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Introducing a Trauma-Informed Matrix: A Resource for Academics to Support Criminal Law and Criminology Students

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INTRODUCING A TRAUMA-INFORMED MATRIX: A RESOURCE FOR ACADEMICS TO SUPPORT CRIMINAL LAW AND CRIMINOLOGY STUDENTS

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I   INTRODUCTION

A proportion of students enrolled at university will have historical and/or current experiences of trauma. Some students may also experience vicarious trauma or re-traumatisation during their studies, particularly in courses with sensitive content. Within the academic environment, trauma can negatively impact academic success and engagement, for example, difficulties with attendance, concentration, participation in classroom activities, and completion of assessment tasks. Symptoms of trauma, which can include dissociation and avoidance, may be misinterpreted as disengagement in the classroom or a lack of interest in learning.[1] And so, trauma creates equity and wellbeing issues in accessing and participating in higher education, which demand attention.

Experiences of trauma will vary from student to student. Some may experience personal trauma linked to life experiences such as abuse or exposure to violence.[2] Students may experience collective trauma, which encapsulates the community's psychological reaction to an event such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, bush fires and floods.[3] Sensitive course content in higher education may contribute to vicarious trauma or re-traumatisation. Criminal law and criminology students are particularly at risk of experiencing vicarious trauma or re-traumatisation, given course content that may be described as sensitive, traumatic, icky and uncomfortable.[4] This includes discussion of

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[1]   Bruce Perry, 'Fear and learning: Trauma-related factors in the adult education process' [2006] (11) *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 21.

[2]   Gemma Smyth, Dusty Johnstone and Jillian Rogin, 'Trauma-Informed Lawyering In The Student Legal Clinic Setting: Increasing Competence In Trauma Informed Practice' (2021) 28(1) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 149, 156.

[3]   Marlene F Watson et al, 'COVID-19 Interconnectedness: Health Inequity, the Climate Crisis, and Collective Trauma' (2020) 59(3) *Family Process* 832, 840.

[4]   Kelley Burton and Amanda Paton, 'Vicarious Trauma: Strategies for Legal Practice and Law Schools' (2021) 46(2) *Alternative Law Journal* 94.

sensitive issues such as personal safety risks, homicide and other serious and violent offences, victimisation, and deaths in custody. The risk of vicarious trauma or re-traumatisation may be exacerbated by some teaching mediums such as videos and simulations as opposed to text. Courses involving clinical education further expose students to clients in the real world, and may result in greater levels of distress.[5] And so, criminal law and criminology students are at greater risk of trauma, given the nature of the content, and academics need to be equipped to respond and work closely with Student Wellbeing services.[6] The professional development and recruitment of trauma-informed law and criminology academics is critical to safely and effectively engaging students in learning. Without a nuanced understanding of trauma-informed practices, equity and equality in participating in criminal law and criminology courses may be unachievable.

The higher education sector thus has responsibilities for student equity, safety, and wellbeing, and to provide the conditions needed for learning. The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education defines equity as:

> [P]roviding students with the supports they need to participate – it is about removing barriers, redressing disadvantage and creating a level playing field. Depending on students' circumstances, they may well require, and benefit from, different types of supports to access and participate in higher education.[7]

The Australian Universities Accord (Final Report) maintains that '[i]ssues affecting student wellbeing need ongoing attention'.[8] The AdvanceHE defines wellbeing and student wellbeing as follows:

> **Wellbeing** will encompass a wider framework of which mental health is an integral part, but which also includes physical and social wellbeing. This uses a model provided by Richard Kraut, in which optimum wellbeing is defined by the ability of an individual to fully exercise their cognitive, emotional, physical and social powers, leading to flourishing.
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> **Student Wellbeing** will adopt the general definition of wellbeing above, but we recognise that, in addition, students' engagement with academic

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[5]   Mary Heath et al, 'Teaching sensitive material: A multi-disciplinary perspective' (2017) 4(1) *Ergo: The Journal of the Higher Education Research Group of Adelaide* 5.

[6]   Andrew E Taslitz, *Strategies and Techniques for Teaching Criminal Law* (Aspen Publishing, 2012) 3, 42; Colin James, 'Trauma-Informed Legal Education: Rejecting the Stigma in Caring for Self, Client and Workplace' in Emma Jones and Caroline Strevens (eds), *Wellbeing and Transitions in Law* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023) 253, 255.

[7]   Nicole Crawford, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, *"Equity" In Higher Education: What does this Term Mean and What are the Practical Implications?* (Guide for Staff, June 2022) 1.

