

De Minimis

Tuesday, 17 October 2017

Volume 12, Issue 12

www.deminimis.com.au

RILEY TO RUN FOR TOP DOG IN 2019



STORY ON PAGE 2

Illustration by third-year JD student Jenny Au

RILEY, JURIS DOGTOR, ANNOUNCES 2019 LSS PRESIDENTIAL BID



RILEY THE WELLBEING DOG

You've heard before, but you'll hear it no more - "I'm not voting in the LSS elections because I don't have a dog in the fight!"

Unenthused? Disengaged? You think voting doesn't make a difference? You'll feel that no more as you, (also my campaign slogan): "Get **RILED** Up!"

Yes, I am announcing that in 2018, I will be voted in by you, the Humans of Melbourne Law School, as your 2019 LSS President. I will also be applying for Valedictorian and intend to take the position of Dean if it remains unfilled.

Am I announcing too early? Are election seasons getting longer? It took a while for Americans to accept that a Cheeto could indeed be president, so I understand that it might take some time for you to embrace a canine overlord. But you'll have to, if you want to Make MLS Great Again.

And look, I hear those concerns - a DOG? As *PRESIDENT*? And to those concerns, I say, lay on your back while I rub their bellies and assuage their concerns. After assembling a team of expert puppy interns (NOT unpaid - they all received biscuits) we have gone through the LSS Constitution (unamended since 1857) and it states "All JDs are eligible to apply." Given that I am the Juris Dogtor, I can run (can you fault my legal reasoning?). The faculty is aware of my campaign I am the official *De Minimis* endorsed candidate for next year (as the only announced candidate).

It's sometimes said that the LSS elections are just a "popularity contest". But why are we so dismissive of that? Until the law school creates some sort of Electoral College or other representative mechanism, the

person/animal with the most votes must win. And what could be more popular, more of a uniting force, than a literal dog? The other students in your cohort, they can be hard to reach sometimes... going to moots, going to interviews, saying they have to "study". Who can you count on? Riley, that's who - I'm there every Thursday, reliably tail wagging, ready to catch tennis balls and add a boost to your day.

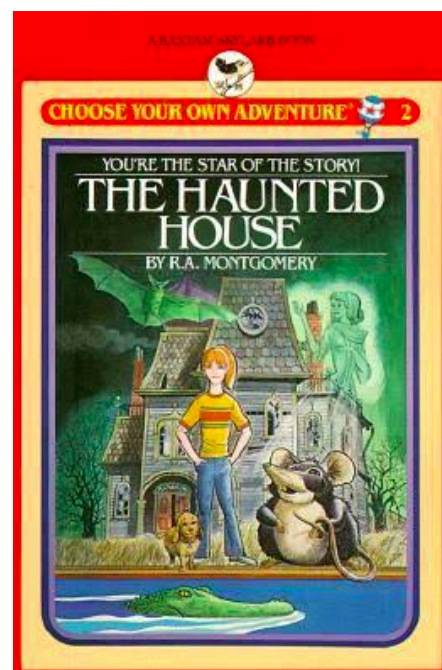
Have you had it ruff? Things will be different around here, announcing my policy platform:

1. Animal law will be not just an available elective, but a compulsory subject
2. Property law will have a greater focus on negotiating leashes
3. Introduction of ability to complete course in a "dog years" schedule
4. Subwoofers to be installed on each floor of the law school to maximise partying potential
5. Phresh Thursday is now Phresh Everyday
6. The Corkman to be rebuilt as the Corkman Irish Pub & Kennel
7. Purely Dictato be renamed Purely Dogta as a voice for animal students
8. Whatever it takes to make things a little more pawsome around here - get in touch with any ideas!

Does that sound as good to you as it does to me?! I hope you're as excited as I am. XOXO, Pugs and Kisses, your 2019 President, Riley.

Don't forget, get **riled up**!

Riley may not be JD student, but he is a very good boy



CHOOSE YOUR STORY

JANELLE KOH

This weekend I took my first gaohu lesson. What was meant to be a study session at a friend's place turned into an impromptu music lesson by her mother, then an hour practising the scales, then an unexpected jam session...

