student transition from university to the workforce. As such, the School has a strong focus on employability.

*Application of the Employability Framework within the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice*

As shown in Table 1, the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice uses a range of approaches within each stage of the student lifecycle to enhance employability. The first stage, *transition towards*, involves interactions with potential students regarding future career pathways. The School proactively interacts, not only with potential students, but also those who are likely to provide guidance to these individuals, including teachers or parents. Specific initiatives include high school visits by academic staff. During these visits, high school students engage in an interactive exercise that demonstrates the type of work that criminologists undertake. Potential students are also invited to a careers evening where students hear about the career paths from alumni of the School. Information about possible criminology careers is also available at University Open Days and major marketing and recruitment events, like the Tertiary Studies Exposition (TSEXPO). Finally, the Deputy Head of School (Learning and Teaching) hosts a lunch for teachers and principals that explains the criminology program in order for them to provide accurate advice to their students.

TABLE 1: Embedding employability in criminology

Phase	Activities
Transition Towards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High school visits</li> <li>• Teachers' and Principals' lunch</li> <li>• Careers evening</li> <li>• Open Day</li> <li>• TSEXPO</li> </ul>
Transition In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commencing student Orientation Program</li> <li>• Criminology Skills (commencing student core course)</li> </ul>
Transition Through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible study options</li> <li>• Criminology Student Society</li> <li>• Griffith Industry Mentoring Scheme</li> <li>• Criminology Undergraduate Research Internship Scheme (CURIP)</li> <li>• Academic Excellence Society (ACES)</li> <li>• Community Internship</li> </ul>
Transition Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing Professionally (final year capstone course)</li> <li>• Professional Practice (final year elective course)</li> <li>• Restorative Justice Practices (final year elective course)</li> </ul>
Transition Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers evening</li> <li>• Arts Education and Law alumni awards</li> <li>• Supervision of placement students</li> </ul>

Orientation events are an important part of the *transition in* stage because they begin to provide students with an understanding that there are subfields within the area of criminology. Thus, selected academic staff provide presentations to students regarding their research and the impact of this research for practitioners. The School also provides a core first year course called Criminology Skills, which teaches key academic skills such as critical reflective thinking skills, academic essay writing skills and referencing. However, there is also a career development component within this course. Students watch videos of criminology

professionals talking about their careers and listen to a guest lecture provided by Griffith University Careers and Employment Services. Some of the guidance provided to students in this lecture includes volunteering and joining student associations in order to improve their employability.

Career development opportunities are provided to criminology students as they *transition through* their studies. Activities supported by the School and specific to criminology students include the Criminology Undergraduate Research Internship Program (CURIP), the Criminology Student Society and the Academic Excellence Society (ACES). CURIP provides undergraduate students with hands-on research experience. Students can apply to work on specific research projects that academic staff advertise. Undergraduate students run the Criminology Student Society, although there is an academic staff member who acts as a liaison with the School. The Criminology Student Society provides students with a range of activities that can enhance their employability. This includes hosting small lunches (less than 15 students) with a professional. At these lunches students can talk to the professional about their career path. They also organize visits to the Queensland Police Academy, the Courts, correctional facilities and the Queensland Police Service Headquarters. Students that are achieving to a high standard within their studies are invited to join ACES. This group of students is provided access to a range of activities including invitations to attend seminars by visiting scholars and opportunities to attend conferences. Activities provided at a university-wide level include the Griffith Industry Mentoring Scheme run by the Careers and Employment Service. This scheme matches students with an industry mentor who meets and discusses career plans with students. Students can also complete a university-wide placement course, Community Internship. This course is designed using the principles of service learning. As such, students complete a 50-hour placement within a not-for-profit organization. Finally, criminology students have flexibility regarding the way that they complete their studies. Almost all courses can be completed internally, externally or via Open Universities Australia. This enables them to study externally if they are unable to attend class due to employment commitments or to study over the summer break in order to finish their degree program early.

The School provides three courses at the final year level that are designed to help students *transition out* from the university into professional roles. Developing Professionally is the first course. It is the capstone course for all students enrolled in the three-year Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice and it is an elective for students enrolled in the double degrees. This course includes a range of career development activities (e.g., job search strategies, preparing resumes and interview techniques), as well as reflection designed to develop professional identities and self-care strategies. Griffith's Careers and Employment Service is critical in delivering aspects of this course and staff from the Service provide four guest lectures. Professional Practice and Restorative Justice Practices are elective work-integrated learning courses. In Professional Practice students complete a 90 - 100 hour placement with an organization that works in the area of criminology and criminal justice. As part of this course, students are given an organizational supervisor and a major project to complete. The Department and Justice and Attorney-General co-teaches Restorative Justice Practices with an academic staff member. Within this course, students learn a range of practical communication skills needed to run mediation conferences.

