From the Dean

The last six months has been a busy time at the UWA Law School with the launch of new postgraduate programs, research grant applications and awards, and alumni engagement events amongst other matters. As we come to the end of the year we are looking forward to graduating our first cohort of the New Courses 2012 Majors – Bachelor of Commerce (Major in Business Law) and Bachelor of Arts (Major in Law & Society). These programs have proved to be very popular, both with students intending to take the Juris Doctor and others.

One of the other highlights of this semester has been the completion of upgrades to some of our facilities. As many of you know, expansion over the years means that the Law School Precinct now includes the Law Building, Law Link Building and part of the old Economics & Commerce Building. This has resulted in our research students in particular being spread across several different areas. In order to bring them together and provide a dedicated workroom, discussion area and kitchen, we have established an ‘HDR Hub’ in the Economics and Commerce Building. This facility ensures that all of our higher degree research students are co-located.

In addition, we have upgraded our video-conferencing equipment in the E-Moot Court. We hope to shortly be using this equipment to work with regional and remote lawyers and communities and to build international trans-national teaching teams. Many of our other initiatives and projects are outlined in this Newsletter and I hope you enjoy this edition of LawyerEd.

Clinical legal education program

In 2014 UWA Law School launched a formal Clinical Legal Education program. Clinical legal education (CLE) is an important part of the curriculum and provides the opportunity for experiential learning. It assists students to contextualise the study of law, foster legal practice skills, develop a deeper understanding of approaches to legal practice, and to critically analyse and reflect upon the importance of legal ethics. This knowledge and skills are important in preparing students to be work-ready graduates.

CLE is a feature of most Australian law schools. In 2013, 26 of 33 law schools in Australia offered such courses; and as of 2014 all Go8 law schools will offer a clinical legal education option to students. There is often little opportunity for students to experience legal problem solving in ‘real-life’ scenarios. Skills built within the curriculum can be complemented by students who choose to enter competitions in legal writing, client interviewing, negotiation and mediation, and mooting. Many students obtain clerkships or other forms of legal work experience. For the first time this year, our Legal Internship unit provides another opportunity for UWA law students to obtain valuable practical experience for academic credit.

The legal internship differs from courses traditionally offered by the UWA Law School and gives students the opportunity to work in a legal environment one day per week for 12 weeks for academic credit. The students’ experience in their placements is supplemented by regular seminars and an ongoing assessment program designed to build legal skills and encourage reflective practice. This program has been developed to complement the legal skills that are already taught throughout the JD program in existing core units and electives. Students can choose between a social justice placement or work in a commercial practice. In 2015 we will extend this program to provide regional placements in Geraldton. Five students will have the opportunity to work over a few weeks in summer with social justice and non-governmental organisations in Geraldton. The Law School is grateful for the support of the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health (CUCRH) which is assisting with accommodation.

Overseas placements are also possible through a range of international internships.

The Legal Internship Unit has been established by Professor Eileen Webb and Associate Professor Aviva Freilich, and Associate Professor Brenda McGivern is arranging the Geraldton placements. We are very grateful for the support of all those individuals and organisations that have provided a work placement for our students. As we grow our JD student numbers we will be looking for more placements. There are a number of ways in which our Alumni and supporters can assist us: by hosting a student, sharing CLE materials and expertise in internships, and by providing financial assistance to enable students to travel for regional and international internship opportunities. We would be happy to speak with anyone who is interested in assisting with the program.
September 23, saw members of the legal fraternity, the judiciary as well as government and industry partners join together with key academics to launch the Law School’s newest postgraduate courses.

Winthrop Professor Stephen Smith MC’d the formal proceedings and guests heard from Dean Professor Erika Techera on the innovations taking place in the law school. Postgraduate student Daniel Sawyer also spoke on his experience studying at The University of Western Australia.

Guests were introduced to key academic staff including those who will be teaching in the Law School’s new postgraduate programs.

Courses commencing for the first time in 2015 are; the Graduate Diploma and Master of Law, Policy and Government; the Graduate Diploma and Master of International Law; the Graduate Diploma and Master of International Commercial Law; and the Graduate Diploma of Chinese Business Law.

Designed after extensive consultation with the legal fraternity, government and industry, the introduction of the courses is the most recent development in the Law School’s proud 87 year tradition of excellence in legal education.

In addition to the new individual courses the Law School also announced a collaboration between the Business School and the School of Social Sciences to create three new combined degrees designed to address the increasing need for cross-disciplinary expertise. From 2015, UWA will offer a combined Master of International Relations and Master of International Law, MBA and LLM, and Master of Commerce and Master of International Commercial Law.

Guests were invited to deepen their engagement with the Law School and participate in the most recent chapter of a long tradition of mutual support between the School and the broader legal community of Western Australia.