Story 1

Soon after I left my friend's house, I forgot all about the music. I remembered instead the quantity of work I had to do. The remedies assignment that was waiting, expectant, OneNote and PDFs still open on my napping computer. As the mountain of work loomed big in my mind I gave voice to it. The mountain learned how to speak, and tell stories. It told me stories about how it was made out of work worth doing, how conquering it would be like pulling the proverbial sword out of the stone. Get it done before everyone else, and I could be the King Arthur of Remedies. Would I take the path of righteousness? No, I chose the path of vice and sloth, playing around when I should be studying. I am nothing but a jester, and I don't even have that cool hat with the bells. My mountain of work shakes its massive head, and unjust enrichment notes flutter down from the sky.

I should be studying, I know.

Story 2

The gaohu enamoured me. More than any other, it seemed to have a pre-requisite of grace - the way you hold yourself affects the way you hold the instrument. It makes the difference between a note swollen with

Choose your story continued

sound, and a sickening buzz. My friend's mother demonstrated to me the correct bowing technique. I watched her right hand, and could think of nothing to describe the way she played except through this word: 送. A Chinese word, meaning to give, often used in the context of gift-giving, where generosity is implied. She sent to the instrument something that she thought it might appreciate, and it returned the favour.

The body of the gaohu is a long thin stick, to which two fine strings are attached. These strings are not traversable, in the same way you can run your fingers over a guitar. One hovers above the other, in a constant tension. Like two star-crossed lovers, never the twain shall meet - because curiously enough, the bow comes attached to the instrument, caught between the two strings. One may bow up and bow down, but never both at the same time. This instrument felt undeniably dramatic, and I could not get enough of it.

I managed to pitch my way through a few simple songs, accompanied by my friend on piano. Some old Chinese ones that my mother used to hum when I was younger. The tone of the gaohu, unmatched by any Western instrument, is at once creaky and sweet, attendant and grouchy. I recorded snippets of the songs to show our other friends, but the fluted edges of each note were tamped, mashed down to a wail. All you could hear were dull, wrong notes. When listening to the recording, it incited our back molars, made us bare our teeth and groan. A friend attempted to hammer his wince into a smile.

It sounded better than that, I promise.

I tell myself these stories, but sometimes I forget that one is truer than the other. Story 1 makes more sense to me, because it's always easier to tell myself that I'm the problem. I am lazy, and never ever working hard enough. But I like Story 2 more, because it tells me that I am more than the wrong notes I make. I am a music student, I am a friend, I am a duet partner, I am more than a questionable law student. I do have a choice, between the stories I tell myself. And I think it's important that we like the choices we make.

Janelle Koh is a second-year JD student



ABBY CONE

Last weekend I received my acceptance for exchange. This means that within two weeks I will have spent my last week at MLS and within just over a month I will hand in my last ever assignment. The feeling on receiving this letter was for the most part pretty standard; happiness at being able to ask the government to support me while I travel, nervousness at leaving the city that has been my home for 6 years perhaps forever and surprisingly, overwhelming relief.

I will be the first to admit that I have a complicated history with the law school. While I have met inspirational people and formed some strong friendships I have also faced many challenges, some expected and some not. I didn't aim to end up here, I've battled to be able to study and work enough to support myself, I've been diagnosed with anxiety and have at times felt caged in and claustrophobic as soon as those glass doors slide shut.

I don't think I'm the only one. Not everyone fits in here (to which the weekly articles in *De Minimis* can attest) but it's more complicated than that. I wouldn't consider myself as being on the outer of MLS and don't pretend to speak for some sort of Breakfast Club-esque group of misfits. However, towards the end of semester I have noticed an increased amount of nostalgia amongst the third years; year book, valedictory and each social event taking on new meaning as it may be 'the last'. This growing nostalgia has made me reflect on my time here and I'm still pretty unsure of the outcome.

In first year everything was new, large groups of LMRs would hang out in the sunshine and each class felt one inspirational teacher away from a 'Captain My Captain' moment. By second year the law school crack starts to wear off, I realised that I didn't have to attend every event, in fact, it was better for my mental health not to. Anxieties get diagnosed, competition creeps in and the

omnipresent idea of networking may make you question if you have friends or just a carefully constructed house of contacts.

Third year comes along, everyone gets busy. If you've got a strong group of friends this solidifies, otherwise it becomes a long list of 'we should catch up's. Life shifts drastically to what you're doing outside of the law school, what are your plans for the future, where you got (or didn't get) a grad position. If you feel like you just got the hang of the internal goings-on you need to forget that. Don't worry, you won't really have time to remember. It is, quite honestly, exhausting.

It was exhausting from day one and there has been no real break. I found myself withdrawing more and more to things outside MLS, people who have no idea what a top-tier firm is and could not care less.

