

Events

THE HIDDEN GENDER OF LAW: 25th ANNIVERSARY

Two weeks ago, the Law School celebrated International Women’s Day and the 25th anniversary of publication of ‘The Hidden Gender of Law’. The LSS Women’s Portfolio presented a talk by the authors of the book, which is a feminist legal perspective on the law.

Reg Graycar, an emeritus professor at the University of Sydney, and Jenny Morgan, a professor at Melbourne Law School, spoke engagingly about the themes of the book and reflected on the process of writing it together.

Graycar and Morgan explained their unorthodox decision to structure the book around issues that affect women,

rather than the traditional divisions of law. This allowed the reader to easily access the diverse areas of law that impacted that issue.

They spoke about themes of the book; the meaning of equality, the public private divide in law and the epistemological challenge—described by Professor Morgan as ‘How does the law know what it claims to know about women?’.

Professors Morgan and Graycar reflected warmly on the process of writing the book together. However, there were also the challenges of collaboration before the age of the internet; posting floppy disks from Melbourne to Sydney, using a laptop the size of a fruit box (one between the two of them) and keeping track of who had the ‘mistress copy’ of the chapter.

A second edition of ‘The Hidden Gender of Law’ was published in 2002. The authors spoke about the

difference writing on the topic over a decade later. Aside from technological advancement being a huge relief, there was a huge increase in the volume of feminist theory.

Concepts such as intersectionality had entered the feminist theory discourse and there was more engagement with other ‘outsider jurisprudence’ and issues facing minorities.

The event was well attended; not only every seat but also most of the floor was occupied. More than a few first edition copies of the book were proudly brandished by attendees, many of whom were colleagues or former students of professor Graycar and Morgan - reflecting the lasting impression their teaching and writing has made.

Kalia Laycock-Walsh is a second-year JD student.



Spot the difference!

Your trusty law school newspaper racks up a win against the big guys.

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DE MINIMIS

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Sponsorship Syndrome

Amani Green discusses the effects of corporate sponsorship on the culture of Melbourne Law School.

Looking through my upcoming Facebook events is absolutely exhausting. At 6.30pm on the date of writing this, I think I have five different things on. If I could be in five places at once, I would attend an event trying to sell me on corporate industry, be at an interesting-sounding public lecture about things related to my course, be undertaking Chinese lessons (and be able to put “conversational Chinese” in the otherwise barren Language Skills section of my CV), and play Allens Linklaters Mixed Netball with my law mates.

All of these things are worthwhile pursuits. But what law firms have over us is that we have *no idea* what they want from us. We have no realistic way of gauging the culture, vibe, or any sort of difference between the major firms. Moreover, they reserve the right to choose between us based on criteria which I am sure are perfectly arbitrary.

So if it means I can see just a glimmer of what it would be like to be at Skadden or Linklaters, I'll drop everything to get there. It becomes equally stressful and dreary to stare down the barrel of the week ahead: between work and volunteering commitments, class and goddamn corporate cocktail evenings, the realisation dawns that, nope, there just won't be time for readings this

week either. That's what SwotVac is for, right?

There is a sort of inundation that happens at law school. We don't know what commitments are worthwhile so we overcommit. We don't know what the right work balance is so we overwork. We are directed towards these amorphous goals that are difficult to understand.



We do all this shrouded by a black cloud everybody calls the Shitty Job Market, which nobody can quantify or explain, aside from the fact that we should all find it terrifying. The whole internship/clerkship anxiety is fed as much by us students as by the firms themselves.

It is probable that this contributes to the overexposure of corporate firms about the place, and the unhealthy corporate competition complex that ensues. It can be easy to imagine the dystopian future that Equity Uncle envisioned last edition, where we sit on the DLA Piper Lawns watching the

Herbert Smith Hunger Games, where eager law students literally fight to the death for clerkships.

I get it: the LSS needs money for things like beer. I like beer. If that beer is free because we slap somebody's name on the front of an event, that's a trade-off I'd make every day of the week. And that is also true for the great number of things the LSS offers - whether frivolous, like the Hip Hop Lollipop initiative, or essential, like the Book Fairy.

But we've got to step back and acknowledge the impact corporate interests can have on our student culture, as we relax to Allens Linklaters yoga sessions and bond over Allens Linklaters netball and upscale our commercial acumen at the Allens Linklaters negotiation competition (is it just me, or has Allens targeted their sponsorship really well this year?). I wore a netball top with 'Allens >> Linklaters' emblazoned on it, and I wasn't thrilled, but I was cool with it, because without sponsorship, we would likely not be able to have netball, or yoga, or an STS program.

However, we need to have a conversation as a community about where the line is, and how willing we are to toe it for the benefits we receive.

It's also not as simple as that. We also are expected to deliver things to firms when they offer their support. We need to deliver a certain number of people to events.