[8]   Australian Government Department of Education, *Australian Universities Accord* (Final Report, 28 December 2023) 137.

learning is a key component part of their experience and makes a significant contribution to their wellbeing.[9]

The higher education sector is ripe for change. The Australian Universities Accord (Interim Report) foreshadows the need for extra support as the Australian university student population grows in size and diversity over time.[10] More specifically, universities need to provide appropriate pastoral care, be socially inclusive, be culturally safe and foster a sense of belonging to increase student retention rates.[11] The latter could be achieved by 'mentoring, extra-curricular activities, tutoring, and foundational skills and academic preparedness programs'.[12] The Interim Report also states that universities 'have an obligation to students to foster…cohesion within the institution and broader community', and thus transcend the institution itself.[13] In response to the Interim Report, the Australian Government introduced a requirement for higher education providers to develop a support for students policy to identify students at risk of not successfully completing their programs and provide assistance.[14]

Importantly, the Interim Report acknowledges students who are victim-survivors of sexual violence are at risk of not appropriately progressing through their programs. By way of illustration,

> The impacts of sexual violence on a student's educational experience and outcomes can be devastating. Students who have been sexually assaulted experience elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder and clinically significant depression and anxiety, resulting in higher rates of nonattendance, delayed academic progression and higher academic failure rates.[15]

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency developed a good practice guide on how to prevent and respond to such sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH).[16] However, these behaviours continue to pervade higher education, and while the prevalence of SASH has been reported elsewhere, there is an urgent need to support higher education students who are victim-survivors.[17] The Australian Universities Accord (Final Report) acknowledged the 'Education

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9   'Education for Mental Health Toolkit – Definitions – Mental Health and Wellbeing', *AdvanceHE* (Web Page) <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/teaching-and-learning/curricula-development/education-mental-health-toolkit/introduction/definitions-mental-health-and-wellbeing>; Richard Kraut, *What is Good and Why* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

10   Australian Government Department of Education, *Australian Universities Accord* (Interim Report, 19 July 2023) 71.

11   Ibid.

12   Ibid.

13   Ibid 132.

14   'New Requirements to Support Students', *Australian Government Department of Education* (Web Page, 2 February 2024) <https://www.education.gov.au/new-requirements-support-students>.

15   Australian Government Department of Education (n 10) 133.

16   Australian Government Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Preventing and Responding to Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Australian Higher Education Sector* (Good Practice Note, July 2020).

17   '2021 National Student Safety Survey', *National Student Safety Survey* (Web Page, 2 February 2024) <https://www.nsss.edu.au>.

Ministers released a Draft Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education for further consultation', as well as 'the leading role the higher education sector can and should play to prevent gender-based violence and set the example for appropriate, trauma-informed responses to victim survivors'. [18] While a recent report explored how Australian universities are responding to sexual assault and sexual harassment, all higher education providers should continue to resource evidence-based initiatives. [19]

There are additional opportunities to implement supports in Australian legal education. The Kift and Nakano Report recognised there are a lack of supports for students who are experiencing vicarious trauma and there is a dearth of research on the higher education experiences of diverse student populations. [20] Concerningly, there continues to be an '[i]nequity of access to law courses by students from low socio-economic and regional backgrounds due to "structural, systemic, sociocultural and personal factors that can act as barriers and enablers to high-status professions"'.[21] Kift and Nakano suggest further research is needed on the strategies to attract underrepresented populations to access legal education and how to positively impact graduate outcomes.[22]

Addressing disparities, providing an inclusive and supportive learning environment and ensuring all higher education students can access and participate in the same opportunities and learning materials, are thus crucial to enabling equity and positively impacting student wellbeing. Developing a trauma-informed pedagogy can act as a buffer or protective factor to understand and respond to the diverse needs of students, supporting equity, student wellbeing and academic success. [23]

Following on from this context, part II of this paper explores the conception of trauma-informed practice and trauma-informed principles. Building onto that existing literature, part III puts forward a solution to the problems outlined above in the form of a trauma-informed matrix, which is premised on the intersection of trauma-informed principles and elements of teaching and learning. The trauma-informed matrix is a tool designed to support frontline teaching staff such as course coordinators, program coordinators, lecturers and tutors, to understand what it means to be trauma-informed and how to bring that knowledge to their course content and design, classroom environment, teaching method and assessment. The matrix is applicable to all higher education courses but is particularly relevant to courses

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[18] Australian Government Department of Education (n 8) 230.

[19] Australian Human Rights Institute, University of New South Wales, *How Australian Universities are Responding to Campus Sexual Violence* (Report, February 2024).

[20] Sally Kift and Kana Nakano, *Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education* (Report commissioned by the Council of Australian Law Deans, 1 December 2021) 80, 119.

[21] Ibid 80.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Sarah Katz, 'We Need to Talk about Trauma: Integrating Trauma-Informed Practice into the Family Law Classroom' 60(4) *Family Court Review* 757; Kristen Doughty, 'Increasing Trauma Informed Awareness in Higher Education' (PhD Thesis, Wilmington University, 2018).

where there is sensitive course content, risk of vicarious trauma and work integrated learning. Finally, part IV utilises two case studies to illustrate the application of this trauma-informed matrix through two courses at a regional university. The first case study comprises a compulsory, first year criminal law and procedure course, while the second case study encompasses a third year clinically based criminology course. Applying the matrix to these courses will help to identify aspects of trauma-informed practices done well and where there is scope to integrate additional trauma-informed practices.