I look at the people I know who have continued to involve themselves with the Law School with genuine admiration. I have experienced enough here to listen to those who tell me they have thoroughly enjoyed their time with complete belief.

And therein lies the complication. I am extremely grateful to the law school, my teachers and my peers, I have shared in experiences here that have helped me grow and question myself as I did so. And yet, answering yearbook questions about 'my favourite memory of MLS', sugar coating the very real, very challenging issues that I faced during my time here made me feel like a sham.

Our emotional connection to any place is complicated and nuanced. So If you ever feel as if you are missing something by not getting a rush of sentimentality when you look towards Pelham Street, you are not alone.

As for me, will I look back on these three years and fondly remember my time? The jury's still out on that one.

Abby Cone is a third-year JD student and the reluctant Sub-Editor of De Minimis

THE OXFORD MYTHOLOGY & MLS STUDENT ASSESSMENT

GEORDIE WILSON

Gaining an approach to legal study that's fuelled by an independent interest in the law is important. Such a mindset can help push through the moments of boredom within the rewarding field of study. Another is more practical, those heading into the profession will need these habits for when there is a need to spend time outside of working hours keeping up competency in the law.

As marks are perceived to be all-important by many, the approach many take to learning within this school is primarily driven by the assessment structure at MLS. Given that this is the case, formulating the structure of assessment is one of the highest impact decisions the administrators have upon our learning in the school. I think at one level this is recognised, and evident in the way that MLS conducts its assessment differently to most other law schools in Australia. However the system could be improved.

The standard unit assessment structure at MLS is the low-weight mid semester assessment and the high weight written exam. I've inferred these satisfy two respective goals in this place. The structure of the mid-semester as a low weight assessment serves as a way for student and lecturer to check if everything is on the rails at the semester mid-point. It's a low-risk point of feedback that carries marks so all try.

The weighting of the final at MLS leads it to be an extremely stressful and high-risk way to assess competence of students throughout semester. Being so, why run assessments this way? Asking around, some lecturers indicated that high-weighted assessments are long-standing practice.

However habitual practice only explains why this system hasn't moved and doesn't

explain the motivations for this assessment structure in the first place. A search on Austlii or on Lexisnexis for orthodox law school methodology didn't help either, and so we can only be left to guess.

One motivation may have been to minimise the burden upon academics for assessment writing and marking throughout the semester. Another may have been an emulation of an Oxford model of assessment that values a minimisation of assessment throughout the semester in the hope that there is little disruption to the freeflow learning of students throughout.

The second of these possible motivations is undermined by the necessity of a mid-semester assessment to compensate for the extreme format of the final assessments. The extreme weighting and limited time period for writing (typically 3 hours for 70% of a unit's grade) means that these mid-semester checkpoints become very important.

This spacing out has the effect, in an environment where marks are paramount, to require a dedication of focus toward upcoming assessments between weeks 3-7 of the semester. With only a short break before things begin to heat up again as SWOTVAC approaches. There isn't much opportunity in the semester where the pressure is off for free form learning across the units.

The do-or-die nature of the final exam also impacts upon the teaching of units and the way lectures are treated by students. With everything in semester leading towards a high-impact and high-risk exam meticulous detail is spent studying a lecturers preferences, and nuances toward a subject and relating those nuances toward how that interaction with the material should be interpreted with respect to a final exam, rather than an area of discipline. Teachers that have attempted to break this exam-focused pathology within the law

school are often the least favoured among the students, as the construction of a speed-dial taxonomy that aligns with the mind of a lecturer is an effective way to approach the extremely time limited and high-stakes exams. With more than a frantic 3 hours to complete an assessment, there is more scope for a deep engagement with subjects than a panicked attempt at regurgitation. The need absorb these nuances from is a further distraction from independent learning within the subjects.

So what are the alternatives?

One could be a lowering of importance of the mid-semester assessment. By making all mid-semester assessments in this school 'redeemable', less focus need be paid to them and so the assessments would become much less disruptive throughout the semester. A poor outcome on a redeemable assessment would still serve the goal of serving as a litmus test before the final assessment, and so they could still have a healthy role to play.

For the final assessments, the ability to take the assessments for a period longer than a mere 3 hours would allow for a less panicked and reactionary response to the course material. Deeper engagement with course material would be encouraged, and the potential to explore 'rabbit-holes' within topics, more realistic when such exploration won't be made irrelevant or perhaps even too much of a risk to explore when time is so limited and assessments have such high stakes. A final assessment that consists of multiple components, such as a long-form essay alongside a hypothetical; perhaps stretched out over an entire weekend is clearly a better approach than the current default assessment structure within this law school, and it's an approach done before in a few units.

