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Introduction & Acknowledgments
Acknowledgments

Yi Long Li & Sam Keogh
Careers & Development Directors 2013/2014

We would first like to acknowledge the generosity of all of our authors - be they lawyers, judges, bankers, consultants, volunteers or students - who have taken the time to pen the articles you find in this year’s Careers Guide. We would also like to thank the sponsors who have made the publication of this guide possible:

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Secondly, a very big thank you to the Clare Shears and Andrea Tran for all the hours spent designing this Guide and putting up with our demands!

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To the Careers Team: you have devoted much time and effort into our publications and events this year while upholding a high standard of professionalism in delivering our services. Your efforts, although not often acknowledged, are appreciated.

Disclaimer
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Foreword

The Hon. Chief Justice Marilyn Warren AC

Embodying on a career in the law is exciting. Sometimes, during studies in a law course, students become impatient and want to acquire knowledge quickly so that they can embark on a practice in the law.

Equally, in the keenness to commence practice goals are targeted without an adequate focus on the full range of options available in a legal career. Yet again, when the opportunity arises to practise it is best for the individual if he or she is able to draw upon a rich range of experiences.

This publication provides an excellent resource for students.

Relevantly, I asked two young law graduates who had progressed from law school to practise with a firm, admission to practice, a period of study at Oxford University and, finally, time working at the Supreme Court of Victoria for their thoughts.

I asked them what things they wished they had known when they were at university, well before they embarked on their careers in the law. One said:

I wish I had known (or known better) ... :

The well-trodden paths aren’t the only ones that lead to great places. Even if you want to end up working at a large commercial law firm, there’s no reason to feel pressure to rush to get there. Getting involved in other activities such as working at a community legal centre or in the criminal law or assisting with policy research won’t lose you any points with the commercial law firms. It’ll probably be really interesting and will assist you in gaining skills and experience that may be harder to come by at a large firm.

It’s often hard to know in any detail just what a particular job involves, much less what it will be like until you’ve been doing it for a while. I wish I’d known how happy people are to talk about what they do. If I had, I would have spoken to more people in differing legal roles about what they do day to day and what makes parts of their job interesting or tedious. Don’t be afraid to approach people (even without an introduction) and be inquisitive about what they do and how they came to be there.

The other lawyer said of things he wished he had known:

First, that commercial firms are not necessarily the best place to start a legal career. While commercial firms offer a variety of work and may provide strong legal training, they should not be seen as the pinnacle for an aspiring law student. Most commercial firms practice in a small confined area of the law: commercial transactions, litigation, property and banking. Further, they often operate in a commercial setting, they rely on young lawyers to work a set number of billable hours in order to make the firm operational. I wish I had considered the other possibilities of legal practice, in particular legal roles in government. This is because of the greater variety of work: both commercial and government work. Moreover, the work environment is less influenced by commercial pressures, which I believe means there is more time for learning and assessing the law and being properly mentored by other lawyers.

Second, I wish that I understood that employers are not looking for a perfect candidate. There is a belief at law school that to get the right job in the right firm you have to have the ‘right’ CV. Which includes mooting, involvement in the LSS and strong marks: characteristics which represent an ‘A type personality’. From my time at law firms that is completely incorrect. While a solid grounding in the law is important, what employers want is someone who is well-rounded and who they can get along with. I think students need to know that varied interests outside the law is a fantastic quality to have and that it enhances rather than undermines their chance of getting a job.

This advice from these two young lawyers is not only apostate but very sound. I could not express it any better.

There are expanding sources of employment opportunities for students to consider.

Government activity and regulation is on the rise. Legislation, rules, regulations, and international agreements are becoming more numerous and complex. This has led to more law graduates being employed in government agencies and departments in legal, policy and consulting roles.

A corresponding expansion in administrative law and judicial review counterbalances the growth in government activity and regulation. There is more work in the area of scrutinising government action, and as a result, more opportunities for law graduates in private practice and in the community sector.

The modern legal profession operates in a globalised and interdependent market. Many major Australian law firms are merging or allying with international firms. The importance of transnational law is growing. Lawyers who understand foreign legal systems and are able to analyse foreign legislation and case law will increasingly be in demand. Another growing area of law is private international law. As Australia seeks to promote itself as a centre for international commercial arbitration, opportunities will emerge in this area.

I wish all students well in their law studies and future careers. A single legal career may involve a rich, challenging and varied collection of experiences, and touch upon several of the growing areas. Students are receiving a world class education that, coupled with diligence and participation in the wide range of opportunities available to them at The University of Melbourne, will provide the ingredients necessary for a rewarding legal career.
Welcome to the Melbourne University Law Student’s Society’s Careers Guide for 2014. For many years this guide has attempted to be a resource for all law students in making decisions about their future careers. We hope that this year’s guide will live up to the high bar set by previous guides and will be of use in some way to everyone who reads it.

In this guide are a number of articles covering different careers open to those with a law degree, as well as some other information and experiences that we feel are relevant to career planning and decision making. We have tried to cover as much ground as possible, however in spite of our best efforts this guide cannot be comprehensive. We ask for your forbearance for this. In many cases a topic not covered in this guide will have been present in a previous guide.

New to the guide this year are articles on careers as a Judge, a section on surviving law, both as a student and as a practising lawyer, and a section on making transitions between careers and jobs as you go through life. The overall message that we hope to convey is that your job prospects are not as grim as the newspapers would have you believe, you aren’t locked into a single job or career for the rest of your life and that there are a vast range of possible careers open to you. In many cases the path to a career may not be direct or easy, but there are always alternate paths to where you want to be in the future.

The sheer variety of careers held by those with law degrees, and the varied ways in which they ended up where they are, is the best indication that opportunities are plentiful if you’re willing to take them. Something that is often not considered is the sheer volume of lateral movement within the legal profession, both between firms and between firms and other types of careers. A secondment to a bank can lead to becoming a banker, a stint working for the government can lead from a large commercial firm to practising as a public law barrister. The bottom line is that where you end up you are only ever a fortuitous email or phone call away from an alternative career.

As with the Clerkship Guide the surest way to successfully getting into the career you want is a combination of research and persistence. It will be difficult to convince anyone to hire you if you can’t explain why you want to work for them. Likewise, if you can demonstrate that you have consistently put effort into getting into that career it will distinguish you from other potential candidates.

Finally, keep in mind that there are no right or wrong career paths. If the thought of working in an office on Bourke St horifies you then going down the clerkship and commercial firm path is probably not right for you, no matter what all your friends/your entire year level may be doing. You won’t go too far wrong if you think about where you want to be in five or ten years and make decisions that lead generally in that direction.

We wish you all the best with any applications or decisions you may be making over the coming months, and hope that this guide can in some way help you in finding the right career.
The following section contains articles on life working in the court system as an associate and as a judge. While we tried to include an article on life as a barrister unfortunately that was not possible this year. Past Careers Guides certainly include these articles for anyone interested.

Within the court system there are several different types of jobs which are held by lawyers. First and most obvious are judges. In the vast majority of cases appointment as a judge is by invitation of the relevant Attorney-General only. There is something of a taboo in the legal profession about discussing the path to becoming a judge or about expressing a desire to become one. In large part this is due to the uncertainty of such appointments and because it is an honour to be asked. With that said, the most common path is to have a career with some level of success as a Barrister or Solicitor-Advocate. This has become less set in stone in recent times as Solicitors and Academics are now appointed as Judges far more frequently than in the past. This is discussed in more detail in the following article, however the important thing to keep in mind is that with the exception of a magistracy, a career path leading to the bench is subject entirely to who the Attorney-General is and what names come before them.

The second most obvious court-based career is that of Barrister. Conventional wisdom is that the best path to the Bar is via a handful of years as a solicitor. There are advantages to this, not least of which is getting some savings before commencing running your own business. There are no rules about minimum experience when applying to the Bar, however you have to pass the Bar Exam, which is reportedly extremely difficult even among those admitted to legal practise, and to keep in mind that unless you are briefed you will have no income. This means that, if you want to, you can go to the Bar and open a practise as a Barrister almost as soon as you graduate.

A life at the bar is not for the faint of heart, but the potential rewards are significant. Not having a boss means you can absolutely spend that extra day/week/month on holiday. The only repercussions are that you aren’t earning any money while you do so. For those who value independence, or who like talking, being a Barrister could be the right career choice.

Finally, within the courts every judge will have one or more associates who act as their assistant(s). This will involve researching for judgements, writing draft judgements, typing judgements up for final recording and any other tasks that a judge may reasonably need completing. It is quite common for those wanting to go to the Bar to spend one or more years working as an associate in order to gain firsthand courtroom experience. Knowing what things a judge likes or dislikes is also a major advantage if you have to argue a case before them.
Associateship with the Chief Justice

Tim Jeffrie
Senior Associate to the Chief Justice of Victoria

It’s a little depressing when you realise that you are currently in the best job you will ever have before you’re 30, and that it will end. That is how I feel about being an associate to a judge. It’s a job where no day is the same and where you are constantly challenged and stimulated.

What does an associate do?
Associates do a range of tasks that are all aimed at assisting a judge to do their work. I would categorise them into three: pre-court; during court, and post-court. Before court an associate will need to prepare the material for a judge. This may include reading through all the submissions, reading the witness statements and looking at police photo books. A lot of judges may ask their associate for a memorandum setting out the issues of contention, relevant case law, as well as problems in the case of either party. During court associates will have a number of duties. Keeping folders of evidence, swearing in witnesses and juries, taking notes to keep track of submissions and liaising with counsel to make sure the judge has everything they need. The third aspect of the job, in my opinion, is the most enjoyable and rewarding. The judge may want to talk about the case with the associate afterwards to go through the legal issues. Many judge’s ask their associate to draft a memo on a specific point or assist in the drafting process. There are also formal orders to prepare and judgments to proof and send out to the parties and Austlii, most of the these jobs are done by associates. In summary as a judge’s associate, your role is to make the judge’s work as stress-free as possible.

Why did I become an associate?
Being an associate seemed to be a natural progression for me from legal practice and studying overseas. The position of associate provides you with two invaluable experiences. First, working with someone who has an incredible intellect. Judges are, without doubt, the most skilled and intelligent legal practitioners. Discussing a case with a Supreme Court judge is a thrilling experience and you are exposed to a myriad of ideas, thoughts and arguments that will assist you for the rest of your legal career. Second, I decided to become an associate to assist me to make up my mind about my future legal career. Being a corporate lawyer meant that I had fantastic training and amazing experiences meeting clients and doing interesting legal work. However, I did not spend a huge amount of time in court. As an associate I spend a majority of my days in court and it means I fully understand the work of trial lawyers and barristers. This has given me an insight into what I would like to do in the future.

Why should you do an associateship?
I have already mentioned some of the great benefits of being an associate: close contact with great legal minds, interesting work and exposure to court. I believe the greatest benefit for any young lawyer is the variety of work you will do at the Court. Judge’s can be difficult to work for, and the work they set may be boring and tedious, but it can also be interesting and challenging. Seeing an argument you have made appear in a Court of Appeal judgment is pretty special. Practically, being an associate may also open up a lot of doors. Many firms are interested in employing associates as they understand court procedure. It may also help you in getting a mentor at the Bar or getting onto a strong clerk’s list. Finally, being an associate can also assist you in gaining entry into elite universities for further study; having a reference written by a judicial officer is a pretty strong endorsement of one’s legal talent and skill.

How to apply?
First you need to work out which judge’s are looking for an associate. I would suggest calling or emailing their chambers in person and ask the current associate when the next vacancy is. The Supreme Court of Victoria also has a central database of those who have expressed interest in a job as an associate, you register by emailing or calling the Judicial Services Coordinator. Once you have established that there is a vacancy (which can be a year or two away) you should tailor your application. Do not write pro forma applications to judges, they can tell. Try to match your interests with their interests, look at the cases they have been involved in both as judges or at the bar. A judge’s welcome speech (delivered by the Victorian Bar Chairman) is a treasure trove of information about a judge. Finally, if you are lucky enough to get an interview, be relaxed and show a genuine interest in the work of the judge. Judge’s want someone who they can get along with and who they can trust. Good luck!
The Judge

The Hon. Justice David Harper
MLS Judge in Residence Semester 2 2014

His name – Billings Learned Hand – was odd; but his judicial career was outstanding. From 10 April 1909 until his death on 18 August 1961, a total of 52 years, he was a Federal judge. For much of that time he served as Chief Judge of the Second Circuit in the United States (New York, Connecticut and Vermont). The New York Herald Tribune wrote of him on his death: ""The law, said Edmund Burke, 'sharpens the mind by narrowing it'; but in a few of our great judges law has lifted the mind to a level of comprehension and has kindled a degree of humane ardour unsurpassed in any other profession."

Judge Learned Hand had these qualities. Other judges have had them too. Having them, they doubtless experienced the satisfaction, rare and precious though it is, which comes from daily engagement with work which one loves; important work, work calling for and drawing upon most of the finest virtues of a civilised human being. True, the full, constant expression of these virtues will be beyond reach. Our humanity, with its inevitable imperfections, catches up with us all. But the attempt to cultivate the finest of human virtues, and increase - necessarily by uneven increments – one's capacity to realise them, is the stuff of inspiration. No office, no job, will on a daily basis whet the enthusiasms of the holder of it. But judicial office can come close. Many magnificently fulfilling careers are among those to which a student of the law may not unreasonably aspire. Judicial office is one of them.

With the exception of the magistracy, judicial office it is not (at least in Victoria) a position for which a candidate can apply. This may change. In any event, the ultimate choice is, and will almost certainly remain, that of the government of the day: State, Federal or Territory, depending upon the jurisdiction. Generally, the relevant Attorney-General will lead the search for the preferred candidate; generally, cabinet will accept the Attorney's recommendation – or so we have reason to believe. The process, however, depends very much on the individual Attorney, on his or her standing in the relevant government, and on that government's proclivities. Political considerations may, and doubtless sometimes do, intrude. With one exception there are no conventions, let alone binding rules, although most if not all Attorneys-General will consult leaders of the profession, including the heads of the several courts in the relevant jurisdiction, before deciding upon a recommendation. The exception is to be found in s.6 of the High Court of Australia Act 1979, which provides that where there is a vacancy on that Court the federal Attorney-General shall, before the vacancy is filled, consult with the Attorney-General of the States about the pending appointment. Having consulted, however, nothing more is required. The federal government of the day is thereafter unconstrained in its choice.

Realism therefore dictates that few if any can enter the practice of the law with the expectation that judicial appointment will follow. Even the hope of such appointment will necessarily be tempered by the knowledge that luck will likely play a part. For one thing, legislation provides that a condition of appointment to the bench is the accumulation of years of experience; and most appointments occur well after the expiration of the relevant statutory period of qualification (generally, 5 years). Personal circumstances may change in the 15-20 years which commonly elapse between admission and appointment to a superior court. Governments may change too. The future will very likely echo the past: most judicial officers will be first appointed from the Bar or from among solicitor advocates (promotion from a more junior to a more senior judicial office is now by no means unusual). There are several reasons, none of them being competence as a lawyer, for the high proportion of experienced advocates among judicial appointees. One is that advocates are more readily noticed than other lawyers as possible candidates for judicial appointment. Another is that magistrates and trial judges must preside over efficiently run courts; and court craft is a skill which can only be finely honed with experience. Yet another is that trial courts and those over which magistrates preside are courts in which a particular class of question commonly arises for immediate resolution. These are questions the correct answers to which depend upon the proper application of the law of evidence. Court craft and the rules of evidence are part of the daily bread of the competent advocate, whereas these skills are less frequently found among solicitors who are not commonly involved in litigation. Of course, many academics know as much or more about the laws of evidence as do competent judges and magistrates. The former, however, do not so readily come under notice for judicial appointment; and, unless they have had experience in advocacy, will not be familiar with the skills upon which good court management depends.