II   TRAUMA AND THE CONCEPTION OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRINCIPLES

Historically, a focus on psychological trauma and community responses emerged in work with war veterans in the 1860s, leading to a gradual understanding of the impacts trauma can have on the individual, with the formal recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder ('PTSD') by the American Psychiatric Association ('APA') in 1980.[24] In 2001, Fallot and Harris acknowledged a distinction between 'trauma specific services' (such as clinical intervention) and the cultural change coined as 'trauma-informed care'.[25] Trauma-informed care and practice has been defined as 'a strengths-based service delivery approach that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment'.[26]

Traumatic experiences are common and can have an impact on a person's psychosocial, emotional, and physical health. The way a person makes meaning, interprets and responds to the traumatic event is dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can serve as protective factors and mitigate or heighten risk and vulnerability.[27] Research continues to demonstrate a clear link between childhood trauma and adverse effects in adulthood, particularly in the absence of protective factors.[28] These adverse effects can include difficulty with executive functioning and, therefore, struggles with learning, emotional dysregulation, disrupted intra/interpersonal skills, intergenerational relationships, developmental delays, attachment issues and potential

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[24]   Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 1997).

[25]   RD Fallot and M Harris, 'A trauma-informed approach to screening and assessment' [2001] (Spring) 89 *New Directions for Mental Health Services* 23.

[26]   Elizabeth K Hopper, Ellen L Bassuk, and Jeffrey Olivet, 'Shelter from the Storm: Trauma-Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings' (2010) 3(2) *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal* 80.

[27]   Emily Brown, Agata Freedle and Zori Paul, 'Preparing Teacher Candidates for Trauma-Informed Practices' (2020) 57(4) *Urban Education* 662.

[28]   Sherry Hamby et al, 'Recognizing the Cumulative Burden of Childhood Adversities Transforms Science and Practice for Trauma and Resilience' (2021) 76(2) *American Psychologist* 230.

mental health diagnosis.[29] In addition, trauma impacts on the individual can seep into personal, social, vocational, and academic environments which has a profound impact on educational attainment..[30]

An Australian contextualisation of trauma is essential, particularly in understanding how historical and ongoing trauma has been uniquely experienced by First Nations Peoples. Colonisation, dispossession, intergenerational trauma, and systemic and structural inequities continue to influence the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, impacting educational outcomes. There is a need for a more nuanced understanding of trauma that extends beyond what is individually experienced to encompass collective, cultural trauma.[31]

Cultural safety is more than cultural awareness and competence; it involves creating an educational environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel respected, valued, and supported in their identities. The Indigenous Strategy from Universities Australia has emphasised the importance of cultural safety in the classroom, advocating for the transformation of teaching practices to better support Indigenous students. Further, the Indigenous Strategy acknowledges the responsibility of universities to create spaces that are not just free from harm but recognises the importance of embedding value systems and knowledges into university structures.[32] Embedding Indigenous perspectives in curricula, building relationships based on trust and mutual respect, and ensuring that assessment and feedback are culturally responsive.

Trauma-informed teaching and learning refers to an approach that 'realises' the widespread occurrence and effects of trauma, 'recognises' its signs, 'responds' with appropriate, informed strategies and actively 'resists re-traumatisation.[33] The goal is to foster a learning environment that is attuned to the needs of individuals who have experienced trauma. This means acknowledging the profound impact on cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of students' lives, influencing their ability to engage in the learning process.

Today, trauma informed teaching is guided by a set of principles designed to shape educational practice. These principles are applied to curriculum design daily teaching practices and assessment strategies in higher education, creating a supportive environment for students who have experienced trauma. Table 1 outlines the fundamental trauma informed principles and how they can be integrated into three elements of teaching and learning.

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[29] Bessel Van der Kolk, 'Developmental Trauma Disorder: Toward a Rational Diagnosis for Children with Complex Trauma Histories' (2005) 35(5) *Psychiatric Annals* 401.

[30] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, '*SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*' (HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884, USA Department of Health and Human Services, July 2014).

[31] Universities Australia, *Indigenous Strategy 2022-2025* (9 March 2022) 15.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Fallot and Harris (n 25).

Table 1: Trauma-Informed Principles

Principle	Descriptor[34]
Safety	Establish a safe physical, interpersonal and psychological learning environment, where safety measures are in place and teacher responses are consistent, predictable, and respectful.
Trustworthiness and Transparency	Build and maintain trust with students, where staff are reliable, consistent, approachable and accessible, and operate with transparency in relation to University policies and learning expectations.
Collaboration, Mutuality and Peer Support	Authentically partner with students in their learning experience, facilitating communication, and inviting student input and feedback to guide course design, teaching, and assessment. Promote opportunities for peer engagement and support to enhance safety, learning, and wellbeing.
Empowerment, Voice and Choice	Value and respect students, their choices and autonomy, their culture and their values, recognising and building on individual strengths, and providing opportunities for students to make choices about their learning experience.
Cultural Safety	Respect and be responsive to diversity, including understanding how cultural context influences trauma responses and recovery, and recognising intergenerational trauma.

Trauma informed teaching is not about focussing on individual principles in isolation but rather applying them collectively to create equitable and supportive learning environments. These principles as outlined in table 1 work together to foster student wellbeing by addressing the needs of trauma survivors and promoting inclusivity. Whilst the principle of safety- creating physically, psychologically, and emotionally secure environment is foundational, it is equally important to integrate other principles to support students' overall learning experience.