Geordie Wilson is a second-year JD student

ON FREE WILL, PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY & THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

SCOTT DRAPER

You are sun-baking on the University Square grass, enjoying the warm breeze of a spring day. Suddenly, you notice a fully-grown grizzly bear a mere three feet away. It sinks its teeth into your ankle and tears off your foot.

Consider this change. Instead of a bear, a man with a machete strolls onto the grass. As you try to determine which snapchat filter will best convey the chilled life of studying law, he hacks off your foot.

What is the difference here? The outcome is the same, but something seems to have changed in relation to each attacker's responsibility.

Bears are bears, you might say. They don't know what they are doing, and can only be expected to act as an animal would. Humans are different. They are complex creatures, endowed with reason and awareness of the consequences of their actions. Humans who have made bad decisions had the freedom to make different ones. As such, they are blameworthy.

This appears to align with the intuitions of most people. But in a scientific sense, this view of free will is mistaken. We spend much of our time - of our lives - regretting actions of the past, blaming others and ourselves for various failings. We think it is justifiable to hate others for their harmful conduct, and think criminals need not only be detained for public safety, but are also deserving of punishment. What I wish to encourage, dear reader, is a view of personal responsibility which may challenge the basis of this intuition. The premise is this: the feeling that we are the conscious author of our thoughts and actions is an illusion.

The logic is as follows. The brain is a physical system, constrained by the laws of nature. All thoughts and actions which originate in the brain are therefore subject to a chain of cause and effect, extending endlessly into the past. The claim that someone should have "decided differently" is to suggest that they alter their own neurophysiology. But the man's decision to chop off your foot was a part of this brain chemistry, itself a consequence of a lifetime of brain events, genetic and external

influences. Where is the freedom here?

This may seem too easy, as if to exonerate all conduct because it is chemical. But in some sense, this is all you need. Here's an experiment. Pick a number between 1 and 100. Concentrate on your mental processes as you choose.

Notice that this is the freest choice you will ever have - if free will is not here, it's nowhere. Question: did you decide which numbers would appear in your mind? Obviously not; they just popped into your head. Were you free to choose something which never occurred to you? You couldn't be.

Perhaps you converged on two numbers. You were thinking of 19, but then you remembered that 7 is your favourite number, so you picked that. You might think this is where free will makes its entrance. But ask yourself, did you author the thought that directed you to 7? That also just appeared in your mind. Why didn't it, for example, have the opposite effect of making you want to choose a number different from your favourite? At bottom, you can't explain it.

If you pay close attention, you will notice that you are not really controlling anything - you are simply witnessing the internal monologue of your own mind. The crux is this: if you are confused about my argument so far, you didn't create that sense of confusion. Equally, if you understand, you are not responsible for understanding.

How can we view and respond to criminal behaviour in light of this? Criminals are, in some sense, victims of their own circumstances. They had the wrong parents, the wrong genes, the wrong brain, or some combination of factors. It appears strange to say, but ultimately one is unlucky to have the mind of a murderer.

This is not to say that autonomy is irrelevant or impossible. There is a difference between committing an act in alignment with your own intentions, and doing it with a gun to your head. But the difference is one which explains what kind of person you are - what you are likely to do in the future - not that you are responsible for being that person.

Neither am I claiming that all criminal actions are the result of mental illness. This defence simply recognises that conduct can be explained with reference to an isolated factor for which the person is not responsible. But in reality, we could say 'this person would never have committed this act if not for the having their brain, their genes, their friends, a lifetime of particular external stimuli,' etc. Our attribution of responsibility is a failure to trace back the thousands of individual factors leading to this decision, none for which the person in question could be held responsible. And a complete understanding of the person's neurophysiology would be as exculpatory as discovering mental illness. In fact, our growing understanding of mental illness - from treating autism as a spectrum, to Forgotten Baby Syndrome - indicates this expansion of deterministic thought in medicine and law.

But despite the clear role of luck, the desire to live in a peaceful society requires that we protect human life and other interests. Criminals are public health concerns, and so it is justified that they are detained and removed from the public when their conduct signals an intent to commit further criminal acts.

This is not, of course, the position of our legal system. Public safety and deterrence are important factors, but punitive and retributive measures are regularly imposed on the basis of deserved punishment. Much of criminal, tort, and other law rests on an (arguably false) assumption that people could (and should) have acted differently in the past.