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Opinion

SPONSORSHIP SYNDROME

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We need to deliver a particular image of firms: display their banners; have our LSS officials make pleasant small-talk with the reps when other students are too timid or (more likely) too bored to engage with them. We actually host networking opportunities at our otherwise non-corporate events.

We do this out of a worry that firm reps will start filtering into other societies, and other law schools. Again, they hold a lot of bargaining power. This isn't necessarily bad, or one-sided: people can get genuinely good advice and insight from firm reps, which can be helpful and enriching.

These people tend to be young grads, and they tend to want to help out; they remember being confused and overworked at law school—they are probably just as overworked now—and they want to give good advice. But there are only so many times I'll hear "and I just *love* [firm x]" before I cease to believe it.

It is important to mention that, as LSS President Matt Pierri has advised me, the LSS is consciously diversifying their sponsors from just corporate law firms to government and industry as well, which reclaims some of this bargaining power. In all of these relationships, it pays to be conscious of what the cost of sponsorship is.

So, the sheer number of corporate events that I feel like I need to go to is stressful, and the amount of corporate money that goes into our Society in part fuels that stress. I don't, of course, think the LSS is corrupt, or not up to the challenge. In fact, I think quite the opposite. But these are delicate balances.

In high-turnover student organisations such as this, the lack of institutional knowledge filtering from year to year means it is easy to fall into a cycle of doing things the way they were done last year because it

seems like that's how they've always been done.

It also means we lose bargaining power; whilst our representatives for negotiating with firms will turn over from year to year, the representatives from the firms remain the same. One of the perils of a three-year degree is that the current President was a first-year only two years ago. If every year we make small concessions (like firm names on netball jerseys), two years down the line, the entire cohort will accept that as status quo, because they have never known non-Allens mixed netball.



Photo credit: University of Melbourne

Obviously, this by itself is a small issue. However, small concessions like this, over time, shape the culture of the institution, and will shape future law students' perceptions of what is normal. These are *structural* issues that need to be addressed, or at least acknowledged.

So whilst we lose institutional knowledge from year to year as leaders graduate and move on, even the innocuous decisions that are made by the LSS can remain ingrained in the culture of the institution for years to come. The debates and dissents are forgotten. The flip-side of this argument, however, is that even small positive changes made by any one committee can lead to lasting change for the better. All this is to say, it is valuable to question the small stuff.

I'm personally feeling the results of all this: I'm stretching myself to go to corporate events to find out about firms I do not understand so I can apply for jobs that I'm not entirely sure I want, but they have been advertised well, and a firm rep told me that it was a great decision for my future.

You never know, I just might come back as a grad and tell all the first-years how much I "*just love the firm*" one day. But I doubt it.

This isn't an article about how the LSS should do more to coordinate events in a way that is more suitable to a student's calendar, although it could be. This isn't an article about how it can feel like we're selling ourselves to corporate interests and we're too stressed-out and fast-paced to ask *why*, although it could be. This is just an article about how it feels like the odds are stacked against me, and every week feels more frantic, and I just feel like some fucking solidarity.

But, in that solidarity, I would prefer us to be a student body that is cautious to guard our student organisations from becoming corporate marketing machines. Corporate sponsorship is necessary for the LSS to provide the great things that it does, and it is reasonable for firms to expect some promotion in return, but we need to be watchful of the extent to which that affects our student culture.

Whilst I cannot stress enough that I am pro-free beer, we should be cognisant of its costs, whether at LSS events, or at corporate cocktail evenings, or at those events where it can be hard to tell the difference.

DE MINIMIS IS...

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Poetry

It's been a year, just me and you,
 Us up against the world,
 Readings, essays, our moot debut,
 In the deep end we've truly been hurled.
 But through it all, you stayed so bright,
 A gold streak in a world of hurt,
 Through PPL readings we stayed up all night,
 Where I struggled you were always alert.
 In SwotVac we pushed even harder again,
 Lines of text turned neon and bold,
 From families and friends did I truly abstain,
 But you I did have and did hold,
 To Goldie I thank you for all that you've given
 Your loyalty is truly outstanding,
 Where I've hurt you I hope that all is forgiven,
 For the two years ahead are demanding,



Photo credit: User:J.Smith, Wikimedia Commons

Through Admin, internships, a clerkship with luck,
 Expect to be pushed to your limit
 A lesser stationary might dare come unstuck,
 Your grit you must truly exhibit
 So here's to my Sharpie, 'Fluo XL'
 The pleasure's sincerely all mine,
 I hope we must never say our farewell,
 For together we truly do shine.

Jacob Debets is a misunderstood second year student and co-editor of De Minimis who needs to see the wellbeing centre ASAP.

Don't like the content? Write your own!

De Minimis is written by, and for, the students of Melbourne Law School.

We welcome any and all quality writing that might interest our readers.

If you have insights into the student experience, the legal industry, events on campus, politics, movies, or even fashion, send an email to the editor:

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