It is nevertheless, and fortunately, true that Attorneys-General and their governments now commonly cast their nets far wider than in the past. Solicitors and academics are as a consequence more likely than in the past to be appointed to the bench. This is a change from which the judiciary, and the community, has greatly benefitted.

The change has been facilitated by considerable advances in judicial education. The National Judicial College, and - more particularly for Victoria - the Judicial College of Victoria, now conduct excellent "orientation" courses for newly-appointed judicial officers. These are designed to assist all in making the transition to the bench. They have the entirely beneficial effect of reducing the caution of governments in making appointments from beyond the confines of the Bar. Some of Australia's finest judges have as a consequence been appointed from academia and from the solicitors' branch.

I add a final word. There is, but ought not to be, a notion that the higher the court the more important the work. Importance is a relative thing, and self-importance a judicial sin. The truth is that the work of magistrates and tribunal members is enormously important, and carries with it the great personal satisfaction of justice being done to individuals in a direct and timely way. Other judicial work, with its own very real satisfactions, does not so frequently match that special reward.
Battling your way through law school, the next coffee break may seem far away in your mind, that assignment due next week may seem even further away, but becoming an academic may be yet further still.

As you progress along the legal path, academia may pop-up on your radar, promising to offer, especially for those seeking intellectual stimulation, a deep level of satisfaction and freedom that cannot be found elsewhere. Many academics start off doing something very different before they fall onto this track, but once they do, they realise this is what gives them that deep fulfilment they have been looking for.

Academia allows you to consider the broader spectrum of an area of law rather than just focusing on a certain subarea as you might in practice. It allows you to consider the deeper theoretical underpinnings of a body of law and move beyond just knowing the rules and applying them. Imparting knowledge to students and exploring contentious or new areas of law through research form the bulk of an academic’s work.

Through teaching, you help shape fresh legal minds and assist their development from the nascent stages to thinking deeply and holistically about legal issues. In the process of passing on your knowledge and experience, you will be confronted and challenged with insightful and thought provoking questions from law students that reinforce your knowledge and make you reconsider your perspective of the law, thus allowing you to clarify and strengthen your understanding. As a bonus, after all the wonderful assignments, essays and exams you have encountered during your studies, you now have the opportunity to craft a tasty piece for your students to test their mettle.

In research you take the lead and tackle an issue that you want to address. Delving into an area of law that has seized your interest whether during your studies or out in practice, whether it is the Quistclose trust or Native Title. This provides the freedom to choose whatever area of law that you desire to scrutinise. It offers the chance to explore and venture further into uncharted areas and to push the boundaries of existing laws. It gives you the opportunity to publish your findings and impact how your area of law is viewed and influence the students that study it, helping mould the minds of law students of the present and future.

If you seek to develop a deep understanding of the law both in application as well as at a theoretical level, impart your knowledge and influence the way law students think, then academia may be the career path you’re looking for.
An Academic Career

Anna Hood
Lecturer at MLS and Co-Director of Lex Specialis

When I was at law school, I swore black and blue that I would never be an academic. I can't remember exactly what my aversion to a life in academia was but I can remember being adamant that it was not for me. After graduation I undertook a number of other jobs. I spent time in a commercial law firm in Melbourne, a human rights NGO in Uganda and an arms control think tank in Washington DC. While I enjoyed aspects of each of these roles, I didn't find them completely fulfilling and I eventually reached a point where I decided to ignore my earlier doubts and give university life a go. I started a PhD and doing some sessional lecturing. Before long I was hooked and keen to become a full time academic. Broadly speaking, there are four different aspects to the role of an academic:

**Research:** law academics are able to research any aspect of the law they are interested in. Some seek to develop deeper understandings of the way law operates, others identify problems and tensions within the law and others explore ways that particular aspects of the law could be developed. It is a wonderful privilege to have the freedom to explore issues of interest to you in depth. I think it is also very important for society to have people thinking about and challenging the law and how it effects the world, and the very best scholarship can have a significant impact on the way law is understood, applied and developed.

**Teaching:** this aspect of academia probably needs little explanation! As I'm sure you’re well aware academics teach a number of courses each year. Outside the classroom, academics also spend time responding to student enquiries, designing courses, putting course materials together, writing assessment tasks and marking.

**Public engagement:** academics are expected to spend some of their time engaging with communities beyond the university. This can involve holding public seminars on topical legal issues, undertaking consulting projects for NGOs, governments or other groups, writing op-eds in newspapers or explaining legal issues to the press. Many of Melbourne's academics are very active in this area and make significant contributions in this way.

**Administration:** the final aspect of academia is contributing to the running and governance of the law school and university. There is a broad range of committees that focus on matters such as student welfare, research grants, student misconduct and course development. I really enjoy the diverse tasks that I am able to undertake as an academic. I love engaging with students and discussing a wide range of ideas with them. I also really enjoy the intellectual challenge of research and I find that many aspects of the role provide opportunities for creativity. I think there is also potential for academics to make important contributions to the law and the community and I hope one day to be able to do this.

Another benefit of academia is that there is a lot of flexibility and it is a largely self-directed career. However, don’t let the flexible hours fool you into thinking academics have bucket loads of time to sit around twiddling their thumbs. Academia is extremely demanding and the vast majority of academics I know work very long hours.

If you are interested in pursuing a career in academia then I would strongly encourage you to enrol in a PhD. The process of undertaking a doctorate provides great training for an academic career and nowadays it is very difficult to enter academia without one. It’s also helpful to get a range of experience prior to applying for an academic role. Most people spend at least a bit of time working outside of universities before deciding to pursue an academic career and this is regarded as a strength by university hiring committees.

And for those of you who currently have no interest in academia but start wondering about it a few years down the track…don’t be afraid to go back on any strong declarations you may have made about academia not being right for you – it’s a wonderful career and well worth considering.
Dr Katy Barnett  
Senior Lecturer at MLS

I had a winding pathway into academia. I always had an academic bent, but my early plan was to go to the Bar. This is the one thing I haven’t done yet. My career plans had to change when I didn’t get Articles in the year I graduated. This was devastating at the time. However, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it meant I ended up doing all kinds of other interesting legal jobs which I had never intended to do. It takes a little longer, and one ends up having to investigate options on one’s own to a much greater degree, but it is very rewarding.

I have had a number of different jobs since leaving law school. In my final 6 months of law school, I worked part-time at a chemical company as a legal researcher for the company’s in-house legal team, and later transitioned to full time for a few months. This was an interesting job, as I got to speak directly with clients and had a good deal of control over my own matters. After that, I was a legal researcher for the Victorian Court of Appeal for one year, in a team of three researchers. This was a very rewarding job; moreover, I ended up meeting my future husband at the wedding of one of the other researchers! After that I completed Articles at Freehills, with rotations in litigation and banking. I left after 11 months, having received a dispensation to finish Articles early. This was because, while I was at the Court of Appeal, I had been offered an associateship by one of the trial judges, Justice Mandie. I ended up staying with Justice Mandie for two and a half years and witnessed many interesting trials. One of the most interesting cases was ASIC v Plymin [2003] VSC 123, a seminal judgment on trading while insolvent. Although I had struggled to get Articles, when I left the judge, I had offers from a variety of different firms and institutions, including some who had refused to take me for Articles! This just shows that you never know how things will turn out in the end. I was tempted to go straight to the Bar, but I felt that I hadn’t given being a solicitor enough of a chance. Consequently, I then became a banking litigator at Russell Kennedy, a position which I held for two years until I had my daughter.

After I had my daughter, I found that I did not want to go back to practice full time because the hours are long, and in litigation, they depend very much on what is happening on the particular file at the time.

I had always enjoyed writing research essays at university, and while I was at the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, I wrote two academic articles which had been published in the *Melbourne University Law Review* and the *Adelaide Law Review* respectively. I had also been an LSS tutor and a law tutor at various university colleges, so I knew I enjoyed teaching.

In 2006, MLS employed me as a sessional lecturer in Property Law after I wrote to them expressing an interest in teaching Property. In 2007, I started my PhD with Professors Michael Bryan and Andrew Robertson as my supervisors. The topic of my PhD was gain-based remedies for breach of contract. I continued to work on it while I taught. When I completed my PhD in 2010, I was hired on an ongoing basis.

Any student who wants to become an academic should consider doing a PhD, as it is now generally necessary to have a PhD in order to get an ongoing position as an academic. I would also advise any student considering a career in academia to try tutoring and to attempt to get essays or articles published, because publication and teaching are central to a successful academic career. Conversely, if you hated writing essays in Law School, I’d suggest that perhaps academia may not be a career for you.

I am really glad that I tried other jobs before I became an academic, as I believe the experience of practice has made my academic insights richer. Working in the court and in practice gave me a strong insight into just how important remedies are for litigants and judges, so it is no surprise that Remedies are my central research area and passion.

The advantage of being an academic is that it is flexible, there are no six minute billable units, and you have a fair degree of control over what you do. Also I love research, so I really enjoy that part of the job. The disadvantages are that it doesn’t pay nearly as well as a job in a top law firm (but then again, the latter isn’t as flexible), and that you can sometimes feel isolated. It can also be somewhat bruising to the ego as it involves accepting constant critical feedback, particularly in relation to articles you submit to refereed journals, but also in other contexts as well. I have had to develop a thicker skin and learn that critical feedback can sometimes be really useful and can improve my work and teaching.

Ultimately, academia has been a great career choice for me. I am glad that my winding pathway led me here.
My Path to Academia

Brad Jessup
Environmental Law Lecturer at MLS

The academic role notionally comprises 40 percent teaching (two days-a-week). However, during semester teaching takes up almost all of my time. It typically takes about eight hours to prepare for each hour of class, and preparing new curriculum takes hundreds of hours over many months. We are always planning our teaching offerings. We are always thinking at least 12 months ahead.

Twenty percent (notionally one day-a-week) of the academic role is said to comprise outreach, engagement and administration. This involves meetings with colleagues, writing to law reform commissions, helping or speaking to community groups, committee work, preparing and organizing events like Orientation and Open Day, and media and public engagement (like contributing to the High Court blog: opinionsonhigh.com.au or holding a public lecture). This is the most public part of the academic job, but quantitatively the most minor component.

The final notional 40 percent of the academic’s job (two days-a-week) is research. While we spend most of our time and reflect most on our performance as educators, researching and writing journal articles, books and chapters is probably what most academics most want to do more of. Generally each academic works on at least a couple of research projects each year that they develop into articles or books. We travel to present our ideas at conferences, and are encouraged to make new connections and build networks with academics that have similar ideas and interests.

Most academics take up an academic job because they enjoy doing research, sharing research ideas and they love to write. However research is the thing that often gets sidelined, gets pushed to home time and weekend time. This is why there is no real end to the day for an academic. Wherever and whenever you find the time and energy you do research. Each three years, though, we can apply to have a semester when 100% of our time can be used to do research (this is called sabbatical), and some academics occasionally obtain research grants where the research funder pays their salary so they must not teach (that is: their teaching gets ‘bought out’).

I became an academic because I enjoy research. After I finished law school I went into private practice and what I enjoyed most in practice was doing legal research and drafting advices. However, after about four years in the firm I stopped doing this. This was because research and advice writing takes a lot of time so it is expensive for law firm clients. Junior solicitors therefore do most of this work. I got to a point in my legal career where I stopped doing research and I began supervising junior solicitors who were doing the work I enjoyed most.

Because of the importance of research, and the fact that it is the bit of the job that you need to self-manage, an academic career is really only for those of you who enjoy doing research. An academic job might be a career path for those of you: who love doing research essays, who end up with so many sources and so much to say with so few words to say it; who will work through the night to perfect your footnotes and make them AGLC compliant.

There is no one path into the legal academy, but it is generally a long path, involving lots of study and a demonstrable interest and capacity to do research and to teach well. My path will give you some insight into what you might like to do to join me in the legal academy.

- In my last two years of law school I chose to take those electives with research essays as assessment tasks, and I did well in these subjects. I saw my marks increase substantially.
- I got one of my elective research essays published in the Deakin Law Review.
- I worked for two years on the Monash University Law Review as a general member and an assistant editor.
- I took a research topic subject supervised by an academic (like our Legal Research subject). Again, I did really well. I took my supervisor’s advice and got the paper published and began working with her as a research assistant. She became my academic mentor. I kept working with her on research projects during my time at the law firm. She became my referee.
- When I decided to transition out of legal practice I did not do a coursework Masters, but instead a Masters by research, which culminated in a thesis. Like my undergraduate geography honours thesis I got this thesis published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- I studied my Masters on a scholarship overseas at The University of Cambridge.
- I returned to Australia and enrolled in a Doctor of Philosophy at the ANU. The PhD is becoming a standard requirement for a legal academic job.
- At the ANU I began to teach, got training in teaching and developed good teaching practice, and started to publish parts of my PhD in book chapters and refereed journals.
What Led You to Choose Academia as a Career?

Lisa Burton
Administrative Law Lecturer at MLS

I suppose you could say that I was fairly ‘studious’ (a.k.a. a nerd). I didn’t particularly enjoy my first few years at Law School because I was fairly sure that I did not want to be a lawyer, and because I found subjects like contracts and torts fairly uninteresting. I suspect a large part of my problem was that I had little to know understanding of what a lawyer was and what they could do. I assumed that it was also corporate law. I was the first person in my family to complete a university degree, so it was all a bit confusing, to be honest.

But I loved my studies in the Arts Faculty, and I suppose that made me realise that I enjoyed reading, writing, thinking and formulating arguments – and that I was quite good at those things. And then once I took Constitutional Law and Administrative Law, I was hooked. I found these subjects fascinating; complex, technical, but also linked to far broader questions about the way people interact with the state and what government is supposed to be and do.

In my final year of university I completed a research dissertation, looking at the use of privative clauses in the Migration Act 1956 (Cth). I really enjoyed that experience, and was asked to publish part of it as a journal article. That was really the first time that I realised I could make a career out of researching and writing about areas of the law that interested me.

At the end of my undergraduate degree I decided to take up an articulated clerkship at Blake Dawson rather than go straight into academia. Again, that was partially because I didn’t know what other options there were out there. Completing my articles was a good experience, mainly because it confirmed my suspicion that I was not meant to be a corporate lawyer. I then applied to do the Bachelor of Civil Laws at the University of Oxford in the hope that it could help launch an academic career.

An overview of what the job is like

I am still completing my PhD, which I combine with teaching. That means there are effectively two components to my job. The first is preparing for class, going to class, and then completing all the associated administrative tasks (like marking and student consultations).

The second component of my job is my PhD research. A PhD is essentially just a large, independent research project. You think of a problem that requires a solution, you go away and you find everything that everyone else has written that might provide an answer to it, and any cases that might be relevant, you think, and you write your answer. If I am not preparing for class or teaching then I am working on this. I also try to produce articles for publication and conference papers.

Benefits, drawbacks

The benefits are:

- Your job is to research and write about things that interest you. You get to pick the areas you research and the topics you write about
- It is very intellectually stimulating. You certainly use your brain. Apart from when you are proofreading your footnotes for the 3rd time.
- It is very independent. If you don’t work well with others or you just prefer to work on your own projects and formulate your own ideas, then you would like academia (though on the other hand, many academics collaborate with others, for example to co-author articles and books)
- It is rewarding! It is very satisfying to produce an independent piece of research and see it published. You can produce research which demonstrates that certain principles of law are wrong, or that the law should be changed.
- Teaching is also very rewarding and often quite a lot of fun
- The hours are flexible – and I would say they are far less than you would expect in a corporate law firm. But academia is certainly not a ‘soft option’. To get ahead you need to be working pretty hard, by publishing your research and in time, getting research grants

The drawbacks are:

- It can be a little isolating and lonely, because it is so independent. If you like to work in teams/with other people, then you are unlikely to enjoy academia. There is a lot of solo time in front of the computer, and you will quickly reach the point where no one knows (or cares) as much about your area of research as much as you do, so it can be difficult to discuss your day job with your friends and family.
- It can take a longer time to get there, and it is very competitive. You have to be prepared to finish your Law Degree and then do PhD (often with a masters of law in the middle) if you want to get a permanent position on faculty.
- It can be a little bit daunting putting your ideas out there, knowing that people are likely to disagree or fearing that they will show you are wrong.
- The final stages of a research project (e.g. proofreading, footnoting) is very tedious
- Marking exam papers and assignments is horrible.
Reasons why someone would go down that path

- A real love of the law. Be honest. If you don’t actually love thinking about the law, don’t go into academia. Could you spend three years of your life thinking about legal issue x? If not, do something else.
- A desire to write and communicate your own ideas, or to work independently
- An interest in teaching
- A desire for flexibility and independence in your working hours and arrangements
- Academia is a very ‘humble’ profession. Of course, the aim is to publish your research, and this can mean your ideas are put up there on the national or international stage. But you are not at the coal face. You are not standing up in court and formulating arguments or ‘winning’ cases. You are in the background, thinking deeply about the issues that other members of the legal profession do not have time to. Some people might not be satisfied with playing that kind of role.