For instance, trustworthiness and transparency build the essential trust between students and educators, while collaboration and mutual support encourage authentic partnerships in the learning process. Empowerment, voice, and choice give students agency in their learning to feel valued and respected. Cultural safety ensures that diversity is honoured, recognising the unique ways cultural context influences trauma responses and recovery. By weaving these principles into teaching practice, educators create a holistic framework that not only minimises the risk of re-traumatisation but also actively promotes

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[34] Descriptors adapted from C Henderson, M Everett and S Isobel, 'Trauma-Informed Care and Practice Organisational Toolkit (TICPOT)' (Mental Health Coordinating Council, 2018); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n 30).

engagement, wellbeing, and equity. Griffith University's Trauma-Informed Tertiary Learning and Teaching Practice Framework explores the intersection of student and educator behaviour with trauma-informed principles and the Learning and Teaching Capabilities Framework.[35] This holistic approach demonstrates that when trauma-informed principles are applied together, they transform the learning environment into one where students feel safe, empowered, and able to thrive. The emphasis on clear communication, predictable routines, and inclusive choices exemplifies the power of trauma-informed teaching to foster positive relationships, enhance student engagement, and ultimately contribute to a more equitable and supportive educational experience.

While this paper focuses on the application of trauma-informed principles in a law and criminology education context, it is worth acknowledging the conception of 'trauma-informed lawyering' and its increasing demand of lawyers in practice. Trauma-informed lawyering occurs when lawyers use trauma-informed principles in their day-to-day legal practice.[36] 'Trauma-informed lawyering' is important to avoid re-traumatising the client, professionally safeguarding and advocating for the client's rights and interests, and protecting the lawyer's wellbeing from vicarious trauma.[37] In doing so, a trauma-informed lawyer demonstrates soft skills such as 'empathy, responsive listening, restraint from judgement', and 'authentic care and concern'.[38] Further, a trauma-informed lawyer builds rapport, respect, transparency and trust with the client, enabling an effective and collaborative client-lawyer relationship.[39] By understanding the complex phenomenon of trauma and its impact on the client's brain and body, a trauma-informed lawyer empowers a client to access justice and traverse the intricate legal system.[40] Promoting trauma-informed principles in the legal profession supports lawyers to disclose vicarious trauma experienced by responding to traumatised clients and seek support for mental health issues.[41] Trauma-informed models are now also central to professional practice within the criminology discipline, including trauma informed corrections and trauma informed policing, for example. [42]

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[35]   M Tsantefski et al, '*Trauma-Informed Tertiary Learning and Teaching Practice Framework*' (Griffith University, 2020).

[36]   Katz (n 23) 767.

[37]   Ibid 769-70; Melanie Randall and Lori Haskell, 'Trauma-Informed Approaches to Law: Why Restorative Justice Must Understand Trauma and Psychological Coping' (2013) 36(2) *Dalhousie Law Journal* 501, 505.

[38]   Eliza Patten and Talia Kraemer, 'Establishing a Trauma-Informed Lawyer–Client Relationship' (2014) 33(10) *ABA Child Law Practice* 193, 199.

[39]   Robey B Champine et al, '"What Does It Mean to Be Trauma-Informed?": A Mixed-Methods Study of a Trauma-Informed Community Initiative' (2022) 31 *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 459, 467.

[40]   Ibid; Liz Wall, Daryl Higgins and Cathryn Hunter, 'Trauma-Informed Care in Child/Family Welfare Services' (Research Paper No 37, Child Family Community Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2016) 9.

[41]   Colin James, 'Towards Trauma-Informed Legal Practice: A Review' (2020) 27(2) *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 275, 282.

[42]   Jill S Levenson and Gwenda M Willis, 'Implementing Trauma-Informed Care in Correctional Treatment and Supervision' (2018) 28(4) *Journal of Aggression,*

Consequently, law and criminology schools could build the capacity of students to thrive in their professions by starting trauma-informed practices early in law and criminology programs and continuing them throughout.[43]

Kaye and Jones agree that trauma-informed practice should be embedded in law programs, but more boldly advocate for trauma-informed practice to be a Priestley 11 in its own right, and thus a prescribed area of knowledge in a law program.[44] Compatibly, Colins states that '[l]aw schools have a duty to inform students and help them prepare to cope with trauma in legal practice and aggravating conditions in some legal workplaces'.[45] While this duty and a trauma-informed pedagogy is future-focussed, introducing trauma-informed practices into legal education has a more immediate benefit of improving student wellbeing and performance.[46] However, Harris and Kashyap acknowledged that trauma-informed pedagogy tends to focus on the trauma of clients and victims who had 'been damaged or broken by encounters with other individuals' rather than the vicarious trauma of lawyers and law students who represented them.[47] Thus, they sought to expand the conception of 'trauma-informed teaching' to 'include the traumatic harms inflicted on law students by law schools itself-especially on students who are socially stigmatized and structurally disadvantaged'.[48] Adopting a broader definition of trauma-informed pedagogy in law classrooms and clinics enables the student experience and wellbeing to be at the core of the conversation.