While the *transition up* phase is largely self-directed, it is scaffolded by final year courses and continued support from the university. Frequently, alumni of the School return to participate

in activities related to the career development of future or current students. This includes presenting at the Careers Evening or supervising students on placement. Additionally, the Arts Education and Law Alumni Awards recognize the achievements of criminology graduates working in industry.

While the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice does include a range of work-integrated learning opportunities within its undergraduate degree program, including the courses Developing Professionally, Restorative Justice Practices, Professional Practice and Community Internship, there also is a range of other activities available to students. These activities are designed to occur before, during and after students complete their criminology studies.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The employability of graduates is becoming increasingly important to universities (Clarke, 2017; Qenani et al., 2014; Rothwell et al., 2009). The School of Criminology and Criminal Justice has had a strong focus on the employability of its graduates for a significant amount of time. This is critical given that many students study criminology because of their strong interest in the area (Tontodonato, 2006), and they may not necessarily have a strong understanding of the career outcomes of the degree. As discussed above, the School has therefore developed a range of activities and opportunities for students before, throughout and after the criminology program to enhance employability. The use of the Employability Framework has been useful when examining where various employability and work-integrated learning initiatives are located within the Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice. The framework has ensured that various activities are located at times that are most beneficial for students.

There is a view by students (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Tymon, 2013), alumni and business (Sarkar, Overton, Thompson, & Rayner, 2016) that placements are a key mechanism that can be used to enhance student employability. At Griffith, students studying criminology have two opportunities to undertake a placement. The first is through a university-wide course, Community Internship. Community Internship is based on service learning principles. Research suggests that the number of service learning courses within a criminology context is limited (Burke & Bush, 2013). The second is through a school run course, Professional Practice. Given the resourcing issues involved in providing traditional work-integrated learning courses (M. Bates, 2011) for undergraduate students and the large numbers of students enrolled in criminology, the provision of alternative work-integrated learning opportunities is critical in developing the employability of the student cohort. At Griffith University this includes Restorative Justice Practices, which is co-taught with a key criminological agency, the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General as well as Developing Professionally. Developing Professionally, a compulsory course for three-year criminology students and an elective for those enrolled in double degrees, has a specific focus on enhancing student employability.

While the Employability Framework has been applied in a criminological context, it has not yet been evaluated. There is a need for research to not only identify the effectiveness of the framework, but also the various components on employability. This could include qualitative interviews with alumni to explore how they believed the elements of the framework improved their employability, as well as using quantitative analysis from a source such as the Graduate Destination Survey to identify if students who participated in particular elements



have stronger employment outcomes. Additionally, given that there are gender influences on the career aspirations of criminology students (Yim, 2009), this should be considered in future research.

The Employability Framework is designed to be used as a tool across specific disciplines. It encapsulates many ideas within the literature, such as the need for students to be made aware of possible career options at the commencement of their studies (Sarkar et al., 2016), developing pre-professional identities and building professional networks by joining communities such as professional associations and student societies (Jackson, 2016; Sarkar et al., 2016), fostering networking skills (Batistic & Tymon, 2017), embedding job search skills within a degree (Cranmer, 2006; Sarkar et al., 2016), involving employers in degree design and delivery (Cranmer, 2006), and preparing students to take responsibility for their continued learning (Glover, Law, & Youngman, 2002). Thus, while the case study above has focused on criminology as a discipline, it should be useful in contexts as diverse as engineering and education.

There is evidence to suggest that programs designed to improve employability are successful (Hernandez-Fernaud, Ruiz-de la Rosa, Negrin, Ramos-Sapena, & Hernandez, 2017). Thus, universities can improve student employability outcomes. While the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice provided activities within specific courses, as well as to students more generally, some supports such as the Careers and Employment Service were provided by the university. Therefore, schools and universities that are looking at methods of scaffolding students' employability throughout a degree program should begin by mapping their existing resources and services against the Employability Framework. They can then leverage from these services to provide more bespoke activities to the students within particular degree programs.

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