If you would like any information about the Law School’s new postgraduate courses visit: law.uwa.edu.au/courses/postgrad

International expertise joins Law School

2014 has seen significant expansion in the breadth and depth of the Law School’s expertise with staff joining the school from around the world, including Dr Philipp Kastner who brings to considerable expertise in the area of International Law.

Dr Kastner’s research specifically focuses on the creation and role of legal norms in the context of peace negotiations aiming to end internal armed conflicts. Forthcoming publications include Legal Normativity in the Resolution of Internal Armed Conflict (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2015).

He is also currently researching the legitimacy and effectiveness of transitional justice mechanisms, such as international and national courts, truth and reconciliation commissions and reparation schemes, and the emergence of transnational legal norms in this context.

Dr Kastner studied at the University of Innsbruck (Austria), and holds an LLM. as well as a Ph.D. from McGill University (Montréal, Québec, Canada) and a Dr. iur. from the University of Innsbruck. Whilst pursuing his graduate studies, he also undertook internships with the Human Rights Watch International Justice Program in New York and


Dr Kastner will be teaching several units in the new Master of International Law programme.
Law School students winners at Kirby Moot

UWA Law students Sam Pack, Chris Burch, Yvonne Yap and Ciara O’Loughlin have won the 2014 Kirby Moot, the premier national mooting competition in contract law for universities around Australia.

The competition fielded 26 teams from 17 universities, with students having to prepare two written memoranda (one for the claimant and one for the respondent).

The competition was run in Brisbane over four days, with the UWA team competing against four teams and progressing to the final knockout rounds.

UWA Law School lecturer and team coach, Dr Renae Barker, travelled with the students and is an advocate of mooting for law students.

“It’s a fantastic opportunity for students to put their law studies into practice and to develop their legal reasoning and oral advocacy skills,” she said.

The grand final against Bond University was a tight competition with Ciara O’Loughlin and Sam Pack winning by one point. Sam Pack was also awarded the prize for the best speaker in the grand final (jointly with one of the speakers from Bond) and best speaker in the final rounds.

This was only the second year UWA has participated in the relatively new, but rapidly growing, Kirby Moot. Last year, a UWA team progressed to the quarter finals.

Research Highlights

2014 has been an exceptionally busy year for the Law School in terms of grant submissions with our researchers seeking funding from a variety of sources for some exciting projects.

The Law School Associate Dean of Research, Winthrop Professor Harry Blagg has recently been awarded $200,000 of funding for his project “Evaluation of innovative models of interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated responses to family and/or sexual violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities” through the Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS).

This multi-jurisdictional project will evaluate the impact of innovative, coordinated family violence interventions in three sites in the North of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Central Queensland, with the aim of identifying ‘how’ initiatives work, or fail to work.

Associate Professor Sarah Murray has successfully been awarded an Institute of Advanced Studies Distinguished Early Career Fellowship to pursue her work on exploring the potential impact and feasibility of neighbourhood justice courts in Western Australia.

Recently staff from the Law School and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences held a Health Law & Medicine workshop which was facilitated by W/Professor John Challis, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Health and Medical Research). Leading experts from both faculties, along with external stakeholders, are now working together to focus on opportunities for Law and Medicine to jointly address issues in five main areas. We look forward to developing a strong partnership between the disciplines.
In 2013 researchers in the Law School undertook a large comparative study into psychological distress and associated behaviours in Law and Psychology students at UWA.

Consistent with existing scholarship, the law student participants in this study reported significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression than members of the Australian population in the same age range, generally, and the psychology student participants, more specifically.

The study revealed further that law students reporting heightened states of stress, anxiety and depression may not be making the wisest and healthiest choices as to how they spend their time. By way of a simple example, the results of the study indicated that students who exercise regularly experience lower levels of psychological distress. Yet, students as a mean spent only 4 hours a week exercising. By contrast, students spent a mean of over 6 hours per week engaged in online leisure activities such as social media. This despite there being a positive correlation between the amount of time spent engaged in online leisure activities and stress, anxiety and depression. Of greater interest is that, of all the activities specified in the study, time spent on social media was considered by law student participants to be the least worthwhile, and only marginally more enjoyable than University study and work.

To provide UWA law students with an informed basis for self-managing their wellbeing, the results of the study were presented at a student seminar during Blackstone Society’s Stress Less Week in Semester 2, 2014. To emphasise the importance of exercise in the mental health equation, the seminar kicked off with a 5 minute Boot Camp by the Faculty’s resident personal trainer, Faculty Administrative Officer, Tash Terbeeke. With energy levels boosted by green smoothies courtesy of the Blackstone Society much fun was had by all. Building on the success of this initiative, from semester 1, 2015 the Faculty plans to offer free Boot Camp sessions for Body and Mind for staff and students.