Teaching Public Law to High School Teachers

The Project

In 2014 I organised a half-day workshop at the Adelaide Law School for high school year 11 and 12 Legal Studies teachers. The purpose of the workshop was to assist Legal Studies teachers in keeping up-to-date with contemporary legal issues.

As part of the South Australian year 12 Legal Studies curriculum, students must undertake an 'Inquiry' into a contemporary legal issue. One of the great challenges for high school teachers is keeping abreast of current legal issues so as to assist students with their Inquiries.

As part of the workshop, I ran a session on ‘recent developments in constitutional law’. In the session we discussed:

- The Commonwealth’s power to legislate with respect to same-sex marriage;
- Parliament’s role in constitutional interpretation;
- The recent decision in *Williams v Commonwealth (No 2)*; and
- The constitutional provisions relating to the passing (and blocking) of a federal budget.

The other sessions were presented by Professor Melissa de Zwart (‘Young People and Social Media’) and Ms Kellie Toole (‘What Do Courts Know About Defendants’ Criminal History?’).

The sessions were kept informal, with teachers given the opportunity to ask questions throughout the presentations. The presentations also generated discussion within the group.

**Feedback from the Teachers**

- “I found it refreshing, informative — well prepared — and you encouraged us to participate and ask questions”
- “Interesting, topical examples used — easy to follow and opportunity to ask questions”
- “Each session was very interesting, relevant and helpful to deepen and update our understanding on a number of current issues. Excellent!”
- “Loved it. Would come back again.”

Expanding the Project — 2015 and beyond

- A session on “Research Skills: Using Free, Online Resources” (for teachers and students).
- Exploring ways of connecting directly with students.
- Connecting with remote and regional teachers and students — outreach beyond the Adelaide CBD.

The Project Benefits ...

- Sharing my research beyond academia.
- Developing communication skills to explain my research to a wider audience.

... for my teaching

- Gaining a better understand of the high school Legal Studies curriculum.
- This in turn assists me in my teaching of first year university students, as some first year students have completed Legal Studies in year 12. I now have a better understanding of their legal knowledge.

... for the Law School

- A chance to showcase the Law School’s expertise in Public Law.
- While the purpose of the workshop was not to market the Adelaide LLB, the workshop morning tea and lunch breaks provided teachers with an opportunity to ask questions about studying law at Adelaide Law School.

Dr Adam Webster
Lecturer, Adelaide Law School

Acting Dean, Professor Melissa de Zwart welcoming the Legal Studies teachers to the Adelaide Law School.

Lunchtime discussions