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KAREN FOLEY: Hi, and welcome back to Student Connections. Well, that was a really interesting talk about politics. And now we're shifting completely, and we're talking psychology. And I'm joined by Allison and Rose, who have both been intrinsically involved in the development of the new psychology programme.

But before I start by asking them what's going on, I'd like to find out who the psychology students are on the chat. So let HJ and Rachel know if you're a psychology student, what you're doing. We often have a lot of psychology students, and I know they really enjoy coming to Student Connections. So let us know if you're there.

Don't forget, as well, that we'd love to see your selfies. You can send us those on Twitter, hashtag #SCC15. You can email them to us via phone at connections@open.ac.uk. And of course, let us know if you've got any questions.

So Allison and Rose, welcome. Tell us, massive, massive module production in terms of all of the psychology. And Allison, you'd mentioned before, for those of you who saw the opening slot, we were talking about curriculum, and the importance of developing that. Why have you completely redone everything? And tell us what's happening?

ALLISON: It's a good, good question, why did we pull it all apart and then give everyone all this hard work to put it all together again? So in the earlier session, I explained that what we were trying to do is give students more choice and more flexibility. So we'd looked at psychology curriculum and how it was offered around the country. And we'd found that a lot of universities are offering students a much more diverse curriculum which is more tailored towards their kinds of interests and tailored towards professional areas.

And we'd listened to our students. We'd seen some feedback from students from studying the original qualification, suggesting that they wanted to specialise more. They were particularly interested in areas like counselling psychology and then forensic psychology. And coincidentally, those are two of the strengths of OU psychology, along with social psychology too.

So to give students the choice that we wanted to give them, we had to completely rebuild the

curriculum and design it from scratch, which was a challenge. It gave us a really great opportunity then to actually think about pedagogy, and how we enhanced students' experience, and how we take advantage of all of those things that Ian was talking about earlier about OU Live, then the VLE, Moodle, and so forth as well.

KAREN FOLEY: So whereas Richard was talking about designing one module specifically, you mention here that this then gave you the opportunity to look at how you frame that whole progression in terms of teaching psychology. Can you both say a little bit about what your vision was with how you decided to structure that? Because obviously, you would have had a lot of constraints, since BPS-recognized, you would have needed to comply with a lot there. But then, there's also a little bit of flexibility and scope in terms of how you deliver that. Can you tell us about your initial thinking when you're trying to work on this?

ALLISON: Oh, I can say a little bit about the qualification structure, and then Rose might want to say something about the module that she developed and had the vision for.

So the vision was for a curriculum that would enhance student progression, which meant that what we were trying to do is enable students to develop the skills incrementally so that they would go seamlessly, if you like, from one module to another module. And in order to do that, of course, we had to meet these very rigorous standards that the BPS set for us, which was in itself a challenge.

So the strategy that we developed was that we would build on student's knowledge at each of Levels 1, and then at 2 and 3. So it was a very nice, coherent kind of strategy. And I don't know how Rose's team experienced that on the ground, because they were actually involved in developing the module. And this fits right in the centre.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

ROSE: So yeah, well, what we did initially with Allison and the meetings with the other module team chairs, was to kind of work out which bit of the BPS curriculum we'd each be covering. So D200, which is the module that I chaired, is the Level 2 core module. So it covers all the core material.

Now, across the qualification, D100 is level 1D, 200, level 2D, 300, level 3. And those three modules are the core, and they cover all the BPS requirements. And then around them, there are options that are the areas that are of interest to students who study psychology. So D200

being in the middle was kind of pivotal. Because in Level 1, obviously, you're welcoming students, and you're introducing them to the subject. And at Level 3, there's the big job of the dissertation, which you do your own independent project, which is very exciting if you're studying psychology and you're interested in it.

