

Diversifying the Curriculum funding blog

We received Diversifying the Curriculum funding in 2022/23 for two guest lecturers on the course unit CRIM 30662 From Imprisonment to Rehabilitation. This is a course all about the theory of desistance from crime (what factors help people stop offending) recognising that this varies according to many aspects such as offence type and the demographics of the person desisting. It also considers the ways that people are managed in the criminal justice system and how this helps or hinders their desistance from crime. The two guest lecturers who contributed to the course both had lived experience of desisting from crime and were able to explain their journeys to the students and therefore really bring the theory to life in a powerful way. Desistance theory has been criticised for being overly focussed on white men (Weaver and McNeil, 2010) but there is a growing body of literature that is beginning to consider how this differs for women, people of faith, and minority ethnic groups (see for example Maruna et al, 2006; Marranci, 2007; Calverley, 2009; Glynn, 2014; Barr, 2019). Both speakers also have diversity characteristics and therefore also effectively show students what additional factors can impact and further complicate people's journeys out of crime such as mental health issues, drug addiction, ethnicity, faith, parenthood. These discussions also allowed students to develop an appreciation of the concept of intersectionality and an understanding that people in the criminal justice system have many aspects of personhood that can influence their journeys out of crime.

Incorporating these guest speakers into our unit enabled us to embed students' learning in everyday, real-life experiences, which is a valuable approach to teaching and learning. From an employability perspective, it is really important that students studying this course unit meet people with lived experience as they will potentially be going to be the ones working with people in the criminal justice system in the future. This helps ensure that students develop a nuanced view of people who have committed crime so they can make a difference in the criminal justice system. It is also essential that our students are exposed to diverse life experiences and have the opportunity to engage with and ask questions of the people (and system) they are learning about.

The guest lectures were delivered alongside online learning materials and with input from one of the two lecturers on the course unit, Drs Caroline Miles and Emily Turner. This ensured the students were given the theory and research before the guest brought it to life. The lecturers met the guests when they were in prison and took part in Learning Criminology Inside, a Learning Together course where university students study alongside prison-students in the prison setting. Taking part in these courses gave the two guests an insight into helping university students understand what they are learning about and ignited a passion for this. They have greatly appreciated the chance to have their stories heard at such a place as a university. We know chances like this are really important in people's journeys out of crime in relation to generativity (giving back) (Maruna, 2001). This is what the guest lecturers said:

"Being able to enlighten and inspire the students is a blessing and a privilege to me. It means the world to me, as it gives me a huge sense of purpose"

"Being a guest to provide honest and open information about my lived experiences gives me a small piece of goodness back from the chunk of badness that was done in my life. Only by giving back can you gain anything."

While no formal evaluation of this was done by students, it was clear that the guests were very well received by students. The students really welcomed the honest accounts that the guests gave and appreciated having other points of view given to them. They also commented that it aided their

understanding. The students engaged with the speakers asking them very thoughtful questions. Students said:

“guest speakers make our learning experience more valuable and allows us to strengthen our knowledge and give us advice for future careers”

“Hearing experiences from guest speakers was very interesting.”

We hope to continue bringing in these guests to enhance the student experience and their understanding for future cohorts of students.