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Strengths, Experiences, and Learning Support Needs of System- Impacted Students in Criminology and Law

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ABSTRACT

University systems have long acknowledged the learning needs of diverse student cohorts, including those based on race, socio-economic status, and disability. Universities have far less often recognized the relationship between these groups and the differential impacts of the criminal legal system that affect education pathways and experiences. At a time when the expansion of diversity initiatives characterizes higher education, this paper draws attention to the need to consider the impact of the students who have been criminalized on how we understand teaching to diversity. The paper reports on Australian qualitative interviews with criminology and law students who have been impacted (either directly or through family or kinship networks) by the criminal legal system: what we refer to as *system-impacted students*. The study explores the reasons why system-impacted students choose to study criminology and law, what their experiences bring to the classroom, at what cost, and what might make the classroom safer for them. Our findings suggest that pedagogical strategies such as universal design for learning are well placed to account for the strengths, experiences and learning support needs of system-impacted students, but this requires a widespread recognition amongst educators and administrators that these system-impacted students are in the classroom.