So Level 2 had to be the middle movement for that. So we're teaching them the skills to do research, teaching the basic conceptual and theoretical knowledge that they need to be able to design and work with their projects. So there's a lot of work being done there. And so we spent a lot of thought on how to do that in a way that students would really enjoy, but also that they would feel safe doing. Because obviously, it's a lot of work, and it's a challenging degree, in a sense. And it's really rewarding.

But OU students are often working at home, and they're often on their own. And we didn't want them to feel alone. So a lot of work has gone into designing the module so it meets that. It kind of holds the hand of the student as they're working through. And to do that, we took advantage of all the new technology that wasn't available before. So we're there with them, step by step, through their assignments, through their learning. We have what you would expect in an OU module, the audiovisual resources, the interactivity.

And I think, and our external examiner actually agreed, that they probably have more interactivity, more practise in actual psychological research than you would in a standard university, in a brick university. Because we have all those kinds of online interactions, where they participate, design. So that's what we were working towards, making students into practical psychologists, so they know how to be a psychologist and work with psychological ideas.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Well, I know we've got a lot of psychology students out there, and there's lots happening on the chat. And I'm going to come to that in a minute. So if you've got a specific question that you want to ask Allison and Rose, then do put that in the social media chat, or get it to us in some way.

But before I do that, we've talked a bit about the BPS, the British Psychological Society, and about doing psychology, and about what that's like to experience it. Often students get to the end and they go, oh, phew, it was BPS-recognized, or this panic if they've done something that isn't necessarily. Why is that important? And what about doing psychology do students need to do in terms of the project work you were mentioning, that sort of thing, to actually be able to do

something useful with their degree?

ALLISON:

Well, I mean, the BPS accreditation is, of course, extremely important. Because most of the degrees that are offered in the UK, as our students know, will carry BPS accreditation. And it's seen as a Kitemark, more than anything. So it's an assurance that the curriculum you're studying is of a particular standard and quality. And that's incredibly important to our students. They tell us that, that it matters, that they want to have something that's accredited by the British Psychological Society.

And it's important because students who are interested in psychology, a proportion-- so [INAUDIBLE] is a large proportion-- but a proportion that want to go and study further. They actually want to be professional psychologists. And the route to doing that is to gain first an accredited degree, and to then go on to study an accredited master's degree. So for that proportion of students, it's important.

I think what's interesting for us is that for all of our students out there, they still want an accredited degree, even though they're not necessarily going to actually use it in that professional sense. And so what we learned, I think, is that a psychology degree is incredibly valuable. It delivers those kinds of skills that employees value. And we know that psychology graduates are amongst the most employable. And our graduates had a bit of an edge in terms of the kinds of experiences that they've had. That's what I think that Rose was alluding to.

KAREN FOLEY:

Yes, no, it's a very well-recognized psychology degree, which is fantastic. So we're mentioning a few things. We're mentioning some of the things-- you mentioned the projects, Rose. You omitted to mention all the maths in the middle, the statistics and other things that students might need to do psychology.

I wanted to ask you, what's it like to do psychology? What might students expect if they're just starting out? What sorts of things are they going to learn about, just generally? Because I do want to go to the Social Media Desk in a minute.

ROSE:

Well, I mean, obviously, they learn different kinds of psychology, different approaches to psychology. Because obviously, psychology's a big field. It's about us, so it's about everything, really, that matters to us in some ways. So they'll learn some of the biological foundations of psychology, about cognitive processes, about development and how we develop psychologically, and how that impacts on how we grow through the lifespan, and also social psychology, the way you engage with other people, and the impact that has, the context on

how one behaves. So you learn all of that, which I think is very, very interesting. And about personality, they learn later on.

So there's all that going on. But in order to learn these things-- and this is the thing-- you can learn all these things, and you can read them in a book. But to be a psychologist, it's also to investigate, to learn more about it yourself. So what we do try to provide is all the skills for being able to do that, for being able to do research, to investigate, or even to read an article in a newspaper and think, actually, that's a really good article. They've defended what they said. They've shown some research and that makes sense.