Any advice for people interested

- Do well in your law degree! There are two reasons why this is necessary. The first is that if you do not do particularly well in your law degree, you may not have the degree of interest in the law necessary to go into academia (not always – but maybe). Secondly, the harsh reality is that if you do not do well in your first law degree, you will struggle to get into a good masters programme, and you will struggle to get an Australian Postgraduate Award to fund a PhD
- Start thinking now about doing a masters degree — particularly at a highly regarded, overseas institution
- See if you can pick up some work as a research assistant, or casual tutoring work, to get a feel for the job
Given the focus of many Careers events held in semester one, you could be forgiven for thinking that a job working in a corporate wing of a major global law firm is the natural and proper consequence of your JD. It is, however, in your best interests not to be drawn in by this misconception.

I was prompted to become a Careers Officer due to what I perceived to be a pervasive closed-mindedness in the student body and general population alike that the place of a private practice lawyer is in a major global city-based firm. Such a conception of private practice is apt to mislead and disappoint those who may not attract such employment, or who find themselves dreading each day of work in a job which may not excite and engage them.

While working as a city-based solicitor in such a firm is a legitimate career option for those attracted to private practice, it remains simply one option amongst many others. In the wake of the global financial crisis and restructuring of the legal profession, it is also an option that is available to only a small number of law graduates in an already saturated legal market. The world of law is as varied and multifarious as any other, and as budding lawyers contemplating their career trajectory the best thing that you can do is to develop an awareness of the great wealth of opportunities available for those attracted to work in private practice.

The following articles hope to prompt a greater appreciation of the paths open to private practice lawyers beyond what you may have previously considered.

Benji’s and Tanya’s articles espouse the merits of working in small and mid-sized city firms. The greater intimacy which a small or boutique firm can foster often makes them ideal institutions in which to learn and get greater exposure to clients earlier in your careers. It’s reassuring also to know that while the larger firms have recently reduced the number of entry level jobs for lawyers, a number of medium sized city firms are actually experiencing growth in spite of the global financial crisis.

Katalina and Justin’s articles remind us also that careers in law abound even beyond the limits of major cities. Private practice work in rural and regional centres has its own unique benefits such as close and personal relationships with clients, an enriching sense of community and a healthy dose of ‘work life balance’ - which can sometimes become merely a catch-phrase for those working in the city.

For those who are simply not sure where you would like your career to take you, Elese’s article encourages you to remember that there remain opportunities to transition laterally between legal and non-legal professions and to apply your professional skill set to a variety of employment streams.

Keep in mind that this guide is not an exhaustive illustration of your career opportunities in private practice. For those of you who have an interest in such work, this guide is only the beginning. Read legal publications, consult with Career Development Services in the Student Centre, attend Careers Portfolio networking events and seminars and be constantly willing to attempt new things and take advantage of new opportunities. Your opportunities are as narrow or as broad as you are willing to make them.

Always remember – you’re simply a student. Despite a sense of pressure to do so, you are not expected to have your future mapped out or to know the exact particulars of where you will work and what you will be doing. But now is the time in your legal life where you have the unique opportunity to learn and develop, and to sample the tastes of different legal careers and all that they have to offer. So be inquisitive, ask questions and broaden your understanding of what a career in private practice could actually mean for you. While we may hear much about corporate-based global law firms – there is a whole world beyond them.
The Benefits of Clerking at a Mid-Sized Firm

Benji Reisner (Lawyer)
Arnold Bloch Leibler

People ask me whether my graduate year has been as I expected it to be. The answer is I didn’t really know what I was getting myself into.

As a graduate in Arnold Bloch Leibler’s commercial practice group, I have been involved in a variety of challenging and interesting matters, ranging from an initial public offering (IPO) and a secondary capital raising, to acting for entrepreneurs and their start-ups, advising publicly listed companies on sensitive issues and assisting some of our pro-bono clients.

My team is fairly typical in its structure in that there are two partners, a senior associate, two lawyers and a graduate. I receive instructions from, and work closely with, all members of the team. I really enjoy the dynamic of our group, and it is interesting to see the difference in their practising styles, strategies and approaches to tackling complicated problems.

One thing that I have noticed is that ABL lawyers are commercially aware and understand that legal advice cannot be provided in a vacuum. When it is unclear, they dig deeper to discover the parties’ motivations. There is a real emphasis on asking why, and on providing specialised and tailored legal advice within the client’s commercial context. This is something that is difficult to implement, but is highly valued by our clients.

The thing that really stands out about Arnold Bloch Leibler for me is the exposure and the degree of involvement that graduates have, the real responsibility that we are given and the continuous invaluable partner contact and training.

In both the IPO and capital raising that our team advised on, I was responsible for managing a discrete work stream. This was both extremely daunting (I won’t pretend that I always enjoyed it) and immensely rewarding. It necessarily brought me into meetings and conference calls, and involved me in the broader transaction. The responsibility drives you to develop your skills quicker, and you end up better for the experience. It took me by surprise when the CEO of one our larger clients called and asked to speak to me in relation to a letter I drafted, but that is the beauty of where I work; exposure.

Ownership of your work at ABL is not limited to the bigger tasks that you undertake. Over the past few months, I have worked directly with my supervising partner to help one of our clients launch his business. This has been a really valuable experience for me in that I have had the opportunity to develop my drafting skills and to have constant and direct client contact. These experiences are not rare for Arnold Bloch Leibler grads; they are the norm.

Finally, Arnold Bloch Leibler is different in that it conducts all graduate training in-house. This is great, not only because there are no exams, but because you learn from leading practitioners in their respective fields. You are given an insight into how they work and think, the chance to negotiate and draft, and real client files on which to practice and cut your teeth.

One year on, I have learnt interesting things, but none more so than how much more I have to learn.
Standing out from the crowd
At Arnold Bloch Leibler, we understand that everyone is unique. So, when recruiting for seasonal clerkship and graduate traineeship positions, we look for something out of the ordinary.

For information about our seasonal clerkship and graduate recruitment programmes, visit the careers section on our website www.abl.com.au/careers.

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Rotation in Construction Law

Tanya Bastick (Lawyer)
Arnold Bloch Leibler

Before I started as a law graduate at Arnold Bloch Leibler, I had never really contemplated becoming a specialist in a particular area of law. However, after being placed in the firm’s property & development practice, I soon found myself fascinated with construction law.

Arnold Bloch Leibler’s property & development practice has earned a reputation for its strategic, practical and commercially focused advice, and approaches property and development projects from the ground up (literally!).

As a construction law graduate, you quickly understand that all construction work involves risk. For example, which party should bear the risk for an injury on a building site, for the removal of contaminated soil, or for the effects of statewide industrial disputes or wet weather?

Importantly, my role as a ‘front-end’ construction lawyer at Arnold Bloch Leibler involves properly identifying and allocating those risks, while ensuring that our clients can manage those risks, if and when they arise. We advise on the negotiation, drafting, management and enforcement of building and development agreements. And we provide clients with the legal foundations to assist them to minimise risks and to maximise returns from a construction and development project.

With that in mind, the distinguishing feature of a clerkship and graduate traineeship at Arnold Bloch Leibler is that you have the opportunity to be involved in actual transactions with real responsibility. During my time at Arnold Bloch Leibler, I have been involved in numerous landmark property and development projects, and as a law graduate in this practice, you have the opportunity to work directly with clients from start to finish, assisting across all aspects of their involvement in major projects.

As a construction law graduate, you soon realise that every construction and development project is different and presents a unique challenge. For example, a single project can involve advising clients on the most appropriate procurement method, drafting a multitude of contracts (including building contracts, design consultant agreements, financier step in deeds, agreements for lease and utilities agreements); understanding the relationships between the various parties involved in a project (e.g. the owner, financier, contractor, architect, engineers and subcontractors); and understanding in detail the legal ramifications of these arrangements. The variety of work is one of the things I enjoy about my current role.

Although a significant component of construction law is contract law, construction law covers many other legal principles, such as property law, torts, equity, banking and finance, insurance, environmental law, occupational health and safety, as well as statutory and regulatory requirements.

Some of my greatest learning opportunities have come from working directly with clients and with the firm’s partners. This direct access provides a constant source of insight into the world of property and development, a combined understanding of not only legal, but also technical and commercial principles, and an appreciation of issues facing the construction industry generally. This insight is invaluable and becomes fundamental to the role of a construction lawyer.

In short, Arnold Bloch Leibler has provided me with a strong sense of career direction. Of course, as a law graduate, there are numerous options from which to choose in pursuing your passion for property law. If you are fortunate enough to work in construction law at Arnold Bloch Leibler, not only will you be given lots of responsibility, but you will also be working with a team of dedicated professionals who are passionate about what they do and are willing to encourage and support those who follow in their footsteps.
Making the Transition to Law

Elese Cartledge (Lawyer)
Gadens

After finishing university I was interested in gaining some broad business experience, so I joined a Big 4 accounting firm as a graduate at the beginning of 2011. I had enjoyed tax law at university and wanted to begin my career in a place where I could work directly with clients from a variety of industries and gain experience preparing and drafting a range of different documents. The firm I chose ticked these boxes.

Throughout my time there, I worked on both tax compliance and consulting matters. I also had the opportunity to commence a Masters of Tax. During this time, I began to realise that the aspect of my role I most enjoyed was that involving legal analysis, and I wanted to broaden my skills in this area.

I commenced my Practical Legal Training (“PLT”), and it was whilst completing this that I decided to work exclusively as a lawyer. It was important to me that before making a final decision as to where I would settle, I be able to gain some experience in a number of legal fields.

As I was not a traditional graduate (I had already been in a graduate role and was in the process of completing my PLT), I looked into the Newly Admitted Lawyers Program (known as Grads@Gadens) that Gadens in Melbourne offered. As I wanted to work in a law firm with multiple practice areas, the program suited my circumstances perfectly. As a medium sized legal firm, I was confident that Gadens would provide me with the exposure I was looking for – experience in different specialist legal areas, as well as the opportunity to work on a variety of matters. The nature, type and size of their clients also meant that I would have the opportunity to work directly with clients early on in my legal career, and that I would start learning immediately. I started with Gadens in early 2013, and was admitted to practice as a lawyer shortly thereafter.

During my time in the program, I had the opportunity to complete two rotations of six months each in different practice areas. I chose to rotate through ‘Family Law’ and ‘Property, Construction & Planning’, where I specifically worked for the ‘Planning and Environment’ team. My time in each team was very rewarding. I worked on a number of different matters. More specifically, I drafted court documents, contracts, and detailed letters of advice, attended VCAT and Family Court hearings, attended client meetings, and liaised directly with clients. I also took part in the ‘Litigation Fundamentals’ training course run by the Partners of the firm, as well as a variety of other training sessions which were run to help accelerate our learning and supplement our daily client work.

After my year on the program, I decided to settle in the Family Law team and was immediately provided with client files to work on. On any given day I respond to client emails, draft letters of advice and other correspondence, and draft various Court documents. I also often attend conferences with clients and with Counsel, as well as instruct Counsel at Court.

My transition to Gadens was a smooth one, thanks to my prior experience and the quality of the program offered by the firm.

I would strongly recommend people consider the program if they are interested in a career in law. The criteria for applicants is that they have been or will be admitted to practice as a lawyer by March 2015.
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Coastal Legal Practice

Justin Serong (Principle Lawyer)
Maddens Lawyers, Warrnambool

What was your pathway to practicing in a rural/remote/regional area?
I had done my articles (traineeship) in a mid-size city firm, and although I really enjoyed the year and made valuable friendships, I just knew city-based commercial practice wasn’t for me. So I got a map out. Literally. I looked for places on the coast where there was a population base, reputable firms and a County/Supreme court. Once you analyse it, there’s not very many, so for me the choice made itself. I picked the firm I thought would be the right one, and approached them. At least back then (and I think it still applies) regional firms were more accustomed to going looking for candidates, rather than having one approach them, so they were interested enough to give me an interview.

What inspired you to become a rural/remote/regional area practitioner?
I wanted whole-of-file experience as a junior lawyer. I didn’t want to be delegated small pieces of the work – I wanted to meet the client, grapple with the problem and fix it. That’s still the case for me. Separately, I wanted to live on the coast, for a whole range of self-indulgent reasons which are also true today.

What do you see to be some of the advantages of practicing in a rural/remote/regional area?
These days, you have the advantage of living in a beautiful place where housing is cheaper and people are more laid back and courteous, without missing out on the expertise and innovation that coalesces in the city. If you’re good with IT and you have a network of clever mates, it’s all available to you and your clients are getting city-standard work in a remote area without the add-on costs, such as higher rents, that come with CBD legal practice.

What are some of the challenges that you face in your work?
I think in country towns you’re more exposed as a professional. People down the street know that you’re a lawyer. People talk; you don’t have the anonymity that a big urban centre provides. So you have to think all the time about how you’re projecting yourself in the community. This also means you have to be exceptionally careful about confidentiality and wary of conflicts of interest.

What opportunities does your practice have for law students now and graduates?
We try to give students time here as interns, and we do take traineeship applications, although we try to give preference to students who have a background in the region or a particular connection to it.

What skills do prospective interns/employees need to work in a rural/remote/regional area?
Adaptability and resourcefulness. In a small regional practice, it is entirely possible that you can see clients about a copyright infringement and cows with mastitis… in the same morning.

What advice would you give to current law students who are interested in working in a rural/remote/regional area later in their career?
Make sure you have a reason to live in a particular town: you will really value the social connections and entertainment that come from having that reason. It might be sport, or the ocean, or the landscape, or family, but something has to be there to keep you enthused and bind you to the place. Work is only a part of your life after all.
Katalina Toth (2nd Year Lawyer)
Saines Lucus Solicitors, Ballarat & Horsham

What was your pathway to practicing in a rural/remote/regional area?
During the course of my law degree I researched all the rural townships in Victoria in terms of lifestyle, work opportunities and areas of law commonly practised (i.e., looking at how well developed the district was in terms of manufacturing, farming, etc, denoting opportunity, therefore opportunities for me to explore various areas of law). I then searched for a firm that allowed for opportunities to practice in various areas of law, not just one area. When I found the firm I wanted to work for I applied but there were no positions available at the time. I waited for an opportunity to avail itself so I returned to study and completed another Bachelor Degree which I had deferred before I commenced my law degree. Within a year, a traineeship position was advertised at that firm and I applied and got it.

In your work, what are the main legal practice areas you engage with?
Commercial disputes, general litigation, personal injury and employment.

What inspired you to become a rural/remote/regional area practitioner?
I was inspired by the lifestyle and variety of the work. Lifestyle is a subjective term so I’ll explain: I can’t stand congestion, crowds, pollution and routine. I love nature and enjoy being in the outdoors. I live nestled in rolling hills and towering gum trees with my fiancé and animals. I’m only a short distance from Daylesford where I enjoy chilling out with family, friends and my Labs. I am also only an hour or so from the nearest surf beach. I enjoy a very relaxed lifestyle and believe that life is meant to be lived, not worked! I work to pay my bills and maintain my lifestyle.