III   TRAUMA-INFORMED MATRIX

To help operationalise these trauma-informed principles, the authors have created a trauma-informed matrix (see Table 2 below), as a quick reference guide for higher education staff. The matrix is organised according to the five principles of trauma-informed practice (safety; trustworthiness and transparency; collaboration, mutuality and peer support; empowerment, voice and choice; and cultural safety) outlined earlier, and three key elements in teaching and learning (course design, teaching and assessment). This produces a 15-cell matrix. Five trauma-informed principles were chosen for this matrix, adapted from those proposed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).[49] Historically, the SAMHSA has served as a vital resource for the health care sector and beyond, with the

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Maltreatment & Trauma 481; Katherine J McLachlan, 'The ABCs of Trauma-Informed Policing' (2024) 9(3) *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* 154.

43   Burton and Paton (n 4) 99.

44   Miranda Kaye and Jackie Jones, 'The University Teaching of Family Law' (2022) 35 *Australian Journal of Family Law* 68, 77.

45   James (n 6) 268.

46   Ibid 254.

47   Angela P Harris and Monika B Kashya, 'From Trauma to Transformation: Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in Law School' (2023) 27(1) *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change* 1, 4.

48   Ibid.

49   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n 30).

principles subsequently being adopted within education, criminal justice, social services, government, and nonprofit settings, reflecting their applicability across multiple sectors.

The inclusion of course design, teaching, and assessment collectively shape the student experience and are critical elements of teaching and learning that capture core responsibilities for academic staff. Course design sets the foundation for learning by establishing the structure, content, and objectives that guide learner engagement. Teaching brings this design to life through the day-to-day interactions and strategies that foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Assessment serves as a mechanism for measuring student progress in addition to providing feedback. By addressing all three aspects, the matrix provides a beginning framework for academic staff to evidence holistic, trauma-informed equitable teaching and learning opportunities.

There are a few ways that this simple matrix can be used as a quick reference guide. The matrix may be used by academic staff to think through the range of trauma-informed teaching strategies open to them, for future integration into their teaching practice, or to inform individual professional development or training needs. In this way it serves as a resource or 'toolkit' for guiding teaching practice. Alternatively, academic staff may use the matrix to map their existing course design, teaching and assessment against the trauma-informed principles. This mapping process would assist academic staff in identifying and affirming existing trauma-informed practice, as well as to identify practice gaps, for enhancing future course design, teaching approach and assessment. In this way it might serve as a form of 'audit' tool. Regardless, we also hope the matrix may also be a useful guide for much-needed research on this issue.

Table 2: Trauma-Informed Matrix

	Elements of Teaching and Learning		
Trauma-Informed Principles	**Course Design**	**Teaching**	**Assessment**
Safety	Identify and address potential triggers that may cause distress for students	Inform students in advance about sensitive course content and potential triggers	Provide options within assessment tasks, allowing students to have an alternative topic, if too triggering
	Embed consistent and predictable routines	Demonstrate empathy and understanding toward students who may be experiencing stress or distress	Emphasise a growth mindset, supporting students to see assessments as opportunities for learning and development- rather than as judgments of their abilities
	Integrate self-care into the curriculum	Include short breaks, stretching exercises or interactive activities to contribute to physical and mental wellbeing	Understand that feedback on assessment has potential to impact students emotionally
	Provide students with information about available support services		
		Demonstrate and model self-regulation	
		Create a system where students can easily reach out for support	
		Confidentially link students in distress with appropriate support services	
Trustworthiness and Transparency	Align course material to assessment items	Establish clear professional boundaries	Build trust with students by being transparent about course expectations, assignments and assessment criteria
	Ensure Inherent Academic Requirements are explicit, to assist students to predict capacity	Be approachable and accessible, honest and reliable to students	Provide examples, demonstrating pass/fail using criteria
	Clearly communicate institutional policies and procedures to provide predictability in the learning environment	Establish a consistent teaching approach introducing routine where possible	Make it clear that students can request adjustments without needing to disclose detailed personal information
		Encourage students to reach	Be transparent about the process for

	Create clear expectations by setting out the learning objectives and goals	out if they are struggling, promote student wellbeing as a priority, and provide information on available support services	requesting and granting these adjustments.
Collaboration, Mutuality and Peer Support	Foster a collaborative learning environment where students feel connected to the tutor, other teaching staff and to their peers Co-design with students through surveys, focus groups, or workshops Encourage collaboration between different disciplines to create more holistic and interconnected learning experiences	Invite feedback and, adjust the classroom environment (on-campus and online) as necessary to enhance the learning experience Develop small learning communities where students can build stronger connections with each other	Utilise student feedback in the design of assessment tasks Provide opportunities for group assessment to promote peer collaboration and support
Empowerment, Voice and Choice	Provide content through a variety of mediums (text, videos, interactive simulations) to cater to different learning styles and preferences Provide students with opportunities to demonstrate autonomy, allowing them to have control over their learning experiences Allow students choices, where appropriate, on reading materials, topics for discussion, and	Create an environment where students have the freedom to make decisions about their learning experiences Create an environment where students feel accepted, valued, and comfortable expressing themselves, especially when they make mistakes Focus on individual and collective strengths rather than deficits	Provide options for assignments or projects, allowing students to choose topics or formats that align with their interests and strengths Use a mix of assessment methods, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding in diverse ways