Or hmm, that's a bit dodgy. I'm not sure about that graph. What does that really mean? What are they saying? And that's a skill we want to teach our students, as well, so they know how to read for quality when they're learning about something, to be a critical reader.

So some of that involves quite basic mathematical skills. I think the thing about stats that's involved in that is that it feels quite scary for people. So it does, it has that, oh dear, I'm not going to know how to do this. But I don't think it needs to be scary. And I think overcoming that initial trepidation is really the key thing that we need to worry about in the first instance.

And then we have some fantastic online hands-on, working through step by step. You go backwards, forwards. You can take it at your own time. You can repeat it as many times as you want. So students have the opportunity to make themselves comfortable with that before they move on to the next step.

KAREN FOLEY: In terms of their skill sets, I guess we would talk about how useful psychology degrees are. And people may not necessarily want to do psychology with those. But things like being able to write a research report, being able to understand statistics, being able to investigate the world. I think that's what makes psychology degrees so useful to employers, even if they're not being used for psychological purposes.

Let's go to the Social Media Desk and see what HJ and Rachel are up to, and what everyone at home is talking about.

HJ: Yeah, well, we've got lots of people at home watching us, of course, joining us from all over the place. So we've got a MyFace update for you guys. And Malcom's joining us from-- if I can find the Isle of Lewis. And I think it's up here. I had a look on Wikipedia, so I'm not sure if my facts may be right there.

KAREN FOLEY: Have you learned nothing from the library?

[LAUGHTER]

HJ: I may have to watch again on catch up. I know there was some mention of Wikipedia, so if that's the marker for you, let us know, and we'll pop you in the right place.

RACHEL: I think we also need to change, because we're in psychology here, psychology sessions. We need to change the mood, some mood lighting.

KAREN FOLEY: We just have a technical question that's come through. I don't know if you guys can see here at home. Some people are able to watch the video, but they're not able to follow the chat. If you press Live and Interactive, you should be able to access the chat box, where you can share your comments with us directly. So give that a go. That message came through from Jeff.

We have some questions here that kind of relate to the previous presentation about politics. And students are quite interested to know whether psychologists study in politics, merely analyse it, or does psychological research actually influence political aspects? That's quite a challenging question there.

[LAUGHTER]

Next!

[LAUGHTER]

RACHEL: Yes, we do have another one, if you want another one.

ROSE: Coincidentally, my initial degree was in political psychology.

KAREN FOLEY: [LAUGHS]

ROSE: And I do belong to the International Society of Political Psychology. So definitely, there's a real interface there. As I was saying before, psychology is, because it's relevant to who we are, is just relevant to so many different things. And there are lots of people doing research in issues that are relevant to politics.

The head of our department, John Dixon, does a lot of work on prejudice, which is obviously a

very relevant kind of issue within politics. And we have people doing work on citizenship. And I do work on political identity and gender identity. So there's lots of areas where-- and health, similarly, so people kind of feeding into the agenda and policy around health. So it very much informs that kind of world.

KAREN FOLEY: That's fantastic.

HJ: Yeah. And it's so fascinating to see how with all these different subjects. I don't think there's any social science subject that isn't interrelated somehow. And you can look at all these things from different perspectives.

Or in economics, you've got behavioralism, which comes a lot from psychology. And you're talking about political psychology as well, So we've got all these interrelated fields, which just make-- I think, social sciences is fantastic. I think we can all agree with that point.

RACHEL: Yeah. And moving on.

[LAUGHTER]

Sorry. Sorry, moving on swiftly.

HJ: My [INAUDIBLE].

RACHEL: We've gotten quite a few questions about BPS accreditation. So we've got a specific one about psychology with counselling pathway. But how can students find out if their psychology degree is accredited with BPS?

