

Graduate futures and the responsibilities of universities

When Good Students Go Bad

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Online learning is increasingly used as a means of addressing the need for post-graduate law students to fulfill practical placement requirements through a virtual world of practice. Within the online sphere, practitioner teachers are engaged to ensure an authentic learning experience for students.

This form of situated learning allows students to interact with skilled practitioners in the safety of the university forum. For the practitioner the role of teacher is challenging. As a legal practitioner, teacher and academic their identity straddles two distinct and complex areas of professional life. The relationship they have with the postgraduate student is therefore unique. They are placed at the cusp of the students' transition to legal practitioner. Once this transition is completed students will enter a world where their teacher becomes their peer.

So what happens when something goes wrong during this crucial time? When student behavior towards their teachers and fellow students goes beyond the boundaries of ordinary?

The response of the teacher is crucial. As teachers we are often blinded by the restrictions of privacy and discrimination legislation. We search for a ways to respond that fall under the university medical, ethical or disciplinary frameworks.

Yet these frameworks can only assist if they are designed to meet current and emerging social needs. In today's climate where practitioner teachers are members of a broader professional community of practice we need to consider if our duty of care reaches beyond the students to their future clients, stakeholders and our peers in the legal profession.

This paper will discuss problematic student behavior in the emerging arena of virtual practice and online education for law students and it will examine the implications it can have for a graduates identity formation and professional life. It will discuss the unique role that the dual identity of the teacher as academic and practitioner can play in embedding and promoting professional behavior to support future practice.