	assessment methods Embed structured reflective learning tasks where students can consider their learning choices and outcomes, to promote understanding and to empower them to make better choices in future	Integrate resilience-building activities that encourage students to overcome challenges Use teaching methods that actively engage students and give them a say in how they learn.	
Cultural Safety	Infuse global perspectives into the curriculum, acknowledging and exploring cultural variations in approaches to the subject matter Include reflective components in assessments where students can explore how their cultural identity influences their learning and their approach to the subject matter.	Avoid unintentional harm or misunderstanding Be aware of and respect the cultural backgrounds and diversity of your students and be prepared to address discrimination, racism, or micro aggressions Incorporate scenarios that challenge students to navigate culturally sensitive situations, promoting empathy and understanding within the learning environment Critically reflect on your capacity (knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours) for creating a culturally safe learning environment	Integrate critical reflection into assessments where students analyse their own cultural competence, acknowledging areas for growth and improvement, with grading based on the process of reflection and personal learning Design assessments that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in ways that are culturally relevant to them, for example alternative assessment formats that align with difficult cultural practices or communication styles (e.g., oral presentations, storytelling, community-based projects)

IV   APPLICATION OF THE TRAUMA-INFORMED MATRIX

This paper utilises two case studies, one in the discipline of law and one in criminology, to illustrate application of the trauma-informed matrix to two courses. Case studies enable a rich, contextual analysis, and in-depth exploration and understanding of practice within real-world settings.[50] The first and second co-authors coordinate the courses utilised in the two case studies. Both courses include highly sensitive course material, with the potential to cause distress to some students. The two case studies illustrate the utility of the matrix, providing a deep dive into the ways that existing trauma-informed practices were implemented in the two courses, and enabling the identification of gaps, to guide future practice.

The trauma-informed matrix was first independently applied to each course, by the respective course coordinator, forming the two case studies. This was a form of autoethnography, using our own reflections on our courses and teaching practices, to inform the two case studies.[51] These independent reflections were then integrated to reveal shared and unique applications of trauma-informed practices. This project received Human Research Ethics approval by the Chair of the University of the Sunshine Coast, Human Research Ethics Committee, via the exemption pathway (E24007).

The two case studies are presented below using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis framework.[52] While a SWOT analysis was developed in the 1960s to evaluate the position of an organisation, it has been applied in legal education literature, acknowledging the need to maximise the positive aspects of strengths and opportunities, as well as minimising the negative aspects of weaknesses and threats.[53] The components of strengths and weaknesses are typically assessed from an internal perspective whereas opportunities and threats are assessed from an external perspective.[54] In the two case studies below, we have adapted the internal and external perspectives so they relate to course and institutional levels, respectively.

A   *Two Case Studies*

Two courses are used to showcase diversity in the application of trauma-informed teaching practices. The first course is a first-year

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[50] Sarah Crowe et al, 'The Case Study Approach' (2011) 11(1) *BMCMedical Research Methodology* 100; Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Sage, 4th ed, 2009).

[51] Elaine Gregersen, 'Telling Stories about the Law School: Autoethnography and Legal Education' (2021) 56(2) *The Law Teacher* 241, 252.

[52] Carly Probet, *The SWOT Analysis: A Key Tool for developing your business strategy* (Lemaitre Publishing, 2015) 4.

[53] Kathleen Raponi et al, 'Academics Embrace Disruption: Lessons Learned Teaching First Year Law During a Pandemic' (2021) 31(1) *Legal Education Review* 27, 30-1.

[54] Ibid.

compulsory criminal law course, that is offered in a blended format via in-person tutorials and online learning materials. The course introduces students to the fundamental concepts of criminal law including the concept of crime, role of the criminal law, sources of criminal law, classification of offences, principles underpinning criminalisation, overview of the state criminal justice system, principles of onus and standard of proof, physical and fault elements, and strict and absolute liability. Students examine a wide range of criminal offences including fatal offences, sexual offences, drug offences, attempts and criminal responsibility for participation in offences. In addition, students explore a range of excuses and defences including provocation, self-defence, insanity, diminished responsibility, intoxication, mistake of fact, accident, act independent of will and honest claim of right. Assessment includes activity participation, an essay on a contemporary topic such as the meaning of consent for the purposes of a sexual offence and an examination drawing on a wide range of offences, excuses and defences from the course using the IRAC (issue, rule, application and conclusion) technique.

In contrast, the second course is an advanced criminology elective course addressing the knowledge and professional skills needed to work in the criminal justice system with victims and perpetrators of violence and abuse. The course is co-taught by industry professionals including correctional staff, and is taught in an intensive format, in hybrid form, with both on-campus and on-line offerings. Impacts of violent crime on child and adult victims, trauma and vicarious trauma, forensic interviewing, forensic assessment, risk assessment, and offender rehabilitation are all covered in course content. Assessment tasks include students responding to a de-identified case study based on the perpetration of a sexual or violent offence/s, requiring students to read in-depth details of the offence and perpetrator behaviour. Enrolled students span criminology, social work, psychology, and law disciplines.