ALLISON: Well, I can assure them that our degrees are accredited. But if they want to find out, the BPS website, www.bps.org.uk, has a section where you can look that up, and you can actually look for a particular university, and check whether a course you're interested in is accredited or not. So that's the definitive list.

If you know which university you want to study at, then I would suggest you just go to their website and have a look. Because it's such an important Kitemark, that if someone has it, then they want to make sure that people know about it.

KAREN FOLEY: I wonder if you can just touch on-- well, you mentioned the counselling side of things. And a lot of people, especially those who maybe aren't studying psychology-- I don't know what you guys think at home-- but a lot of people say, oh, isn't that just all about listening to people and

understanding how you're feeling about things?

And whilst that obviously is one aspect of psychology, and indeed, we have an excellent counselling department who do an awful lot in that, can you tell us a bit about the difference between a pure psychology in the sense that you're talking about, Rose, with those core modules, where we're doing research, and we're investigating things and using statistics to support that, and some of the more counselling, the applied things, and how we deal with that in social sciences?

ALLISON: OK, so the pure psychology degree, if you like, is structured around that core of modules that Rose was talking about. And then what we've given students are some complementary modules, some of which look at counselling related issues. So that might be issues around different therapeutic approaches, around fear and sadness, which is what a lot of our issues boil down to in some sense.

And then the other degree in forensic psychology has some modules that complement that main core spine of psychology modules, which look at issues in forensic psychology, such as, why do people offend? What's the nature of crime? How do you rehabilitate someone?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

ROSE: There's also the-- at the beginning of designing this, when we were working out how we were developing the Level 2 curriculum, we thought through two kind of modules. And the other one chaired by my colleague Jim Turner is the psychology option for Level 2. It's called Living Psychology, and it's a lovely module that touches on-- I mean, it's called Living Psychology, from the Everyday to the Extraordinary. And it's got five blocks, and it touches on lots of different kind of issues that are everyday practises of psychology. And it's much more applied in its approach.

KAREN FOLEY: Great. That's fantastic. I'm just going back to the Social Media Desk and see if there are any more questions, because I also do want to ask about some of these new exciting modules to give people a flavour of some of those options.

RACHEL: We do have questions, but when you're talking about the modules, the students really want to see the new books that are on there. But the question that we have that's just come through is, is there a huge difference between psychology and psychological studies?

KAREN FOLEY: Mm, good question.

ALLISON: Yeah. Well, there is a bit of a difference. I think the degree that's being referred to there is the one that's a strand within combined social sciences, which is on psychological studies, but also the criminology and psychological studies. What we've done is we've used the term psychological studies to give some indication that the qualification is broader. It's more diverse, and so it doesn't have the BPS accreditation. But what it has instead is some interesting modules in social sciences, or some other area. So they're not the same, I think is the answer.

RACHEL: Fantastic, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Are there any other questions before we look at the different options and books?

HJ: Well, now there is a lot coming through. A lot of people are just discussing the different modules that they're interested in taking, and of course, the different paths, like forensic psychology. And a lot of people are actually interested in the different methods that are used when actually studying psychology. So, qualitative and quantitative stuff as well.

RACHEL: We've got students here that are interested in particular research areas as well. I mean, Christine wants to explore organisational psychology combined with neuropsychology. So there's a huge breadth of study involved in psychology that you can focus on, which is fantastic, at least, amongst all of our students here.

ROSE: Can I add something?

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

ROSE: I just wanted to say something about methods, because I think that's interesting. Because I think we've spent a lot of time thinking through the methods and the progression of methods from Level 1 right through to the end of Level 3, so across the whole degree. And what we thought through, I mean, you do get a lot of this division between quantitative and qualitative. And I think there was a point at which that was a very important decision, and it is in lots of ways.

But I think in terms of learning how to use a methodology and which methodology you would like to use, it's more interesting what you're interested in. What is it that you want to study? And then thinking about what methodology. And in that case, maybe the

quantitative/qualitative divide isn't the most useful one.