What do you see to be some of the advantages of practicing in a rural/remote/regional area?
You get to manage your own files, attend Court/Tribunal and work on the most incredible cases. I have also had the privilege of meeting so many different types of clients and am involved in local Committees and Associations. It is an enriching experience to work in a rural/regional area. You can also walk to your favourite restaurant or cafe for lunch and spend an hour or so enjoying yourself with colleagues, without feeling guilty, and you can generally work flexible hours, depending on the firm and area of law you work in. Most people go home by 5:30pm, if not earlier, and you really do have a healthy work-life balance.

What are some of the challenges that you face in your work?
Sometimes you are faced with being overloaded because you want to accept all the work that comes your way. I have simply had to prioritise and occasionally delegate a file or two to fellow workers. I’m lucky I work for a reasonably sized firm with four partners, four solicitors and a trainee solicitor between Ballarat and Horsham. We are very much like one big family.

What opportunities does your practice have for recent law graduates?
Every couple of years we take on a trainee solicitor or first year (recent graduate from College of Law/Leo Cussen). We are an expanding firm so keep your eye on us!

What skills do prospective interns/employees need to work in a rural/remote/regional area?
Excellent communication and interpersonal skills a MUST. It is all about building a rapport with your clients and making sure that the legal process is as easy and cost effective and comfortable as possible. Most clients are scared and very emotional, not just in family law matters but also in building disputes and employment matters. Commercial disputes also arise due to failed commercial relationships and these need to be managed sensitively and intelligently.

Moreover, most of what you had learnt in your law degree will be put into practice, so make sure you do a refresher on property law, contract law, administrative law, criminal law, consumer law, etc. You may notice also as a young lawyer that you find yourself ‘assisting’ current practitioners on areas/points of law. You also have to be prepared to put your advocacy skills into practice and appear on behalf of clients. Sometimes it is just not worth briefing a barrister to appear.

What advice would you give to current law students who are interested in working in a rural/remote/regional area later in their career?
I suggest you make the most of “networking” opportunities and really build your “people skills”. You must also research the townships and find out whether that township or district has the lifestyle you are looking for. Also, ensure that you apply to law firms that have what you want in terms of culture and practice areas. Speak to the district Young Lawyer Representative or the District Law Association for details about work and lifestyle. They may even give you the “heads up” on local job opportunities. Approach lawyers within the firms at regional law events and try to get to know the people working in the area. It is important that when you decide to make the move to a rural/remote/regional area, you do so with the mindset that you intend to stay in that area long term as you will be building relationships with the locals and they will be depending on you, probably for the rest of their lives. It is indeed an enriching and fun lifestyle experience. However, despite the great lifestyle opportunities, you must be in it for the long haul. The community requires you to do so.
This section contains articles dealing with receiving legal training and becoming qualified as a Legal Practitioner. In Victoria until you have completed a period of Practical Legal Training you cannot be admitted to practise as a legal practitioner. Having a law degree does not qualify you to provide legal advice to clients.

There are two paths to gaining admission to practise, which to a large extent are one path. Completing a period of Practical Legal Training with an approved provider, or undertaking supervised work with a law firm. In practise all of the large firms outsource this process to one of the PLT providers.

The advantage of a Graduate position at a law firm is that they will pay for your PLT. There is no special course for those sponsored by a firm and the requirements for admission are not different. This means that paying for your own PLT means you are exactly as qualified as someone who has completed it while working for a firm.

The articles which follow give details of the training programs at a major PLT provider and at a large commercial law firm. Obviously there will be advantages and disadvantages to both. No matter what career path you take if you wish to practise as a lawyer you will need to complete a PLT course and be admitted to legal practise.
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A Day in the Life of a Leo Cussen Trainee

Mark Beech (2013 Leo Cussen Graduate)
Currently working as a Lawyer for Victorian Compensation Lawyers (plaintiff personal injury firm)

Each day in the life of a Leo Cussen PTC trainee is a diverse experience. Every day brings new learning experiences with its own challenges, building up a trainee’s practical knowledge of the law. There are three types of days at Leo Cussen: practice, hearing and seminar days. The hearing days are a unique learning experience moving trainees away from their university study days. The hearings that we undertook came from all parts of the law: family, criminal, contract. For example, at Leo Cussen I took part in a Bail Application. This was conducted against trainee Police Prosecutors with experienced Police Prosecutors playing the role of magistrate. This was my introduction to a criminal procedure that you won’t find in a textbook. The adrenalin was flowing but once the application began, the preparation kicked in and I argued that my client deserved bail. The other major type of day is the Leo Cussen practice day. These are unstructured but busy days in which trainees work on their files. They are distributed throughout the course and provide a change of pace from the more formal seminar days. Seminar days build on and reinforce the subjects learnt at Uni; subjects include family law, trusts, sale of business and civil litigation. Practice days provide trainees with an introduction to a professional environment where work is self-directed and time is self-managed. A typical practice day begins at 8:30-9:00am, when the trainees arrive, and lasts until 4:30-5:00pm. The work is mostly done individually and trainees work to build complete files, as occurs in practice. This is the learning that most distinguishes Practical Legal Training from university. The files cover all the major areas of practice. There is a dedicated and hardworking team of mentors that are here to help and guide trainees as they build their skills. Working with my mentor and my fellow trainees are the part of the experience that I most value. Mentors are able to help build skills such as letter writing, filing (mock) court documents and file management, amongst many other things.

Leo Cussen provides the chance to work in a collaborative environment with other trainees. All the trainees are focussed on graduating the PTC, seeking admission and beginning their careers. This builds strong connections between the trainees. I expect many of these relationships to last an entire career and this provides a great foundation from which to begin a legal career.
Writing a Cover Letter

Lisa Schultze (Human Resources Adviser)
Corrs Chambers Westgarth

Your covering letter is your chance to convince the employer of your excellent written communication skills. The purpose of the letter should be to introduce yourself and clearly state what you have to offer the organisation.

Drafting covering letters is not easy, so be prepared to spend some time on getting it right. Here are a few tips to help you in planning and drafting a covering letter.

• Before you start writing, it is important to plan your covering letter. Think carefully and make notes of key messages you would like to convey in the letter. The key messages should underpin why you are suitable for the role. For example, identify strong points to make about your personal qualities, skills, experience, academic achievement or your work/life experience.
• Tailor your letter to each organisation. Make reference to the firm you are applying to and why. Make sure you find out about the organisation and the qualities they look for in employees and make reference to aspects which are interesting to you. For example, the areas of practice which appeal to you, values and culture of the organisation, partners or CEO who you have read about or met who have impressed you.
• Ensure that you set the letter out in the style of business correspondence. This means including the date and addressee details at the top left. Make sure you know who to address the letter to, including their name, position and address of the organisation.
• Include your details at the top right: your name, address, phone number and email address.

Even if you have these details in your resume, it is important to set them out again in the letter.
• It is a good idea to include a heading which states the purpose of the letter. This should appear in bold upper case as the first line of your letter. Remember to include the year in which you would like to commence the clerkship (e.g. APPLICATION FOR SEASONAL CLERKSHIP 2014/15).
• Avoid restating information in your resume in the same language again in the letter. Instead, include highlights from your resume, illustrating how this information is relevant to the role you are applying for. Include other crucial information which was not in your resume.
• Be original with your letter in terms of content and style – do not copy example letters, as common and overused phrases and expressions are easily recognisable.
• Write in a style which is clear and simple – if you use too many colourful adjectives and phrases, it can detract from conveying a strong message.
• Keep your letter to one page. If it is longer than a page, you are probably giving too much detail. Focus on the key messages you want to convey.
• Once you have drafted your letter, check your spelling, grammar and punctuation.
• As with your resume, pay attention to the format of your letter so that the text is well spaced and there is a good amount of ‘white space’.
• Ask at least two other people to read your draft letter and make suggestions for improvement.
University won’t last forever. Soon, you’ll be embarking on a legal career full of new and wonderful experiences as well as the occasional curve ball. You need to be prepared. So, visit our dedicated graduate website to see our top 10 tips designed to help you get the most out of your early years as a lawyer. To learn more, visit corrs.com.au/tips
Many of us undertook our legal studies with a vague far-distant fantasy of landing a high-paying corporate law job that enables us to live the high life, the sort of career glorified by an endless parade of media. That’s all well and good, but when it comes down to it, it’s unrealistic. Those sorts of jobs entail extraordinarily long hours for relatively low pay, working for clients and causes that don’t necessarily provide any measure of fulfilment. This is part of why it’s well worth your while to pursue a career in public interest law.

Public interest law provides a number of benefits that are simply unavailable in commercial law. The myriad opportunities available allow the recent law graduate to pursue a career in an area that resonates with their interests and comports with their values, whether they be interested in the highly aspirational field of international human rights law, or the assistance provided by bodies like the Tenants’ Union.

The term ‘public interest’ connotes what is entailed by the day-to-day work: helping people. No matter what field you choose, you’ll be working in a direct and tangible way to improve lives and the world at large. Moreover, public interest law generally provides an excellent work-life balance, allowing you to engage in interesting work during the day, and have the time to relax and live the life you want. To be sure, the pay isn’t as high as is potentially available in commercial law; however, weighing the hours worked against the pay received, lawyers working in the public interest, hour for hour, can get paid just as well as a commercial lawyer.

I encourage you to read through the following stories and experiences, and to explore the potential areas for work that exist beyond the few described here.
Pro Bono Work and Junior Lawyers: A Win-Win

Paul Marshall and Adam Stevens (Pro Bono Co-ordinators)
Clayton Utz

Pro bono work is a fundamental part of what makes us Clayton Utz. Since we established an in-house Pro Bono practice in 1997, Clayton Utz has provided more pro bono work than any firm outside of the United States. We will reach a total of half a million pro bono hours over the next year.

We conduct pro bono work at Clayton Utz because we understand it as a lawyer's inherent professional responsibility. Unmet legal need in Australia is significant, with limited civil Legal Aid available. Every Clayton Utz partner, senior associate, lawyer and graduate is expected to provide a minimum of 40 hours pro bono work each year. Last year in Melbourne we averaged almost 70 hours.

Two distinct features of the Clayton Utz Pro Bono practice are:

- the majority of our clients are people experiencing disadvantage (rather than non-profit organisations); and
- we have a focus on providing assistance to clients in rural, regional and remote communities. In 2013, we acted for clients in 90 communities outside of the capital cities.

Pro bono will help you build your legal skills right from the start. Your work on pro bono cases is real work which Clayton Utz treats as billable time. As a graduate lawyer, your pro bono cases may provide your first opportunity to interview a client, to take instructions and to make legal submissions.

Pro bono practice is important, and not just because it makes you a better lawyer, or keeps your feet firmly on the ground. First and foremost, acting in pro bono cases is about the impact which you will have on our pro bono clients. It is about making peoples’ rights mean something. It is about helping community organisations and charities get on with their vital work. It is about protecting women and kids from domestic violence. It is about lifting people out of disadvantage. It is about fixing injustice.

Graduates at Clayton Utz Melbourne have the chance to start flexing their legal muscles straightaway, by staffing one of Justice Connect’s Homeless Law weekly outreach clinics, delivering legal services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Homeless Law work helps to build your professional experience through interviewing clients, taking instructions, drafting advice and advocating for clients. As skills increase, graduates take on files for particular clients referred through the Homeless Law clinics, and with the supervision of more senior lawyers, work to resolve legal issues such as:

- dealing with unpaid fines, such as fines for riding on public transport without a valid ticket;
- appealing unfair eviction notices in VCAT; or
- negotiating for reductions in debts based on the financial circumstances of the individual involved.

After admission, junior lawyers also have the opportunity to appear for clients in courts and tribunals. None of these matters should end up being argued in the High Court - however, for the individual client involved, getting help will make a huge difference to their life.

Of course, pro bono work at Clayton Utz does not end there. It covers literally all the legal areas and skills available within the Clayton Utz practice. A sample of matters which junior lawyers have worked on recently includes:

- advising on establishing charities, drafting constitutions for not-for-profit organisations, and providing advice on tax and fundraising issues;
- negotiating in construction law disputes arising from natural disasters including floods and bushfires;
- acting for an elderly parent who was deceived by their adult children into signing away title to the family home and then was left homeless;
- making submissions before a coronial inquest; and
- advising non-profit clients on privacy and other legal implications for social networking platforms and websites.

All of this work challenges and stretches our lawyers, including partners. For our most junior lawyers, pro bono opportunities increase levels of responsibility and provide direct involvement with clients at an earlier career stage.

Graduates starting work with Clayton Utz increasingly bring with them an impressive range of experience in working with a range of specialist and community legal centres, not-for-profits and international or local internships. Our firm recognises that providing legal help for those who otherwise slip through the cracks of the justice system is an important part of why many people studied law in the first place, and we want to support and provide these opportunities.

Pro bono work is the right thing to do, and speaks to the highest values of our profession. A personal benefit along the way of pro bono work, is that, it provides an opportunity for young lawyers to develop core legal skills which they will rely upon throughout their careers.
Want the inside scoop on landing a role at Clayton Utz? Find it on Facebook!

www.facebook.com/ClaytonUtzCareers
Internship with Reprieve

Nick Jane (LSS President)
Reprieve Australia

The first time I walked into a Texan prison and met a prisoner on Death Row, all I could think of was the words Red utters on Andy Dufresne's first night at Shawshank, “When they put you in that cell…and those bars slam home…that’s when you know it’s for real. A whole life blown away in the blink of an eye. Nothing left but all the time in the world to think about it.”

I should probably give some context first. In my first year of law school, I went to a talk at university given by Reprieve Australia. Reprieve is an organisation which fights against the death penalty here and abroad by providing legal and humanitarian assistance, advocating against the death penalty and raising awareness about human rights.

Truth be told, I don't actually remember anything specific about the talk, other than that I was enraptured by the idea of working in a capital-murder defense firm. Thus, the following year I applied to Reprieve Australia, and was lucky enough to get an international internship to work in a firm in Houston, Texas.

I didn’t actually know much about the firm at which I was interning. All I knew was that I was stepping into a state situated in the heart of the Deep South, a state that has 274 people on death row and was responsible for almost 45% of the national execution rate of 2013. These kinds of stats are virtually incomprehensible for an Australian law student; it’s almost like reading about a fictional world. Truthfully, I realised that my only real interaction with American prisons and the death penalty was through Hollywood, and I really had no idea what to expect for my three-month stay.

For all my initial trepidation, the experience I had was one of the most rewarding and challenging of my life. The firm I was located in, the Gulf Region Advocacy Center (GRACE), is a small firm, with only a handful of full-time employees, who focus solely on capital defense work. I was fortunate, due to the size of the office, and the unbelievable quality that GRACE puts into every defence, to be exposed to all facets of running a capital defense. I was allowed to follow mitigation experts who interviewed family members of our clients, conducted research on complex legal topics, drafted motions for trial and interviewed clients on Death Row.

I was a little worried that despite my interesting work, the skills I learnt overseas would not be transferrable back in Australia. On the contrary, I found that much of the work I did would help me immensely in my study and work here. The way to interview witnesses and clients, the methodical evidentiary preparation needed to run a defense, and the honing of my legal research skills were just a small part of what I will be hopefully be able to incorporate into my own career.

I didn’t only learn from my own work however, being in an environment like GRACE was truly eye-opening. Capital defense, as you can probably imagine, is not an easy area of the law. The hours are long and there isn’t much respite for the dedicated workers.

Despite these hardships, the enthusiasm and commitment shown by the staff at GRACE was awe-inspiring. To work in an office with such a milieu of dedication and fervour was something I had not experienced, and showed me what work is like when you are doing something you truly have a passion for.