1 Strengths: Applying Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices

A key focus of course design in both courses was creating safety and promoting wellbeing for students. This began prior to the commencement of teaching. In the law course, students are instructed to watch a video recording titled, 'Vicarious Trauma' at the outset of the course. In the video, the course coordinator clarifies the concept of vicarious trauma as informed by the literature and identifies a range of pragmatic self-care strategies for mitigating the risk of vicarious trauma. At the same time, students are also instructed to explore Student Wellbeing supports, including health and wellbeing resources. In the criminology course, this includes the provision of clear information on course content, up front, so students know what to expect from the course, including alerting them to support options available during the course and encouraging help-seeking behaviour. Online self-care resources, practical guides and activities (such as mindfulness and

relaxation strategies), and (internal and external) referral options are also made available to students.

At course commencement, classroom safety is prioritised. In the law course, the course coordinator and students discuss how to create a safe space in tutorials. These discussions underscore active listening, being respectful of other student comments, not talking over or cutting off other students, and being aware of gender, social, culture, political and other diversity issues. In the criminology course, a set class structure and routine is established to provide a space that is predictable, a sense of security and control, and opportunities to support regulation. For example, each class begins with a check-in session, valuing the student experience and helping the student to orient to the classroom environment. Self-care is also integrated into the curriculum, taught through course content, and rehearsed and reinforced at the beginning and end of each class. In this way, students are taught an important professional skill for working in the criminal justice system, while simultaneously developing resilience for studying sensitive content. In both courses, clear classroom and online boundaries and behavioural expectations are explicitly discussed and established, including about the sharing of personal information and help-seeking. The purpose of these activities is to create clear expectations and boundaries and prioritise emotional safety in the learning environment.

In both courses teaching staff are approachable, accessible and collaborative. In the law course, course coordinator consultation times are clearly articulated, students are invited to rate how they feel on a scale of cats or birds, students are encouraged to provide feedback on their learning experience, and student feedback is responded to immediately. In the criminology course, teaching staff are accessible immediately after each class to support students without the need for an appointment or to wait for formal consultation times. Student Wellbeing staff also attend the first class to speak directly to students, inviting and normalising help-seeking and support. Teaching staff also share their own self-care strategies to model this behaviour and normalise the need for active self-care in criminal justice system practice. In both courses, communication with students is positive, inclusive and respectful. Systems are also established to support students in distress, including one-on-one conversations with teaching staff after class, and encouraging students to seek support from Student Wellbeing or other relevant services. As needed, welfare checks from the University's Student Wellbeing Services are also requested.

In both courses, weekly online learning materials are presented consistently on the learning management system and assessment tasks are scaffolded, ensuring transparency. Classes are also consistently structured to include learning activities undertaken in pairs and small groups, and problem-based learning and caters for different learning styles through a variety of mediums such as simulations, text and videos.

Finally, in both courses trauma-informed assessment practices include setting diverse assessment tasks, clarifying assessment expectations, clearly communicating assessment policies and

procedures, providing opportunities for formative assessment so students can reflect on their progress and insights into the learning process before completing summative assessment, sharing past assessment exemplars, utilising explicit rubrics, encouraging students to view assessment tasks and feedback as an opportunity to grow, and appreciating the impact of feedback on students emotionally by using positive language and a growth mindset.

2   Weaknesses: Enhancing Trauma-Informed Practices

Use of the matrix to map the two courses also helped to identify gaps in trauma-informed practice, highlighting trauma-informed principles requiring most attention in future course design, teaching and assessment. In both courses, students could be given more opportunities to have choice and control over their learning experiences. This could include choice in classroom learning activities and formats, and integrating more resilience-building opportunities. In both courses assessment was identified as a key area for enhancement. In the law course, increasing options for assessment might include broadening the essay topic, for example, allowing students to choose which new criminal offence they would create that aligns with their interests and strengths. In the criminology course, students currently have a choice of topics for one assessment task, allowing them to avoid topics that might be most triggering for them. However, similar choices are not available for an in-depth case study assessment task, despite the case study material being sensitive and potentially triggering for some students. Choice in case studies would enhance safety and will be integrated into future assessment design.

3   Opportunities: Supporting Trauma-Informed Practices

Support from Student Wellbeing Services was identified in both courses as instrumental in advancing a trauma-informed approach to teaching. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Student Wellbeing Services had presented to other law courses on self-care and mindfulness. Applying the matrix has identified a need to revisit that collaboration to promote student wellbeing. In the criminology course, support from Student Wellbeing Services began with their consultation on the development and documentation of a course 'safety plan' to guide course design and teaching methods. In addition, Student Wellbeing Services also provided an online video introduction to the Student Wellbeing Service to help break down any barriers to accessing support, and they attended the first class to meet directly with students to discuss available supports and to normalise help-seeking behaviours. Any concerns from the teaching staff about specific students are discussed directly with Student Wellbeing Services, either via referrals for support, or requests for a welfare check.

At the organisational level, opportunities for staff training on sexual assault and harassment are important for enhancing staff capacity to recognise and respond to trauma. In 2023, compliance training on

'Sexual Assault & Sexual Harassment ('SASH') Awareness' was introduced. Training on trauma symptoms is also imperative. Support from School leadership to advocate for professional development opportunities is also invaluable. In the criminology course, this has included support to engage sessional staff with professional skills in working with trauma, ensuring the teaching team are confident and skilled to teach sensitive course content, monitor student wellbeing, respond if trauma issues arise in the classroom, and to actively support student safety.