So the way we've mostly conceptualised the methods teaching is between experimental, which uses a certain context in a certain way-- statistics. Survey research, which looks at broader groups and can use quantitative measures, but also qualitative ones. And then textual-based ones that are around interviews and collecting more language data. And those are the three kind of options that you get once you get to the Level 3.

So we're trying to get students to think through, what is it that you want to know? And then think about what kind of method that they want to use. And we're trying to offer them as broad a tool box as possible so that they can use the method that is most appropriate.

KAREN FOLEY: I think that makes it have such an applied sense to it. Because whereas before you'd have cognitive, social, and you'd have all these various categories, and I think it's become a lot more intertwined. And like you say, thinking about what you want to find out and then what best methods are used to suit that. And with mixed methods now being so popular, it's so much more useful when you actually get out there to do things with it.

We don't have time to talk about all the modules, but I'd like to ask both of you, I mean, Rose, you mentioned DD210, which has got all sorts of-- this is this one, Living Psychology, from the Everyday to the Extraordinary, which includes things like why we believe in ghosts and all sorts of interesting things. Whether or not alternative medicines work, yeah, all sorts of things.

Allison, what is your favourite new addition to the psychology curriculum?

ALLISON: My favourite--

ROSE: Allison.

ALLISON: You're putting me on the spot, yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah.

ALLISON: I do like the ideas behind DD210, which is the books that you pulled up there, because it's just so novel. It's so innovative. And I think the way that they've knitted together those really diverse areas is really interesting. So I have a particular affinity for that. I do like what the team are doing with the Level 3 module and DE300, and the way in which they're tackling some really important design issues around how to teach those core areas of psychology.

And then how to enable students at the very end to develop their own independent project, to carry out a piece of independent research on an area of their interest. It might be something related to forensic psychology, or it might be something more related to counselling. And that's the final thing they do. At the end of that module, fingers crossed, hopefully, our students will then have a degree, which is the end of that journey for them. So I'm really excited to see how that module turns out, and to see how well our students fare with it.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, thank you very much. We've got time for one last thing. And Rose, I'm now going to ask you a favour at the end, because I would like you to mention something, which is the CHIP tool. And I'd just like you to say something, because we've talked a lot about the books, and the content, and the methods. Very briefly, could you just tell our students about some of the VLE-- the Virtual Learning Environment-- innovations that you've been working on?

ROSE: Well, I mean, there's lots of different things we were saying, like the independent experimental you can-- sorry, I'm just tripping over my words there. But you can participate in experiments. But I will answer, my favourite thing is the CHIP tool, which has been designed to be able to investigate Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology, so C-H-I-P, CHIP.

So we've got this new resource that's on the web. It's open for everybody, so anybody can use it, whether they're a psychology student or not. And it offers you the opportunity to explore different narratives around psychology-- the history, concepts, individuals who have contributed, different methods. So it gives you a real overview of psychology that you get to explore just on your own, wherever it leads you, wherever your interests are. So I do love it.

KAREN FOLEY: Perfect. Thank you very much, Allison and Rose. And that resource, that's an OpenLearn, free resource that anybody can access. So if you're interested in psychology, and you'd like to link some people, places, and ideas, you can do that. And that will be on the Resources page of the website.

Well, thank you very much. It has been a really useful insight into the psychology programme.

ALLISON: No, thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, now we're going to have a break. I'm going to do something a little bit different during this break. Because I'm going to show you a YouTube video. And there's a chance to tell us what you think about that. This is going to form the basis of our next discussion, which is all about social psychology. So I'm hoping we can all do some psychology, whether you're

studying psychology or not.

And we're going to have a really interesting discussion next with David Kaposi, to talk about-- well, I'll leave that to the next topic. But you can see the widget. You can see the film. Watch it, and then we'll be back in five.

[MUSIC PLAYING]