While my internship was rewarding educationally, it was also a wonderful experience for me personally. GRACE set me up with accommodation right around the corner from their office, and thankfully around the corner from a coffee shop that rivalled 7 Seeds for its hipster vibe (the barista wore a top-hat and tails) It was my first time living out of home for any serious period of time, and I was lucky enough to live with some amazing interns, who were a wonderful support during my stay there. The shared experiences extended beyond work, forging friendships that will last a long time, and was one of the great things I took away from my time there.

This is not the place for me to wax lyrical about the death penalty, but rather to explain the benefits of an international internship that you may not have considered. I will finish however, with my first visit to a prison on death row.

Despite my Hollywood ideals, what struck me, what really struck me, was the silence. An almost invasive silence that seemed to envelop you. No noise seemed to last more than an instant there, not the clink of a heavy metal door, the jangle of handcuff keys, or chairs being scraped against a concrete floor. We made our way through this thick silence, before being ushered into a tiny room, divided in the middle by a Perspex window and concrete bench.

Our client was sitting behind the Perspex window, looking tired and dishevelled. Before I’d even sat down, he asked me how old I was. When I told him he chortled and remarked that he had been in prison longer than I’d been alive. Longer than I’d been alive. It was more than the fact that floored me, but the casual manner in which our client said it, like he was remarking on my clothes I was wearing. This man, who was bound hand to hand, ankle to ankle, had been sitting in prison for more than my lifetime.

My mind wandered to another Shawshank exchange, when Andy remarks he’s been in prison for “thirty years. Jesus, when you say it like that…you wonder where it went.” A sobering moment I won’t ever forget, from an experience that I would never get anywhere else.
The Aurora Internship Program

Kana Fujimori (JD 3rd Year)

Aurora

During the winter break of my second year, I had the opportunity to undertake an Aurora Internship in Darwin. The Aurora Internship Program matches law, anthropology and social science students and graduates with organisations such as Native Title Representative Bodies, Indigenous corporations, government bodies, community groups and other policy organisations Australia-wide to work in Indigenous affairs.

I was motivated to supplement what I’d learnt in the classroom with practical experience, and was naturally attracted to the Aurora Program for the opportunity to engage in practical projects, as well as due to my interest and desire to experience work in Indigenous affairs and public policy advocacy. I had heard from previous interns of the variety of exciting work offered through the program, and those interested in gaining legal experiences such as policy research, drafting and preparation of court submissions, client interviewing and court attendance won’t be disappointed by the array of internships offered. Located Australia-wide, the Aurora internships also offer the chance to spend a few weeks in a new environment.

After a written application and interview selection process, I was thrilled to be matched to the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO-NT), which is an alliance comprising the Central Land Council (CLC), Northern Land Council (NLC), Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS), located in Darwin. APO-NT engages in policy research and advocacy of overarching Indigenous affairs in the Northern Territory.

On the job at APO-NT

My main project was a research task, building upon previous intern projects, to evaluate the housing policies for remote Indigenous communities in the NT by collating evidence available of the link between housing factors and health outcomes. The research aimed to recommend policy focus and identify gaps in data required for more evidence-based reform. Flowing from this project, I explored possible avenues of data collection with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT for further research of empirical associations between housing and health that are unique to the NT due to the prevalence of overcrowding, mobility and homelessness among Indigenous people. I also had the opportunity to draft a letter to the Chief Minister of the NT in support of the Better Schools agreement on behalf of APO-NT.

The Benefits

The main highlight was getting to meet intelligent, driven and passionate people who have developed, or are intending to develop, their careers in public interest law particularly in Indigenous affairs. These include my supervisor, colleagues and fellow Aurora interns. I had the opportunity to glimpse and consider some of the challenges faced by policy advocates of Indigenous rights such as distance, language and resources that are unique to the NT and each local community. I’m truly grateful for what I’ve learnt and experienced during the 4 weeks. Socially, I thoroughly enjoyed the highlights of Darwin’s dry season by making the most of the weekend markets, the deckchair cinema, and visiting incredibly beautiful places such as Kakadu National Park. There’s so much to do and see that the time passes by far too quickly. I would definitely encourage other students to undertake the Aurora Internship, particularly those with an interest in public interest law and Indigenous affairs wanting to supplement classroom learning with practical experience. You can find more information on the website at www.auroraproject.com.au, and applications are open in March (for winter internships) and August (for summer internships) each year.
Working with Public Interest Law Initiative (PILI)

Claire Carroll
PILI

1. What is public interest law and what are its various facets?
Public interest law encompasses a wide range of activities that are designed to promote access to justice for vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our society. There are a wide range of organisations that we traditionally associate with this sort of activity such as legal aid, community legal centres, charities, NGOs and government agencies. However, there are also the contributions of private firms and lawyers who are acting pro bono, meaning free of charge or at a significantly reduced fee. Public interest lawyers engage in wide range of activities to promote access to justice including:
- offering free legal services such as legal advice and advocacy in courts and tribunals
- community education
- law reform and policy work

Promoting access to justice is not the exclusive province of lawyers, and can be undertaken by a wide range of non-legal professionals. Public interest law therefore provides a fantastic opportunity for lawyers and law students to engage with other professionals in multidisciplinary endeavours.

2. Why did you decide to pursue a career in this area of law?
I attended UNSW where I completed Graduate Law. During the final year of my degree I enrolled in two intensive clinical legal education subjects at Kingsford Legal Centre, which is a community legal centre run by the University. The work was academically rigorous and meaningful. This experience inspired me to pursue a career in public interest law. After graduating I worked at the NSW Ombudsman as a Complaints Officer and continued to volunteer in community legal centres. Eventually, I joined a team at a local community legal centre in my first Solicitor role.

3. What challenges have you faced in pursuing this career?
The primary challenge I have faced while working in the public interest sector has been funding. It is very difficult for community legal centres to achieve social change in the context of limited and contingent funds.

4. What roles have you worked in, and what did they involve on a day-to-day basis?
I have worked as a Solicitor and Clinical Legal Educator in community legal centres, primarily in poverty law and its associated areas. I have a passion for legal education and have designed and implemented clinical legal education programs in collaboration with Universities. I have also worked in the tertiary sector engaged both in teaching and implementation of clinical legal education programs.

5. What are some of the challenges you faced in your work there?
Again, the funding constraints placed on the legal assistance sector create many challenges for employees.

6. What skills do volunteers/interns/employees need in order to work in public interest law generally?
For students, strong interpersonal skills and communication skills are critical when working with disadvantaged clients. Public interest lawyers need to develop resilience in lobbying for broader social change in order to manage the resistance they will inevitably encounter.

7. Do you have any tips for students applying for jobs in public interest law?
Research your organisation. Think about what skills you have that will add value and emphasise those skills in your application. Any experience in areas in which the organisation specialises should be emphasised, even if it is not legal experience, since it will demonstrate your commitment and passion. Remember that even though you may not have a great deal of legal experience you are sure to have life experience and skills which are relevant and unique. Attend any public interest law events, such as the MLS Public Interest Law Fair, and talk to people.

8. What advice would you give to current law students trying to decide on which field to pursue?
Keep your options open. Even if you want to pursue a commercial career remember that experiential learning in the public interest sector will assist you in developing skills that are transferable to any kind of employment. You will also gain an insight into different workplaces and may make valuable professional contacts.

9. Anything else you think is important?
The Public Interest Law Initiative at MLS offers three clinical legal education subjects – Street Law, Public Interest Law in Practice and Legal Internship. Regardless of your career aspirations, these subjects provide an invaluable experiential learning opportunity.
Working with the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC)

Heath Paynter
VAC

1. What does the Victorian AIDS Council do?
The Victorian AIDS Council ("VAC ") is the peak HIV/ AIDS NGO in Victoria. The organisation aims to reduce HIV transmissions in Victoria as well as furthering the interests of people living with HIV including their human rights. In addition to these aims, the organisation also has an extensive HIV services component to its operations. This includes a drop in centre that provides extensive services to people living with HIV, counselling services, and a trust fund that distributes income to people living with HIV who require financial assistance. More recently VAC opened the first HIV rapid testing facility in Australia, PRONTO! in Fitzroy. VAC is also the only AIDS organisation in Australia that operates a medical clinic: The Centre Clinic in Fitzroy Street, St Kilda.

2. What was your particular pathway to becoming involved with VAC?
Before starting in my current role at VAC I was a legal policy adviser in tobacco control at Cancer Council Victoria. Prior to this I was solicitor at Russell Kennedy in the Public Law, Litigation and Aged Care practice. This included a 5 month secondment with the Human Rights Law Centre and my articles of clerkship. Before studying law I worked with the Youth Substance Abuse Service as a residential worker in their detox and rehabilitation centres. Before this position, I worked for the Commonwealth as a community development worker assisting people who were identified as long term unemployed.

3. What challenges have you faced in pursuing this career?
One of the challenges in moving from private practice to a policy role is illustrating competency in building stakeholder relations and drafting policy. I was able to demonstrate these competencies through the work I was involved prior to being a lawyer.

4. Why did you choose to pursue a career outside traditional practice?
Before commencing law, as a graduate student, I was a community development worker/youth worker. This was in 2002 – 2006. Many of the people I worked with were marginalised and disenfranchised members of our community. One of the groups of people I came into contact with were people who were rehabilitating from opportunistic infections and diseases associated with AIDS. This was only 5 or so years after highly active anti retroviral treatment became available in Australia. While the health of people living with HIV was improving there were still people, mostly gay men, who acquired HIV before the mid 90s who very sick. The experience of working with this population group taught the importance of access to basic health services. In addition to this experience I also came to appreciate the importance of HIV/ AIDS as the primary health and political issue for the gay community. I never forgot these experiences, and I always had a desire to work in advocacy and policy development in HIV/AIDS. I spent three years as a commercial lawyer with a very supportive partner who sent me on secondment to the Human Rights Law Centre. This experience allowed me to rediscover my interest in the community sector. I was lucky enough to be successful in my application for my current role at VAC.

5. What does your job involve on a day to day basis?
My work involves developing policy at VAC and engaging with key stakeholders and the community to build and maintain trust and rapport with the people VAC works with. A lot of my work involves identifying key areas of policy that require reform. This can involve drafting policy statements, factsheets, organising community and/ or sector forums or addressing concerns with the public service or advisers to key ministers in government.

6. What challenges do you face in your day to day work?
One of the challenges I faced in my job was learning about the science of infectious diseases, and more specifically HIV. I didn't pursue science beyond year 10. HIV/AIDS is deep, complex and dynamic. Without a science background keeping on top of the developments in this area is an ongoing challenge.

7. What skills do volunteers/employees need at VAC?
VAC, like many NGOs, relies on the support of volunteers. There are many opportunities for people to support the organisation. No specific skills are required other than ability to understand English.

8. What (if any) opportunities are there at your organisation for law students, either now or later in their careers?
VAC runs the HIV/AIDS legal centre out of the Positive Living Centre on Commercial Road. This is volunteer run and provides legal advice to people living with HIV. There is an ongoing demand for law students and lawyers to support this service. There is also a need for people with good research and writing skills to support the organisation's policy and advocacy work. Further information can be obtained from volunteer coordinator.

9. What advice do you have for current law students considering work in this field, or at your organisation?
The best advice I have for law students is to find an area of the law, or the labour market, more broadly, that interests you. I have always found working for an interest that I believe in to be so much more enjoyable and fulfilling than something that I have no interest in.

10. How has your law degree helped you in your work?
My law degree assisted me in finding work in a private law firm, which in turn helped me get the job I am in. The demands of a law degree and also of being a junior lawyer taught me to prioritise multiple tasks, with varied deadlines. The other attribute that I have learnt from this experience is the ability to distil complex and disparate ideas into simple plain language. The facts of a legal dispute are often incoherent, messy and chaotic when initially presented. A skilled lawyer is able to frame the situation in simple language that respects the law and serves the interests of the client simultaneously.
“Why do you want to be a lawyer?” For a law student, this is the most dreaded yet frequently asked question on a daily basis. Even though it is an obvious question, its premise seems to be rifled with ignorance. The assumption that the pursuit of legal education could be directed towards a single end is inherently flawed. It is disheartening to see my peers become jaded and roped into the idea that clerkship is the only way to achieve a fulfilling and successful career, especially the ones that came into this degree with ambitions different to what a clerkship can offer.

It is common knowledge that after spending a few years at a traditional law firm, most lawyers go on to do wonderful things in business, government and academia. Little known, however, is the fact that one does not necessarily need to work at a law firm to justify the opportunity cost of a legal education: three years and a student debt. I truly believe that every student at MLS has tremendous potential and many will achieve great levels of success. However, it is also important to recognise that a corporate law firm is looking for a specific skillset. Therefore, just because one does not fit that mould it does not make them any less brilliant.

In this guide, we have tried bring to your attention the wide array of options open to you as you apply for internships and graduate programs. While other sections focus on non-corporate careers, this one is about an often forgotten area amongst law students: non-legal corporate careers. My primary motivation for taking this position was the apprehension and uncertainty among the student body, particularly those interested in the corporate world. In various conversations with my peers, I realised that many of them knew that they did not necessarily want to end up as corporate lawyers. However, they saw a lateral move into the business world as their only option. Through this section, we have tried to raise awareness about the endless possibilities available for every law student. You just need to think outside the box and march into the industry most appealing to you.

Those with an undergraduate degree in Arts will be particularly interested in Emma’s article, which provides an insight into developing commerciality. It articulately explains the advantages of a law degree for a career in a traditional consulting firm such as PwC. Students with a more quantitative bent will enjoy Matt’s article about a traditional Investment Banking graduate program at UBS. Andrew’s article about his work with Lazard PE sheds light on other corporate careers that are within reach because of your law degree. It sets you apart from a straight undergrad lacking the combination of qualitative and quantitative skills that degrees such as Engineering/Law or Commerce/Law can help develop. Additionally, Tom’s article about Government Advisory at KMPG is a refreshing reminder of the niche areas that a law degree can open up for people with varying backgrounds. This, however, is by no means an exhaustive statement to the wide array of opportunities available within and beyond these fields.

Look at alternate career options and leverage your skills. The JD has given us tools to be better than our competitors; we just need to be able to sell these at networking sessions and interviews. Whether it is analysing AER regulations for risk assessment purposes at a Bank, contractual negotiation for procurement in Oil & Gas or analysing foreign tax code for best transfer pricing outcomes at a consulting firm, we can do it better than someone without legal training.

In conclusion, I wish you all the luck with your journey of self-awareness over the next few months. Reach out for what you truly want, be it a clerkship at a big law firm or an internship for a non-profit in Rwanda. Let nothing else but your passion guide you. Do not compromise and do not relent. As Steve Jobs would say: “Stay hungry. Stay foolish.”
From South Lawn to Southbank

Emma Hassaram LL.B(Hons)/BA(Philosophy)
Corporate Tax Consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers

You’ve pumped out exams at the REB, worked long nights refining your research papers in the library, bonded with your fellow classmates at Seven Seeds, and philosophised on South Lawn. But your time at Melbourne Uni is coming to a close, and you want to leave your university life to make a difference in the real world in a commercial firm. Increasingly, firms are expecting candidates to demonstrate a sense of “commercial awareness”, but it’s hard to understand how to develop a skill that sounds so different from anything you might have learnt at university.

Why is commerciality important?
It’s no longer sufficient for firms, whether law firms or professional services firms, just to advise on the law. To provide value to clients, lawyers and business people need to understand the commercial context in which their legal advice sits. This requires you to understand the drivers, risks, and profitability of a business, as well as the wider environment in which your clients operate. As a corporate tax advisor, you are advising on more than tax law — you are helping clients achieve their goals by providing advice to steer their business commercially.

Preparation for work
Leaving Melbourne Uni and entering the commercial world at PwC was a huge step for me. Having studied Arts (Philosophy)/Law, I didn’t have a commerce background, and my studies in Law, whilst broad and spanning from subjects like “Tax Law” and “Advocacy” to “Trauma, Justice and Psychoanalysis”, didn’t exactly imbue me with the commercial mindset needed for my graduate position. In the lead up to starting full time work, I became an avid watcher of Monday night ABC (Four Corners; Q&A; Lateline Business) in a bid to learn more about commercial current affairs. I also kept up with the Financial Review and read articles online about the economy. This was all helpful preparation, but paled in comparison to what I would learn in my first year on the job.