4   Threats: Appreciating the Barriers to Implementing Trauma-Informed Practices

In both courses, time, resourcing and workload barriers can make it challenging to implement some trauma-informed practices. A trauma-informed approach requires currency in knowledge about trauma and its impacts, time to reflect on trauma-informed principles and the ways they may be operationalised within the curriculum and teaching methods, time to design new assessment tasks and learning materials informed by trauma-informed principles, and time to collaborate with professional staff for advice and guidance. For example, setting alternative tasks, associated marking guides and rubrics could better meet trauma-informed principles. However, this practice may impact teaching and marking workloads, and might challenge consistency in marking.

Integrating adaptive technology to support various learning styles for flexible and responsive teaching methods, not only requires time but also a skillset. The online environment, central to contemporary higher education, also presents additional challenges to trauma-informed teaching practice, particularly for monitoring student wellbeing if students engage without a camera. Studying at home, and at night, when many support services are closed, may add further risk.

V   CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to the trauma-informed literature by sharing and applying a trauma-informed matrix, which aims to operationalise trauma-informed principles in higher education teaching and learning. It is designed as a quick reference guide to assist staff to enhance their trauma-informed practice. The trauma-informed principles included in the matrix were derived from the literature and include safety; trustworthiness and transparency; collaboration, mutuality and peer support; empowerment, voice and choice; and cultural safety. The elements of teaching and learning incorporated into the matrix include course design, teaching (classroom environment and teaching methods) and assessment.

More specifically, the trauma-informed matrix presents a wide range of opportunities to integrate trauma-informed practices in teaching and learning. At a course level, the trauma-informed matrix

provides a tool to support frontline teaching staff, including course coordinators, lecturers and tutors, and is particularly useful where a course contains sensitive course content and work integrated learning. The trauma-informed matrix may assist teaching staff to consider a range of options for implementing trauma-informed principles in their work, serving as a 'toolkit' or mapping tool to guide course design, planning and preparation. It showcases multiple ways in which trauma-informed principles might be incorporated, and thus provides practical assistance to operationalise a trauma-informed approach. The matrix may also be used at a faculty, school, program or discipline level, supporting Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching), Program Coordinators, or Discipline Leads (or equivalent positions) to develop whole-of School or whole-of-discipline approaches to trauma-informed practices. For example, it may be used to map and monitor trauma-informed teaching practice across a program, discipline or School, and identify gaps or areas requiring greater attention, as a form of audit. In turn, it may guide future curriculum planning. Such mapping activities could also be used to identify professional development and training needs for teaching staff. Finally, we also hope this matrix might be used by researchers, to increase understanding of trauma-informed teaching practice and advance teaching scholarship.

The trauma-informed matrix should be a conversation starter, as one part of a comprehensive approach to developing trauma-informed teaching practitioners. Ideally, the trauma-informed matrix would be accompanied by a suite of tools, for example, training designed to support teachers to recognise trauma and understand what it means to be a trauma-informed teaching practitioner, and a step-by-step guide on how to appropriately respond to trauma in the moment in the classroom. The authors hope that the matrix provides some academic staff with confidence in applying trauma-informed practices, and anticipate that the trauma-informed matrix will help some staff to identify trauma-informed practices they may already be (unknowingly) implementing. While all Australian law and criminology schools should invest in the trauma-informed professional development of all teachers, including sessional academics, where there are limited resources, it is critical to direct them where they are most needed. Not all courses are alike, and those that need to be prioritised are the courses that contain higher levels of sensitive course content, high risk of vicarious trauma amongst the staff and student cohort, and work integrated learning.

The case studies illustrated the application of the trauma-informed matrix in two diverse courses, resulting in several key learnings. Both courses implemented practices spanning numerous trauma-informed principles, and integrated across course design, teaching and assessment. In each course, student safety with respect to course content was explicitly addressed, and students equipped with practical strategies to enhance wellbeing and resilience. Notably, despite significant integration of trauma-informed principles in both courses, the matrix helped to identify additional ways in which trauma-informed practice may be enhanced, including new opportunities for student choice. Importantly, both courses benefited from support from Student

Wellbeing staff to build student safety and wellbeing, highlighting the crucial role of professional services in the implementation of trauma-informed teaching practice. Workload issues were identified as a barrier in both courses explored in the case studies. Future examination of the workload impacts of a trauma-informed approach may be needed if this is to be embedded at a university-wide level.

This work is merely the tip of the iceberg, and there are plenty of opportunities for advancing practice and research in this field. The next step is to evaluate the matrix as a guide for law and criminology academic staff, particularly documenting its utility in practice. More rigorous evaluation of trauma-informed teaching practices is also warranted. Such evaluation could be grounded in an action research methodology and may include identifying the number of students seeking support from Student Wellbeing, student retention, and other academic indicators, including student feedback. In addition to continuously improving the trauma-informed matrix, future researchers may choose to evaluate trauma-informed principles in action.