

## Success Stories

### Criminal Cases 2009

### Legal Learning Assistance Program: Christopher Du-Boulay

The Learning Technologies Group, located in the Computing Services Department, finds new and innovative ways of using technology to enhance teaching and learning at Oxford University.

Criminal Cases 2009 provides a useful tool for learning the cases required for the Criminal Law unit; especially in preparation for examinations.

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#### Introduction

Law has long been a discipline which, both in practice and in study, requires a firm understanding of case law. Key to this understanding is the discernment of the *ratio decidendi* of a case: its key legal principle. For legal examinations in general, and for criminal law in particular, the learning of these principles and their application to problem questions is paramount to achieving success.



#### Drivers for creating Criminal Cases

Criminal Cases began life as a simple list of case descriptions and a 'Look, Cover, Test, Check' exercise which I had prepared as part of my revision for my Criminal Law Moderations. After discovering that this was not in fact a very efficient method of learning the cases (it was very easy to cheat by peeking under the edges of my hand and I tended only be able to recall the cases in the order that I had learnt them in!) I experimented with different options. The solution I arrived upon was getting my friend to read out a description at random and then to check my answer. Naturally this was only possible when someone else was around and not busy revising themselves and so I decided to create a computer program to do the testing instead.

#### How has Criminal Cases been used?

Criminal Cases began as a simple personal revision tool; however it soon became a competitive game between my fellow Mansfield lawyers. The game contains over 160 descriptions of cases from the criminal law module of the Oxford Law Moderations syllabus; either giving the key legal principle of the case, a brief summary of the facts and findings or a mixture of both. The program randomly displays a description and the user must then enter the corresponding case name. The game has no end, although we commonly played to 100 questions to see who could get the most correct; and most importantly, who would be the first to attain 100%!

#### Impact of Criminal Cases?

Although the effectiveness of Criminal Cases has never been tested as a program for the initial learning of cases, it has more than proved itself as a revision tool. One student boasted a greater than 1500% improvement

rate over just four days of using the program; rising from just six out of one hundred in his first attempt to consistent scores in the high nineties.

Form1  
Held that only the age, sex and characteristics relevant to the gravity of the provocation of the defendant should be conferred on the reasonable person.

Camplin

Press Enter to submit answer

Correct! 5 Out of 6

Above: Screenshot from Legal Eagles



## Reflection and Looking Forward

One of the biggest problems with Criminal Cases was that due to the fast approaching exam deadline, the time available to write the program was very limited and so only very basic features could be included. For this reason a more extensive version of the program, Legal Eagles, is now being developed.



Legal Eagles will support all the core subjects on the Oxford Law syllabus and will include many new features and improvements on the original program:

- ☒ **Timed Questions** – Set yourself a time limit for each question.
- ☒ **Multiple Question Modes and Styles**
- ☒ **Support for All Core Modules** – Currently only Criminal, Constitutional, Roman and Tort available
- ☒ **User Statistics** – Keep track of your scores
- ☒ **Topic Choice** – Choose which modules or units you wish to receive questions from
- ☒ **InteliQuestioning** – Selects questions for you based on your past success/fail rate
- ☒ **Difficulty Levels** – Cases are divided into essential, useful and insane
- ☒ **Automatic Updates** – Program will automatically update when new cases are available (requires internet access)



A free copy of Criminal Cases is available from the developer's webspace at  
<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mans205>

For more information about the Learning Technologies Group's work or to sign up for courses please visit:  
<http://oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg>



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