On the job – client work
Working as a graduate in corporate tax at PwC is as much about developing your commerciality as it is about learning to navigate the tax laws that govern corporates in domestic and international transactions. Part of this is achieved through the substantive work that you do day to day. For example, reading financial reports of clients develops my ability to deeply understand the financial position and opportunities for those clients. Similarly, listening to executives at our corporate clients allows me to understand the underlying motivations as to why they might want an answer to a specific area of tax law. This was all underlay by our training. In my first months as a graduate, I undertook PwC’s ‘Tax Academy’ graduate program, first in Sydney, and then again in Melbourne. That was the first year the program was rolled out, and was a response to a shift to a more sophisticated tax services market. The genesis of Tax Academy was to fast track graduate development to allow graduates to operate at a higher level from day one. Aside from tax technical knowledge, we were trained on understanding our clients in the market, developing entrepreneurship as graduates, and given a commercial understanding of our tax practice. However, a large part of learning commerciality is by osmosis. Sitting with Partners and Directors at PwC, and listening to them bounce ideas off each other and flesh out their thoughts, are weekly occurrences. They slowly build commercial awareness and a natural sense of the drivers of a business.

On the job – running our business
Outside of direct client work, the job of meeting with Managers and clients to discuss our scope of work on any assignment gives me an understanding of how our own organisation operates and makes profit. Part of this is understanding our clients’ needs and values — all of which improves my sense of commerciality. Team meetings also give me a deeper understanding of our team KPIs and our performance in a particular month. All these aspects of working at the firm, including the understanding of networking and maintaining client relationships, have the collective effect of developing my commerciality for the road ahead.
Dispelling the Myths of Private Equity

Andrew Justo (2nd Year JD)
Lazard Australia Private Equity

Mitt Romney hasn’t done us any favours. Despite the not-so-great PR that Private Equity has received in the past few years, working as a junior analyst for Lazard Australia Private Equity has been an incredibly rewarding experience. There are few careers that challenge you to be constantly learning and developing, intimately involve you in a breadth of industries and businesses, and allow you to have a meaningful impact on the economy and community in the way that involvement in Private Equity does.

The unique nature of Private Equity comes down to the fundamental differences between how these funds work, in comparison to other financial services, such as Investment Banking and Consulting, where advisory work is the norm. In a nutshell, the purpose of Private Equity is to invest money, typically provided by institutional investors such as Superannuation funds, in privately owned businesses over the medium to long term.

Unlike Hedge Funds, short term profiteering off stock price movements is not the goal. As private shares can’t be traded easily on a stock exchange, PE investors have to become intimately involved in the companies they own, often taking board positions and adding value through expertise in management and M&A transactions. The goal is to simultaneously build better, stronger businesses that contribute to the wider economy (either by saving distressed businesses or generating growth), create employment, and ultimately provide to investors superior returns. PE as an asset class has on average beaten returns on the ASX 200 over the past ten years.

At LAPE, we focus on Growth Capital transactions in the mid market, or companies valued at between $25 million and $100 million. Unlike many funds, we view ourselves as passive investors, choosing to invest in companies with proven business models and leadership teams, and providing them with help, guidance, and oversight. We generally take minority equity stakes (below 50.0%), and provide our investee companies with help in strategy development, professionalization, and project evaluation.

The role of an analyst in PE involves a diverse array of skills and responsibilities. At any one time, we will have anywhere from five to ten active opportunities on the table. For the ones that may be attractive investments, our team will generally perform initial screening research, before undertaking a more thorough analysis of the business, its financial performance and prospects, and its market environment. We are not industry specialists, and therefore each opportunity presents an entirely new challenge in coming to understand and assess it properly.

What this means is that research skills are imperative to investment decisions. In any one day, our dealflow will mean I have to complete market research reports on a number of different sectors, each of which will involve different research methodologies. The ability to locate, process, and communicate large volumes of information clearly and accurately is critical. The flipside is that an understanding of finance is also essential.

Holding board seats creates obligations on fund managers to understand and grow their businesses, in the interests of shareholders of the company and the investors in the fund. Consequently, an analyst’s role involves working closely with the upper levels of portfolio company management, in particular CEOs and CFOs, throughout the life of the investment. During my time at LAPE, I have had the opportunity to work closely with a company, attending board meetings, developing financial models, and at one point providing analysis on tenders.

But the benefit of the JD to my work goes beyond simply information processing; the law itself is fundamental to the operation of the fund. Obviously, the transactional nature of PE means that legal knowledge is necessary whenever there’s a deal on (which is almost always). During acquisition or sales processes, our team works closely with both our In-House Counsel and external lawyers on due diligence and share purchase/sale agreements. And an understanding of regulatory environments is a key element in examining the viability of an investment. On the management side, the breadth of industries LAPE is involved creates a myriad of legal issues that our portfolio companies must navigate. As with any business environment, managing these effectively is incredibly important, and therefore we are regularly involved in the detail of these disputes.

Overall, anyone interested in a non-legal career should consider PE as a long-term alternative. Typically, funds look to hire professionals with some prior experience in related fields (accounting, banking, and consulting generally), and expect a high level of business acumen and commitment. As far as a working experience goes, the diversity of PE, in working across a wide range of industries in both transactional and management capacities, is hard to beat.
Investment Banking at UBS

Matthew Young (3rd Year Analyst)
UBS

As a law student, you may not have considered a career in investment banking. However, an investment bank offers a genuine option for those looking for a non-legal career, with many in the industry former lawyers or, like me, law graduates. In fact, you do not need to have a finance degree to be considered for a graduate position at an investment bank, with the majority of the skills necessary for the role learnt on the job and dedicated training programs in your first few years as an analyst targeted at developing the skills necessary to succeed as an investment banker.

What does an investment banker do?
An investment banker typically advises corporate clients on mergers and acquisitions (from public market takeovers to private treaty asset sales), capital raisings (including both debt and equity), public market listings (IPOs) and general strategic advice. Clients typically include the Board, senior management and/or shareholders of publicly listed and private companies, Governments and private equity firms from across the globe.

Why investment banking?
As an investment banker, you have the opportunity to work with the decision makers of some of the largest and most innovative companies to solve interesting and challenging problems. You get to focus on the big picture as well as the detail. Even as a junior analyst, you are given responsibility and opportunities, including contact with top decision makers at clients and transaction experience, that does not come for many years in other industries.

What is a typical day of an analyst?
There is no typical day for an analyst. Whilst many of the skills you develop can be applied across a wide variety of tasks, the client you are working with or the industry you are learning about can change rapidly. Typical tasks include valuation and financial modelling, preparing presentations for client meetings, news updates, company and industry profiles and conducting company and industry research.

But I am worried about the hours…?
Whilst the hours can sometimes be long, they are definitely not unmanageable. And generally, the hours are longest when the work is the most interesting such as when you are working on a live deal. Ultimately if you enjoy the work and the people you work with, the opportunities the role provides far outweigh any concern over the hours.

What’s the best thing about the graduate program?
UBS provides a six-week training program for graduates in London in each year. The program not only allows graduates to sharpen their analytical skills, but also provides a fantastic opportunity to build your network with other UBS graduates from across the globe.

Why did you choose UBS?
UBS is one of several global investment banks in the Australian market and consistently advises on some of the largest and most interesting transactions. It also gives junior bankers a huge amount of responsibility and lots of chances to develop. But ultimately, I chose to work at UBS after talking to and getting along with a number of the bankers and then completing and enjoying a summer internship with UBS.

Finding the right bank for you will come down to how well your personality fits with the culture of the institution – so try to get along to as many networking events as possible to talk to those you may one day be working with and apply for a summer internship to test if the career and bank is right for you.
Government Advisory at KPMG

Tomas Acutt (2nd Year JD)
KPMG

1. Is Government Advisory for Me: What does it Involve?
Most people believe that government advisory involves advising Government (both Federal and State) on tasks it is unable to investigate or can be done more effectively by the private sector. While this is certainly the case, it takes the work done in government advisory as a complex area, and oversimplifies it. Government advisory is also about consulting with key public and private stakeholders on how best to engage and converse with the Government of the day so that it can adequately inform its decisions. In this regard, the work done in government advisory is extremely dynamic and unpredictable. No day will ever be the same with governmental policy constantly being created or modified in any given area. One day you are working on how best to manage non-renewable resources in Australia, the next day you are advising on the effects of the Japan-Australia FTA on the agricultural industry. Consequently, if you work in government advisory, you must be knowledgeable in all areas of Government involvement.

Furthermore, government advisory is not just about extracting the most efficiency out of Government bodies and their functions. It also involves informing the shaping of policy in a way that best achieves the objectives intended, whether it be a better solution for the Australian people, or a more effective tax system for importers of goods or services. Such a task requires foresight, innovation and a sound understanding of the legal landscape, both in Australia and aboard.

2. What do you do at KPMG?
I work in a small team contained within KPMG’s Advisory service line. The team, due to its need to constantly and spontaneously engage with Government is spread across both Canberra and Melbourne. Our work is unique in the sense that it is not purely policy based, but straddles both analysis of tax systems primarily concerning tariff and excise duties on alcoholic beverages, as well as broader policy advisement on industries such as tourism and agriculture.

In terms of legal skills, a lot of time and effort goes into legal research and analysis, writing and preparing briefings, tariff and tax impact calculation, as well as liaising with clients. To be effective in my line or work, one must always have their finger of the pulse when it comes to international trade agreements, statutory regulations (both in Australia and aboard) and the relevant policies of the Government on any issue at any one time.

3. What attracted you to Government Advisory and KPMG in Particular over Previous Legal Work?
There are a number of reasons why government advisory is more attractive than many paralegal and graduate law careers currently in the market. Firstly, government advisory work gives you insight that no other graduate lawyer will have. It is your job in government advisory to help inform and shape the policy of Government based on solid research and industry practice. In this way, you see the law before it becomes the law. You deal in the political decisions that influence and motivate the Government to change or create legislation on certain issues. Just think, while all your buddies will be talking about the impact of that new trade bill, you can sit smug in the knowledge that you not only have a full grasp of the bill and its impacts, but you contributed to its very construction and influences!

Secondly, your legal skills will be invaluable in the corporate world. To put it frankly, we as law students are trained in the rules which govern and regulate society. Government is the main body which creates these rules. Therefore, any person who has the ability to analyse how the law is created and its impacts on a certain industry is going to be an asset in any financial or advisory firm.

Thirdly, I did a Bachelor of Arts in undergrad, where one of my majors was international relations. Performing research and creating detailed analyses on trade and tax law, including international agreements, taps into this interest, making the work absolutely engrossing. For any one who has a political background or is interested in politics, should seriously consider work in government advisory for this very reason.

Lastly, as stated above, government advisory is a broad and complex area. As such, you will need support from other areas of your firm. In my experience, this is mainly with the tax and economic modeling teams. The result is a culture of cohesion (at least in my experience at KPMG) which will educate in all areas of government policy and function. Consequently, the room for growth and development in the government advisory sector is unprecedented as you meet and build your repertoire of skills among government advisors and officials from around the country and the globe.

4. Biggest Highlight?
The biggest highlight of my work so far as been my analysis of foreign domestic trade law. Having your work acknowledged by Associated Directors and Directors of the firm, which is then taken up as a part of a brief to clients is extremely rewarding.
What is most unique about a potential career in government law is its combination of public service with the intellectual rigour of law. For many government lawyers, the fulfillment of a sense of duty is highly satisfying and adds a layer of deeper meaning upon their professional work.

The articles that follow elaborate upon this concept of service and illuminate how it can be manifested in a variety of different ways. Underpinning the varied work government lawyers can undertake is the pursuit of the greater good for society. This may be revealed on a micro-level through daily interaction with victims and alleged offenders, for example or evident in societal decision-making on a macro-level.

Additional, the contributors focus on direct ways to gain graduate employment and begin a career in government law. Importantly, the diverse backgrounds of each writer reflect the broad range of employment options available to MLS students in the government sector. From discussions of Victoria Legal Aid’s New Lawyer Program and the Office of Public Prosecutions legal traineeship to the Australian Government Solicitor’s and the Victorian Government Solicitor’s Office graduate program, this guide has it covered.

As you read the government chapter of the career’s guide, keep an open mind. Whilst it might appear that opportunities for graduate employment remain limited, a broader perspective of this area of law demonstrates it is career pathway that is meaningful, diverse and ripe for socially conscious and passionate law graduates.
Starting a Career at the AGS

Cathryn Moore  
Australian Government Solicitor (AGS)

What to choose?  
So, it’s time to start your career (or at least think about it)… Overwhelmed yet? I was.

As I approached the end of my studies I knew that I needed to make some choices. I had received sage advice that there was much to be gained from going to a large firm with the resources to train me well but also heard cautionary tales about young lawyers who had wasted the early years of their careers doing work that was less than inspiring. From experiences throughout my degree I knew that I valued:

1. challenging work (or else I would be bored);
2. interesting matters with a public interest element;
3. working with brilliant people;
4. opportunities for diverse experiences throughout my career, including as a young lawyer; and
5. high quality training and supported exposure to running matters early on to allow me to develop skills through experience, as well as theory.

If I considered these priorities a multiple choice test, some of my options seemed to satisfy ‘both a) and c)’ while others came closer to ‘both b) and e)’, but definitely not d)’. I found out about the graduate program at the Australian Government Solicitor (AGS) shortly before the applications closed and decided to give it a shot. I started at AGS a year ago and I am convinced that, for me, it was the ‘all of the above’ option to start my career.

Beginning at AGS
My graduate year at AGS was more diverse than I could have imagined.
- I prepared advice and submissions in smaller matters – I even had my first appearance in court!
- I worked in teams on large, high profile litigation including the Tobacco (Plain Packaging) arbitration (under the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law Arbitration Rules) and a couple of constitutional matters in the High Court.
- I was exposed to the negotiation and drafting of some of the most significant commercial services the Commonwealth engaged at the time.
- I spent 3 months outposted (or seconded) to a client, where I had the chance to gain a unique insight into an integral Australian institution.

Generally AGS graduates rotate through each of the practice areas in their office (AGS has offices in Canberra and each capital city), plus a client outpost and a pro bono outpost.

What makes AGS different?
Culture means something different to everyone and there is surely no more overused word during the graduate recruitment season. One of the most common questions I am asked by would-be lawyers is what the culture is like at AGS. AGS is a unique place to work because it essentially operates like a firm, but in some vital ways it’s not – we have billable targets and compete for most of our work with private firms, but the profit that AGS makes becomes public money. AGS lawyers are not public servants, but we are closely tied to government and serving the public interest. There is also a genuine commitment to training and development, evidenced by AGS removing the pressure of billable hours for graduates in preference of skill development and quality learning opportunities. All of these factors bode well for its ‘culture’. So too does the real atmosphere of collegiality I found at AGS. The expertise of AGS lawyers is second to none, but almost every law firm will be able to tell you that they have specialists in a variety of fields. What I did not expect was the willingness of AGS lawyers at all levels to share their experience with each other… and me. Even as a graduate I have felt comfortable picking up the phone and calling some of the most senior lawyers at AGS – some of the country’s foremost legal minds – and ask for their input. Those lawyers have been only too happy to oblige.

Making a choice
I would encourage you to think of starting your career in terms of multiple choice test of priorities, then stretch yourself to see if you can find your ‘all of the above’ option. For me, that was (and is) AGS. For more information about opportunities at AGS visit http://www.ags.gov.au/employment/graduate-employment.html
Working for Victorian Legal Aid (VLA)

Mali Cornish
Victorian Legal Aid

How did you come to work at Victoria Legal Aid?
I finished Law School at the conclusion of 2010. I then worked as a deputy associate at the Federal Circuit Court with a judge who heard family law matters, in addition to migration, intellectual property, bankruptcy and a number of other general federal law matters. I subsequently moved to the Family Court where I did a variety of work, including relief associate, court officer and registry duties. While I was at the Courts I completed my Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice at Australian National University. I applied for Victoria Legal Aid (VLA)’s New Lawyers Program once I was admitted and was lucky to get a family law position. I have now been at VLA for about a year and a half.

