

A welcome (or welcome back) message from the Dean

Dear Members of the UNSW Law community,

Over the last week or so, the Law Building has come back to life as you and your colleagues have returned. This isn't to say that nothing happens over the Summer (far from it, as I'll explain below), but nothing matches the buzz of having our students around. It makes the obvious point – you, our students, are the lifeblood of this Faculty.

What is special about this Faculty? The original vision of our founding dean, Hal Wootten, continues to inspire us. This vision was of legal education being committed to fundamental principles of the rule of law and justice for all. The purple banner near the main entrance to the Law Building carries Hal's words – 'A law school should have and communicate to its students a keen concern for those on whom the law bears harshly'.

This means that we should look at law from the perspective not only of those who have traditionally *used* the law – the socially and economically powerful – but also those whose experience of law is having it *used on* them. For me, a model UNSW law graduate is someone whose capability is much broader than is normal – it is this that employers tell me is a distinctive strength of our alumni. They are people who are equally well equipped to work in, for example, commercial litigation as in a community legal centre. We have some outstanding examples who do both concurrently.

The broadening of focus also entails a change in perspective and method. Understanding how law works across our society necessarily involves studying the contexts in which law operates and how it works in practice rather than just 'in the books'. My own research provides an example: I work on the relationship between law and policing practices, so this involves looking at how police officers go about their everyday work. When police stop and search someone on the street or take them to a police station to question them, law is very different from the version analysed in the High Court – but it is at least of equal significance to people in their everyday lives.

Within the Faculty, a vital connection between law in the books and in practice is provided by our centres. Everyone will have some contact with Kingsford Legal Centre, which provides legal services to the local community, teaches students, engages in community development, and contributes to policy development through research-based papers and submissions. But there are a dozen other centres, initiatives and groups which, in various ways, combine research, education, and community service. Their names indicate their specialities – from Indigenous Law to Human Rights, from Cyberspace to Legal Information, from Pro Bono to Public Law. The latest addition is the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Law, an expression of our commitment to looking to other disciplines for collaboration and insight. Most of our centres are based in the Centres Precinct, which you can find off the corridor from the Library to the Roundhouse. You will have opportunities to be involved both as a volunteer and for course credit as an intern. There are also a number of research focused initiatives – on climate change, international law, private law. (For details of all of these, see www.law.unsw.edu.au/centres)

I would strongly encourage you to get involved in at least one of the many Faculty activities which take place outside the classroom. As well as the centres, there is mootings, the UNSW Law Journal, mentoring, and a wide range of activities organised by the Law Society. Think about getting involved in something new, something different, something challenging. If you haven't been overseas, go on exchange. If you are set on working in a merchant bank, try working in a community law centre. If you always wanted to be an international human rights lawyer, check out commercial litigation. Stretch yourselves, and your minds.

While I know that you have very busy lives, it's vital not to let law school mean just turning up at classes. Take time to find out about what goes on in your Law Faculty. Many students seem to think that we go on holiday (or just into mothballs) when you aren't here. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just take the example of a week in February, when we had: a 2 day workshop of Aboriginal Legal Service research and policy officers; a week-long course for 30 young Indigenous community leaders on using law and rights for social change run by the Diplomacy Training Program; the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law's constitutional Law conference; the launch of the Indigenous Law Centre's journal special issue on inquiries into deaths in custody; and a three day International Research Workshop at which we hosted 100 academics from leading universities in twelve countries in our region. All these involved a very wide range of friends of the Faculty, starting with the 2 Commonwealth Ministers who spoke at events.

Less visible is the mass of research being produced by your lecturers. A couple of notable examples are the publication last week of books by Ben Golder (*Foucault's Law*) and by Chris Cunneen (*Indigenous Legal Relations*). These are the tip of an iceberg of other books, journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and submissions to official inquiries. For more details of the Faculty's research, have a look at the recent publications board opposite the reception counter on level 2, or www.law.unsw.edu.au/research.

While research is being done across the Faculty, I'm particularly keen to encourage cross-cutting research which both deals with key contemporary issues and links with researchers in other faculties – climate change, the security/liberty interface, public health, and responding to the global financial crisis are all areas of current work. Notably, we have recently appointed two research fellows, Chris Michaelsen and David Leary to work on, respectively, liberty/security and climate change law.

Other new faces around the Faculty include: Theunis Roux, an international public law and human rights lawyer from South Africa; Tyrone Kirchengast, who works in criminal law and criminology, specializing in victims' issues; Michael Legg, an expert in complex litigation who joins us from Clayton Utz; and Ben Golder (criminal law and legal theory), who has recently completed his PhD at the University of London. Finally, I'm delighted to announce the appointment of Michael Kirby as Visiting Professorial Fellow, following his retirement from the High Court. Like Keith Mason, who joined us on retiring as President of the NSW Court of Appeal, Michael Kirby will contribute to the Faculty in a number of ways, including writing, teaching and mentoring.

Much has changed since the Faculty was established - notably the indispensability of international perspectives and the use of electronic information. We have changed (and indeed led change in both of these respects through our international and human rights lawyers and through AustLII). However, much of the UNSW Law tradition established by Hal Wootten remains very relevant. A vital element of it involves a commitment to collegiality and civility in how we treat each other. When I first came here twenty years ago, this was one of the characteristics which I found attractive - and very different from what I experienced at law

school in England. It includes good relations between staff (of all kinds) and students, and a willingness to respect and learn from those with whom we disagree. Both of these are, of course, vital in making our approach to teaching and learning by classroom interaction. But they are also part more generally of a mature academic community. 'Community' is an abused and overused word: but it is fundamental to UNSW Law. If you follow the example our alumni, your class-mates will be your most important friends, colleagues and contacts throughout your life.

We are all set for a great year – I hope that you enjoy it and make the best of the wealth of opportunities available. I hope to see many of you in the year ahead, and wish you the very best for 2009.

Professor David Dixon

Dean

Faculty of Law