Principle 3
Emphasise the importance, relevance and integration of theory and knowledge with professional practice to develop solutions to real world issues

Case Study
Dr Merrelyn Bates,
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

The foundation of my work over the past 23 years is my respect and support for the development of students as individuals. This experience provides a strong foundation for a range of leadership roles to foster self-efficacy and professional capacity for future work in Criminology and Criminal Justice occupations.

An effective strategy for fostering self-efficacy is demonstrated in the CSI course. When I speak of CSI, I am not referring to the television series that follows Las Vegas criminalists as they use physical evidence to solve grisly murders. In my role as a School of Criminology and Criminal Justice First Year Advisor, I established the First Year Teaching Team (FYMT), which included all the first year academic teaching staff, learning advisors, information technology staff, staff from the University's indigenous unit (GUMURRI) and student administration. As a team we met regularly and instituted a number of strategies to support each new student group, which included the non-credit, “Criminology Students Investigating” course or CSI, which provides opportunities for students to access information about assignment writing, student administrative issues, stress and exam management strategies and a range of other matters.

In Professional Communication, a first year, first semester compulsory core course, which currently caters for more than 300 students with diverse profiles, developing professional capacity is a key objective. This course is an experientially based introduction to developing students’ communication skills, both oral and written, while introducing the range and nature of potential employment and career opportunities.

Initially, each student is required to use an aspect of communication theory applying it to a research task in an academic essay. Then, students are required to research relevant literature and to design appropriate questions for interviewing informed experts. Providing students with the opportunity to select and pursue their own topic provides them with a sense of agency that enhances self-confidence; it increases the level of student control over the curriculum and ensures a degree of intrinsic motivation and commitment to their own purposes. The research task serves as an introduction to ‘professionalism’ and demands that students take responsibility for their own learning in an interactive setting where they take the lead. This in turn provides a context for them to learn confidence, time management and organisational skills.

Students demonstrate their academic and professional development through the presentation of their research results in oral exam and a written workplace report. Having been so involved in the initial transition of my students into the university, I meet them again in their final year when I conduct three more courses. Each is designed to help them develop vocational skills, experience real industry contexts and explore career opportunities as they prepare to make their next major role transition: from student to professional worker.