What happens in the New Lawyers Program?
The New Lawyer’s Program is offered to first and second year lawyers. New Lawyers undergo four six month placements across VLA’s regional and metropolitan offices and can do rotations across the criminal, civil and family practice groups. Participants often do a placement in one of the country offices.

I was fortunate to do rotations in Geelong and Dandenong before coming to the Melbourne office. Geelong was a wonderful place to begin practising law. It is a small and welcoming legal community. Dandenong was also a fabulous experience. Dandenong is the busiest regional court with extremely long lists. It also has its own Federal Circuit Court registry for dealing with family law matters.

The rotations are one of the best aspects of the New Lawyer’s Program. Lawyers have the opportunity to appear in a variety of Courts, practice different types of law and meet people with diverse roles from all over the organisation.

The initial weeks are carefully managed and there is plenty of time to ‘shadow’ a more experienced lawyer before making appearances or acting as duty lawyer. New Lawyers have a host in each of their placements acting as a mentor and guiding them through the role. The host can answer any burning questions, give guidance on matters and provide feedback.

The Program features a lot of exciting and interesting training opportunities and a carefully structured feedback process for monitoring progress. All New Lawyers keep a log book which provides a good opportunity to look back at the experiences and achievements of each placement.

Describe a normal working week?
A normal working week might involve
  • a duty lawyer service in the Family Violence List at the Magistrates Court and another at the Federal Circuit Court/Family Court
  • a day seeing clients for appointments in the office
  • allocated time to provide phone advice
  • a day in the office; these days tend to be filled with paperwork, drafting letters, preparing briefs, drafting client’s documents and the other more administrative tasks.

In my time at VLA I have worked on a wide variety of matters including residency disputes (regarding who a child should live with), ‘time spend’ disputes (regarding whether a child should spend time with a parent and whether or not the child should be supervised), recovery order applications (where one of the parents has kidnapped the child), Airport Watch List applications (where one of the parents has attempted or may attempt the international abduction of a child) and relocation applications (where one of the parties wants to move with the child to a different state or country). I have also appeared in Family Violence Intervention Order and Personal Safety Intervention Order proceedings. All these matters have involved appearing as duty lawyer, providing representation at Roundtable Dispute Management conferences or providing court room advocacy.

What are the biggest challenges in this type of work?
We can deal with some extremely traumatic subject matters and difficult themes, for example, child abuse, family violence and bitter custody disputes.

What are the best parts?
The work can be very rewarding as we are helping vulnerable people and those who would really struggle to navigate the justice system independently or effectively advocate for themselves. Appearing in court is a real adrenaline rush, particularly in duty lawyer matters. As a duty lawyer you may be expected to do appearances across several different court rooms over the course of the day (having only met the client, taken their instructions and read the documentation that morning). There are also ample opportunities for lawyers to appear in their own litigation matters, should they wish to do so. VLA is a very nurturing organisation. I have had excellent mentoring and support in every office I have worked in.

What would you say to someone considering applying for the New Lawyers Program?
I strongly recommend it. I cannot speak highly enough about the program. The work is very worthwhile, the hours are generally more reasonable than in private firms and the culture is supportive and encouraging. My colleagues are all extraordinary and inspiring people who are dedicated to providing quality services to Victoria’s less fortunate.
Elizabeth Margaronis (Legal Trainee)
Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP)

The Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) is an independent statutory authority and Victoria’s largest criminal law practice. Together with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Crown Prosecutors’ Chambers, the OPP works under the direction of the Solicitor for Public Prosecutions to prepare and conduct criminal prosecutions for serious indictable offences on behalf of the people of Victoria.

The OPP is governed by five core values: to act with integrity, to work together, to strive for excellence, to respect others, and to act fairly. A prosecutor’s role is to ensure that the whole of the relevant evidence is placed fairly, impartially and intelligibly before the jury, and to adequately assist the court with submissions of law to enable the law to be properly applied to the facts of the case. The primary function of the prosecution is not to secure convictions, but to aid in the attainment of justice.

Each year the OPP offers law graduates the opportunity to complete a twelve-month traineeship with the office. On completion of the traineeship program, legal trainees are admitted to practice as Australian lawyers. The OPP’s legal practice has nine directorates, each with specialist legal practitioners. As a legal trainee I have had the opportunity to gain experience in a broad range of practice areas, rotating through five directorates within the organisation. I spent six weeks respectively in the Proceeds of Crime and Policy and Advice directorates, and three months respectively in Appeals and Principal Prosecutions. I am currently completing my final three-month rotation in the Specialist Sex Offences Unit.

I steadily developed a keen interest in criminal law throughout my education, and by the time I had reached my final year of law school I knew that the commercial world was not for me. I wanted the chance to work in a dynamic environment, to learn from robust lawyers, to be challenged by stimulating matters and to experience the thrill of criminal trials. Maybe I had watched too many episodes of Boston Legal. Nonetheless I had a unique insight into some of Victoria’s most serious and high-profile criminal matters – there’s never a boring day, and even a seemingly straightforward case can develop into a legal labyrinth. I have always been well supported by highly experienced practitioners who welcome me through their open office doors and take the time to answer my questions, however basic or confused. One of the joys of going to work each day has been the collegiate atmosphere around the office, and the friendships formed with my fellow trainees.

If you are passionate about criminal law and want to pursue a career in this field, the OPP’s legal traineeship offers a perfect opportunity to learn the intricacies of Victoria’s criminal justice system whilst acquiring practical professional skills. You will be given the experience of a junior solicitor, whilst also being mentored and supported as a trainee. You will be responsible for your own files. You will learn how to analyse briefs of evidence and you will liaise closely with the key stakeholders of the criminal justice system, including the Courts, Victoria Police, Victoria Legal Aid, and the Victorian Bar.

You will be required to consult regularly with Crown Prosecutors, and you will be asked to form your own legal opinions about the cases you come across. Your views will matter. You will come face to face with victims and witnesses from all walks of life, and you will be involved in a process that profoundly impacts their lives. Inevitably, you will confront harsh realities and face difficult situations, but maintaining a strong commitment to the public interest, to the rule of law and to the protection of the community is invigorating and rewarding.

The OPP’s legal traineeship program is much more than a mere stepping stone between your law degree and admission to legal practice. It’s a real job, an exceptional introduction to Victoria’s criminal justice system, and the beginning of a legal career.

Starting a Career at the OPP
Working at the VGSO

Retta Berryman, Grahame Best, Sanishya Fernando, Isabella Lockey, Jordina Rust, Julia Wang
Victorian Government Solicitor’s Office (VGSO)

Traineeship at the Victorian Government Solicitor’s Office
Our traineeship group started at the VGSO in March 2013. We came with diverse interests and experience and all of us excited and a little bit nervous about the year ahead. Looking back now, we all agree that it has been a whirlwind year, whizzing through rotations and learning new skills at a rapid rate. We have had fun getting to know our new colleagues in what has proved to be a welcoming and collegiate environment. We have sharpened our minds on a diverse range of intellectually stimulating work, which not only provides complex legal challenges, but raises questions of great public interest and significance. And we have had the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, professional development opportunities at VGSO, including attending practice group meetings, lectures and seminars and even getting involved in preparing and delivering client seminars.

During the year we have completed rotations through four of the five branches at VGSO, providing us with a unique opportunity to gain exposure to the full range of work that takes place in the office. We have all had the opportunity to do fascinating legal advice work, grapple with complex statutory interpretation questions, gain excellent exposure to court work, develop our client engagement skills and much, much more. If you aren’t already convinced that VGSO is the place for you, here is a run-down of some of our experiences as trainees in each of the five branches.

Litigation and Dispute Resolution (L&D&R)
The L&D&R Branch at VGSO works on a variety of matters for a range of government clients. During my three-month rotation through L&D&R, I worked on inquests, ward of state claims, personal injury claims, advice and litigation relating to prisons, prosecutions for contempt of court, reviews under the Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, defamation claims, and Firearms Appeals Committee reviews.

The work undertaken by the L&D&R Branch often involves fascinating fact scenarios and can be quite high-profile — it’s not uncommon for our matters to make it into the newspapers. The Branch has a great mix of advice work and court work, allowing trainees and junior lawyers to both hone their legal analysis skills and gain invaluable litigation experience. Further, the Branch (and VGSO as a whole) gives trainees a high level of responsibility, allowing us to run smaller files on our own (with supervision by more senior solicitors).

Commercial, Property and Technology (CP&T)
Working in the CP&T Branch at VGSO allows you to get involved in a wide variety of commercial (including corporate governance work), property and IP/IT matters that include native title, negotiating and drafting contracts, settlements, sale and purchase of land for various public purposes, and high-level advice work for public sector clients on a range of issues. The most challenging aspect about the work at VGSO is that all advice and litigation work must contemplate any extra obligations unique to government. This made my rotation in CP&T more interesting and intellectually stimulating and it is what makes VGSO’s commercial practice distinct from those in commercial firms.

In my three-month rotation, I’ve attended client meetings and seminars, assisted with drafting of contracts, Memorandums of Understanding and other type of legal instruments (such as trusts, funding agreements and leases), and have even had the opportunity to run my own files relating to the sale and purchase of land. And continuing with the trend of getting involved in high-profile matters, the advice work I assisted with was not only complex, but was exciting!

Workplace Relations and Occupation Safety (WROS)
During my time in the branch, I worked on a wide range of workplace law and industrial relations matters: from unfair dismissal, to performance management, workplace bullying, disciplinary processes, and managing the employment-law aspects of organisational restructures. Because the VGSO’s clients are in the public sector, matters in WROS will often involve statutory interpretation and may raise constitutional issues. The WROS branch also advises public sector clients who are negotiating enterprise agreements and in relation to public sector governance. I was also fortunate to be involved in workplace litigation which included representing clients before the Fair Work Commission, observing negotiations relating to matters before the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and witnessing a discrimination proceeding before the Human Rights list at VCAT.

If you have an interest in workplace relations, or even if you’ve never considered it as an area of law you might be interested in, a rotation in the WROS branch offers the chance to work on complex and interesting issues for public sector clients.

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**Government and Public Law (GAPL)**

The GAPL Branch is the largest branch in the VGSO and comprises a number of discrete teams that specialise in areas of practice with a public or administrative law focus. The branch carries out work in areas such as constitutional law, review of administrative decisions, access to information, planning and environment law and compulsory land acquisitions, occupational disciplinary proceedings, regulatory compliance, prosecutions, and human rights.

During my busy rotation as a trainee in the GAPL branch my work was varied and challenging. The branch advises and acts for a wide range of clients including government departments, statutory agencies, bodies with prosecutorial functions and administrative tribunals. Rotating through the branch gave me a new appreciation for the seemingly endless variety of the functions and form of government, and I was able to get meaningfully involved both with interesting advice work and various litigation matters. Trainees in the Branch may also have the opportunity to do some straightforward appearance work, such as appearing before VCAT in relation to reviews of decisions by the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal.

**Victoria Police**

The Police branch has only one client, the Victoria Police, to whom we have been providing legal advice and support for over a hundred years. The branch is the smallest in the VGSO and has a distinct character, with aspects of an inhouse legal team, but while operating as an independent, external legal service provider.

We do a range of advice work on any number of issues that arise in police operations and taskforces. For example, we advise on information gathering, data security, sharing information with other enforcement agencies and police powers at common law and under statute. We also regularly make warrant applications in the courts, contest subpoena applications on public interest immunity grounds to protect confidential police methodology and conduct legal costs negotiations.

The Victoria Police are a highly regulated agency whose powers and functions are found across a number of acts and the common law. Their operations, legal questions and public presence are diverse and complex, which means this is a great place to train and practice as a public lawyer.
In this section you will find articles on the topics of study/life balance, the reportedly huge number of people graduating from law every year and some advice from the LSS’ Wellbeing Officers. This section is intended to be a counterweight to the stress that comes up when looking at careers and planning for the future.

The following articles show that locking yourself in the library isn't necessarily a path to success, that there is help available in times of stress and that you aren't drowning in a sea of fellow graduates who are taking all the available jobs. We hope that this section will provide some perspective when planning your career and offer some tools or advice if the pressure begins to mount.

The key point of this section is that working yourself into the ground will not help with getting a job and that it is important to keep in mind that work/a career isn't everything. Also important is that taking some time off can actually help performance in the long run, whether in terms of grades or being in the right frame of mind for an interview.

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind anyone reading this guide that there are many different avenues available if pressure starts to mount including the MLS Student Wellbeing Coordinator Kate Van Hooft and the LSS Welfare Officers Bree and Chris.
How to Have a Life Outside the Law

Suzy Muller (Senior Associate)
Allens

I started my law degree with the mentality that, the more time I spent studying, the better my grades would be. I cancelled catch-ups with friends, set my phone to silent and settled myself into the library, ready to study until I could study no more. I was going for straight high distinctions, and I wasn’t going to let a bit of socialising distract me.

This approach was productive for a while, but gradually I became less and less efficient. I would generally work for an hour or two before my mind would wander to other things (“I’d better check my email / sms / Facebook updates” … “I might just get a coffee / some lunch / a snack”). Before I knew it I was regularly browsing the internet, checking my email and setting up ‘study’ camp in the uni café – thanks to the university’s new wireless system. The day would pass and although I would be spending my time at uni with my books, the overwhelming goal of ‘all work, no play’ really meant that, not only was I depriving myself of a social life, I wasn’t getting my work done either.

The next step in this vicious cycle was what I call, the ‘guilts’. I had become unproductive during the time I had allocated to study, and therefore any leisure time I had was haunted by the thought: ‘I should be studying’. My wellbeing had also begun to slide. Spending hours hunched over a computer was not doing my posture any good, and all the coffee and snack breaks certainly weren’t helping my fitness. It didn’t take me long to realise that perhaps I had oversimplified the task – I needed a new approach if I was going to survive the next five years of my degree!

I decided that I needed to make time in my schedule for things that I enjoyed so that when the time came to do some work, I didn’t feel like I was depriving myself. Between work, study, fitness and socialising, this made for a very tight schedule. When I brought my concerns up with my uni friends, we discovered that we were all suffering from the same difficulties, and it all came down to the way we managed our time.

I realised that if we combined socialising with fitness we could ‘kill two birds with one stone’ and have a lot of fun as well. I started to look for ways I could spend time with my friends and get some fitness in at the same time. Rather than going to see a movie, I would suggest a walk around the park or a bike ride along the beach. On a couple of occasions a group of us went horse riding at a local trail-riding centre and when we felt really enthusiastic, we would go for a jog together. After a few months I could definitely see the improvement in my productivity at uni, and the ‘guilts’ were beginning to subside. What I was starting to embrace was a sense of balance in my lifestyle.

But despite all of these positive actions towards a balanced lifestyle, I still felt that I was spending far too much time hunched over my textbooks, and that I needed to put more effort into my fitness. This led me to a harsh realisation: if I wanted to have an active lifestyle and a career in the law, I would have to do more than the odd walk or bike ride with my friends. The only time in my calendar that I could guarantee to be free was early mornings. My uni was advertising a group fitness class that ran three times a week from 7:00 am, so I decided to put my name down and give it a go.

Now before I go any further I will tell you, I am not a morning person by any stretch of the imagination. Had the location been a little less convenient I would never have contemplated doing the class. But as it was, it was held a five-minute drive from my house, and I was determined not to make excuses.

The first group training session was horrific. It was cold, I didn’t know anyone, and I was being forced do push-ups on the gravel, sit-ups on the wet grass and sprints up steep hills. Why had I signed up for this? But by the end of the first week, the training started to feel manageable, and I enjoyed the social aspect of training in a group along with the satisfaction of getting some exercise done by 8:00 am each morning.

Coincidentally, while all of this was happening, I saw an improvement in my grades. I may not have achieved the holy grail of straight high distinctions, but I was definitely doing better than I had been under the ‘constant study’ approach I had employed previously.

So by compartmentalising my time, mixing social activities with fitness, and making time for a little physical exertion, I discovered how to balance my life with my law degree. As a Senior Associate, I now use the same approach to managing my time, but with different solutions to suit my lifestyle. Obviously the approach I took at uni will not suit everyone. But the point is, it is worthwhile to try a few new things to find a balanced lifestyle that suits you – and to avoid spending all day alone, hunched over a computer and feeling guilty about being unproductive.
Possibility in everything

Where will your career take you? It’s up to you. Whether you join us as a clerk or a law graduate, we’ll support you to achieve your goals. To find out more about our programs and our people, visit www.allens.com.au/careers
Are There Too Many Law Graduates?

Geoff Nicholson (CEO)
The College of Law Victoria

Have you heard that question recently?

Well let’s take a look at it.

Firstly what does the question mean? Frankly I don’t know. Too many graduates for what – legal practice or the job market generally?

There is no doubt that the skills taught in a law degree are highly transferrable and sought after for roles other than as the traditional barrister/solicitor. But let’s limit our discussion to legal practice, because I think that that is what most people take the question to mean. Firstly you need to be careful about the figures.

Recently I have seen statements to the effect that there are 12,000 new lawyers every year. There were in fact 5,338 admissions to legal practice nationally in 2012/13 and, on my best advice, there were approximately 6000 students who graduated with a law degree in that period. There is a big difference between a law degree or JD that entitles a graduate to move forward and become admitted to practice and simply completing a law course (which I understand the 12,000 figure refers to) such as a course in legal studies.

Even after completing a law degree or JD not all graduates become admitted immediately, or at all. Then not all of those who do become admitted in fact practice, or do so only for a limited time.

At the College of Law, we encourage all law graduates to undertake their Practical Legal Training after obtaining their law degree and become admitted to practice. Becoming an Australian Lawyer gives you options and makes you more appealing to any employer. It enables you to move in and out of practice if you wish and once you become an Australian Lawyer, you are, barring misfortune, an Australian Lawyer for life.

In 1984 there were approximately 11,000 law students in Australia’s 12 law schools. By 1999 the number of law schools and law students had both more than doubled. The job market accommodated the increase in law graduates then and will do so again now.

For more information about careers and legal practice visit The College of Law blog at www.collaw.edu.au/insights
What is practical legal training?

You’ve probably heard of Practical Legal Training (PLT) but may not fully understand what it actually is and when you need to do it.

PLT is undertaken at the completion of your university studies. It is one of the essential steps to becoming admitted as a lawyer in Australia. The program is intended to equip you with the skills, practical knowledge and understanding of values needed to practise as an entry level lawyer so that you can quickly make a contribution to your workplace.

Practical skills learnt include advocacy, drafting, client interviewing, negotiation and file management. Completion of a PLT program ensures you have achieved the required competencies, which were developed by the Australasian Practical Legal Education Council (APLEC) and the Law Admissions Consultative Committee. The subjects and electives undertaken as part of a PLT program are stipulated by these bodies and are not chosen by the PLT provider.

Completion of a Practical Legal Training program means you are eligible to receive your Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice and seek admission as a legal practitioner.

Why do more graduates choose The College of Law over any other PLT provider?

The College of Law is the school of professional practice for lawyers in Australia and New Zealand. We are not a university.

So our practical legal training program is not the end of your university legal studies; it's the start of your legal career.

We don’t treat your preparation for practice as a ‘tick the box’ exercise, and neither should you. Students who make the most of their practical legal training are serious about their career in law. Getting admitted to practice is not the end game; preparing for your career in law is.

Our graduates speak highly of our PLT program because it is different in the following ways:

- Our program is fully accredited by the Victorian Council of Legal Education: you can be confident of direct admission in Victoria.
- We offer the choice of full-time, part-time and part-time evening courses, along with more than 7 starting dates scheduled throughout the year.
- Each program is tailored to the legislation and practice of Victoria: employers know you have been trained in the law and practice of your local jurisdiction.
- We offer you two separate weeks of intensive skills training covering advocacy, work and business management skills and ethics and professional responsibility. These are transferable skills you can use in any career. The remainder of the course is delivered online so that you can schedule study along with work and family commitments.
- We make sure you meet your lecturer on Day 1 and he or she will support you through the program. The program is clearly structured and you will know what you have to do, when and how.
- Assessments are practical and spaced through the program; no 3000 word essays, group assessments or formal written exams that you might find in other university styled PLT programs.
- You automatically qualify for 2 subjects into our LLM (Applied Law) programs. When you are ready, this gives you a head start towards a more specialised qualification.

More Information

For course dates or more information about our PLT program visit The College of Law website www.collaw.edu.au/plt, or contact the Student Services Team on 1300 856 111 or enrolments@collaw.edu.au

*An alternative pathway to admission exists in Victoria.
Surviving Law

Bree O'Dwyer & Chris Fitzgerald
LSS Welfare Officers

Hi everyone, we are your new Wellbeing officers at the law school. We'll be running various activities next semester and getting everyone up to date with the sorts of mental health issues that law students and professionals are likely to face. For the meantime, here are some tips on how we recommend you fight off anxiety and/or depression:

Get Involved!
Law school can be a scary place so having friends there makes it little less daunting. Like, if law school were a haunted house, at least you won't die alone. So get involved! The best way to keep spirits up is become a part of things. Whether that be within or outside the law school, make sure to have outlets aside from study. The law school and MULSS run heaps of activities throughout semester, and there are always trivia nights around the local pubs that are good fun. Study is always a priority, but keep up your social life as well. Don't lose contacts with old friends if you can help it, they know you best and are always good to have a catch up with.

LSS Activities are a great way to be involved and do stuff with you haunted house comrades. However, if nothing that's on offer interests you don't despair! Involvement isn't mandatory and you're likely to survive law school without this experience. But, like we said before it's nicer not to do it alone. Heads up – if you want a different activity than the ones that are on offer let the LSS team know, they may just consider it.

TL;DR
Pro tip: get involved
Extra pro tip: if you don't, you'll be okay.

Do something fun!
What my friends and I refer to as taking a mental health day/half day/hour/ten minutes is just as important as study. No you are NOT too tired (okay, you may be too tired) you read that correctly, just as important. The time allotment isn't the same of course, but feeling like you're never going to understand WTF Dworkin is on about and torturing yourself through another four hours of reading him just in case - is totally not going to work. Get yo' shit together and watch your favourite crappy TV show, eat brunch with your best mate (ah, brunch) or like, exercise or whatever.

TL;DR
Pro tip: have fun
Extra pro tip: do it, your study life will improve

When the shit has hit the the fan
Lets face it, you picked law. You are bound to get anxious, depressed, or both at some point if you stick with it.Here's a swift punch of truth right the face – we all feel down like this at some stage. "Even those people who always look put together, are on top of the readings and are STILL smiling in week 11" you ask? Yep, you bet they've felt really shitty before, their poker game is just more convincing (don't worry about it, online poker is the big thing now and no one can see you cry there). The next paragraph is important so lean in and read closely.

If you feel anxious or low for a 'particular' reason, like the impending assignment, a missed opportunity or you dropped your ice cream – it's okay. Talk to friends, family, pets, your stuff animal about it. However, just like a Panadol advert, if these are persisting see your health care professional. Your mental health is as important as your physical health so – see your doctor!!

AS someone who spent a SWOTVAC holed up in her flat, all blinds drawn marathon watching Supernatural (because it was much less scary than the real world) and then had to sit supps on December 20 – you should definitely see your doctor. Nothing is worth sitting an exam on December 20, NOTHING.

Legal professionals and law students have one of the highest rates of anxiety and depression amongst any profession. If you're having problems like this yourself, talk to someone. Dwelling on things that you're worried or nervous about can only make things worse, particularly in high-stress environments.

It's important to fight anxiety and depression before they begin to overtake everyday life. Don't worry about what other people might think, do it for yourself - you won't regret it. You would be surprised how many other law students are facing similar problems.

Some points of call:
• Kate from Wellbeing. She is the best ever. See her for all things law, she's there to sort out how you can get through without losing your soul. Also, if you're lucky she may randomly throw in a Clueless reference in response to your life ('that was way harsh Tai')
• Your GP If you don't have a GP the Melbourne University health service is there and free for students. They can help with what you're going through and refer you on if need be. Don't be hesitant if you think you need help!

TL;DR
Pro tip: law is hard
Extra pro tip: you can make it easier, just ask for help

Silver Linings
Here's one most of us experience, you got a bad grade for a subject. Stop, think, perspective. You will not die from this! Ok, so you know that. But you career won't die from this either! You now have a fantastic opportunity to show some growth, do some self reflection and prove to *insert random dream employer* that when the shit hits the fan, you turn off the fan and get a mop and bucket. Good job you!

TL;DR
Pro tip: good things come from bad things.
Extra pro tip: facing the bad things may get you a job more than never having them.

Xoxo Your Wellbeing Officers.

1 Ok, seriously exercise. As one particular blonde lawyer we know would suggest – exercise gives you endorphins and endorphins make you happy.
New to the guide this year is this section on making transitions within a legal career. While the section is short we hope that it will be able to grow in future years. The point of this section is to provide some level of reassurance for everyone who is concerned about missing out on their desired career, or about being stuck in a job they don’t like. In many ways this is an addition to the articles on surviving life as a lawyer and law student in the previous section.

Speaking with actual lawyers one of the most common themes that comes up is that a lot of them did not start out in the same career they are in now, much less the same job. As mentioned in the article, starting off at a big city law firm doesn’t mean you must stay there, or even stay working for the bad guys in the public/private law divide.

Similarly, the Chambers guide and other “Top Lawyer” lists include many examples of extremely successful solicitors who began working for the government, or in-house legal teams, or even went to the Bar and then decided that working for a firm suited them better. Stories of jumping between working for a firm and working in-house or transitioning into corporate roles are common in the legal profession.

Something that should also be kept in mind is that whenever a partner at a huge firm is asked (for example) “How did you end up practising in Construction?” they invariably answer “I left law-school 100% certain that I wanted to be a patent and trademark lawyer.” followed by either “After my rotation in Construction I never wanted to leave,” or “After my rotation in IP I realised I didn’t enjoy it at all.”

As another example there is at least one MLS alumnus who graduated with a degree in geology and naturally expected to work as a mining lawyer. They did their first rotation in the Dispute Resolution team and have literally never left it, 26 years later.

The point of the following article, and of this section in general, is that you aren’t going to be locked in to a particular career path or job based on what happens while at law school or immediately afterwards. There is almost unlimited scope to change jobs, locations or even industries in the future. As MLS are fond of saying, a law degree can take you anywhere. This is worth keeping in mind.

A further message that should be taken from this guide is that an indirect path may still lead to your desired destination. It is well worth putting some time and effort into working out what other opportunities you can look at that will lead in the direction you are going. For example, if you would like to practice in insolvency consider APRA or ASIC as alternatives to large firms. If competition is your thing large scale companies will often have a regulatory affairs team who can provide experience in this area.

The bottom line is that you aren’t going to get stuck in a career you don’t like, and that opportunities that aren’t exactly what you’re looking for can still lead to you the same place in the long term.

Making Transitions
Do You Need A Life Plan?

Liam Brown (Barrister)
Melbourne Chambers

Yes. But its shape is something clichéd like this: enjoy everything you are doing and if you're not (or cannot see that you will enjoy it in the intermediate future) ditch it and go snowboarding. Actually I can’t stand snowboarders and all their feigned coolness; I tried telemark skiing (Google might be necessary for the uninitiated) for a while but all the attention-seeking knee bobbing reminded me of some weird liturgical dance. Back to where I started: when you get out in the real world not everything will go according to plan (which is fine if you don't have a plan because then it is going to plan because… I’m getting lost again). If you engage with your work, your life and the opportunities you face you will find enjoyment in EVERYTHING law related whether that is the practice of law or the practice of farnarkling in the presence of a JD.

I did my articles of clerkship1 and three years' (moderately) hard labour at Mallesons. It was a great experience and a great grounding for what was to follow. If you don't get on the grad program at a commercial firm, not all is lost. I actually know some people who didn’t go to one of the big firms and are good lawyers and enjoy life. Now I come to think of it, there might even be an inverse relationship between enjoyment of life and time spent at a big firm. Here's some advice: be creative when looking for work – don't be afraid of the suburbs and the country if you're interested in private practice. Some of the best experiences (and best working conditions) of my contemporaries were found in rural areas. In fact, some found romance and have never returned to the city.

Why did I leave? It’s difficult to say but the main motivation was I wanted to have another experience and my wife was due to have a baby so I thought something a little more low key for a while and I ended up as an associate to a Supreme Court judge. That was a fabulous year and I really recommend that everyone think about an associateship anywhere in the court hierarchy. That was a fabulous year and I really recommend that everyone think about an associateship anywhere in the court hierarchy. I formed a really close bond with my judge (it's referred to as "judge-love" in the trade) and the few times he has been overturned on appeal have hurt me worse than when my girlfriend at high school spurned my affections for the class meat-head (when I last saw him at a school reunion he had a "your next" tattooed across his knuckles. I said to him "we're, they're, you’re – do you see the pattern?" My memory restarted sometime into the next week.) Back to the associateship, after Mallesons it was, well, a holiday camp. All the power is with the Court – that means most of the work is done in the following order of effort and endeavour: solicitors, junior barristers, associates, court staff, baristas at the hipster cafes around the Court precinct, judges and last, but not least, QCs. As an associate, you get to read all of the material and see the arguments presented by some of the leading (and not so leading) advocates. Either way, it’s a valuable lesson in the law. But, to quote another cliché, all good things must come to an end and all silver linings have a cloud. You don't get paid much as an associate so after a year I had to think about feeding my (burgeoning) family.

I met someone at a party who mentioned a job that was advertised at the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Up until that point, my understanding of the public service was pretty much comprised of Yes Minister (this was well before the Thick of It and Hollowmen), Green v Daniels and attempting to register a car in Paris in 1998. It turned out to be a masterstroke. Who knew about the important role that the public service provides in advising Ministers and Cabinet on their response to emerging public issues, in developing public policy, in responding to crises, in developing legislation and maintaining the proper constitutional balance between the States and the Commonwealth in our federation? I spent three years in DPC and the insight that it gave me into the inner workings or our constitutional structure meant I was, from then on, a committed public law lawyer (with a penchant for an occasional dabble in commercial law).

After three years working within government, it was time for a new challenge. I had always wondered about life as an advocate so I took the plunge and went to the bar. That was nearly four years ago (meaning it's the longest I have ever held a job). I have never worked harder but it is quite flexible meaning I can work from home to a large extent. I have also never been so terrified and so elated – all within a few minutes. I think the first year was largely about resilience. After that, well, just watch Rake and you will have a pretty good idea of my professional experience.

So back to the start … I was actually asked to reassure you that decisions you make in second year won’t lock you into a career path that you will later regret. On one level this is deeply philosophical; I mean do we have any choice in life or is it some random predetermination based on our genes and the interactions we have with others, also being controlled by their genes? Is there such a thing as criminal liability or is it just genes and environment conspiring to prevent some members of the community from complying with the rules set by others. Oh, yes, back to the point – I don't think, in a liberal western democracy you are ever locked in to anything. It’s a matter of engaging with your opportunities and being a bit creative with your options.

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1 A Dickensian practice where, as a law graduate, you would become indentured labour to a bloated middle-aged troglodyte who had learnt from those before him (they were universally hims, which might be the source of the problem) how to make money through the exploitation of indentured labour and the pursuit of the second oldest but noblest profession.
Standing out from the crowd

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