Compassionate law reform requires us to be more than empathetic. We must recognise that if we were in the shoes of another - thinking their thoughts, living their life - we would act exactly as they had. There is no room for the freedom we cling to which credits us with our own genius, or devastates us for our failings. Treating criminals as intelligent grizzly bears allows us to focus on pragmatic solutions to human violence, rather than seething over the evil we imagine people invent within themselves.

Scott Draper is a second-year JD student

YOU CAN COMMIT TO JUSTICE IN YOUR CAREER



TILLY HOUGHTON & JAYNAYA DWYER

That every person before the Court has the right to representation is a fundamental principle for the legal system—if it is to be a just legal system. But in a democratic society that adheres to the free market, this, in practice, looks markedly different: the resources available to a powerful defendant are in many cases superior to those of the plaintiff seeking the jurisdiction of the Court. We all know this, but as the offers for clerkships come out very shortly, it may be worth re-asking the question: why did you choose to study law?

For a great many of you, it was (and remains) to make a substantive difference to society in a way that leaves the world a slightly better place. Perhaps when you started PPL and learned about the extent and limitations of international law, of domestic sovereignty, and of the legislature, the idea of challenging the powers that be became an overwhelming thought. Suddenly, your first fee notice stacked on top of your undergrad fees began to make you anxious, and you recalled that faint doubt you tossed aside that the legal industry is a competitive one for a graduate. Enter the clerkship process.

Now you're looking through the firms to see who does what pro bono work, and how those sectors align with your own values. The clean, aesthetic graphs breaking down the number of hours and the areas reached give you a sense that it is certainly possible

to pay off your debt *and* get experience *and* make a positive difference; but make no mistake; it rarely looks like this in practice. A top-tier firm may have done enormously beneficial work for women in the legal industry, or for diversity, whilst simultaneously defending a corporation that has actively contributed to human rights abuses either domestically or abroad. It may have contributed enormous resources to funding mental health programs or wellbeing initiatives, while also providing key counsel for the Commonwealth on matters of immigration. A firm is a firm is a firm, but a firm is a power structure which serves its own interests, and those are usually those of the client with the most money to spend.

Yes, it is nearly inescapable—but only to an extent. All of this is information that is publicly available to anyone who wishes to find it. It is unreasonable to expect that any law student with a potential graduate position on the table disregard it solely because an enormous firm with hundreds of solicitors may have acted on a case that is against your moral position. However, it is equally as unreasonable to expect that just because a law firm does pro-bono work, that it is immediately absolved of the other wrongs it perpetuates. Remember why you got into law in the first place, and ask yourself if you're really, genuinely happy to be in an environment where that is a nominal at best part of the work that you will be doing.

It is understandable that at this point in semester we aren't in the practice of putting time aside to contemplate our moral limits. Any offer you get this week is a product of a lot of hard work and should be celebrated. Please don't forget, however, that you are promising, intelligent, capable, thoughtful - and even marketable - and that the decisions we collectively make regarding how we want our careers to play out as we leave MLS will shape the legal landscape in this country.

Taking back agency in this wild process means noting the following in relation to the firm you are 'considering' an offer from: are they are currently representing a client or cause that you find to be morally dubious? You might have to do a little digging. They probably didn't boast about it at the interview or on the page of their clerkship brochure opposite their pro bono

program.

Taking back agency might look something like this:

- Make a list:
 - of organisations who you would under no circumstances wish to represent;
 - of organisations who you feel like you couldn't do your best work for if asked to;
 - of organisations who you would feel ashamed to tell your non-law friends that you worked for. E.g. for you this might be representing the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in refugee matters, for others it might be representing a multinational mining or oil company.
- Find out if your future employer currently does this work using the sources you have access to. Eg. See relevant Federal Court decisions.
- If yes, consider how you would respond if asked or required to do this work.
- If no, still consider how you might respond if asked or required to do this work at an early stage in your career, in a new work environment and with limited experience.
- Visualise articulating your response to someone powerful and intimidating (try Peter Dutton or a commercial law partner of your choice)
- Remember why you chose to study law.

We wish you the best of luck when offers come out. We also hope that your career, whatever you envisage it to be, is one that you have actively shaped not according to the perceived successes of working in a particular firm or area, but through your own reflection on your values, your ideals, and your commitments to justice.

Tilly Houghton and Jaynaya Dwyer are second-year JD students and write in their capacity as committee members of Law Students for Refugees

chatting is bullshit

DECLAN FRY & JANELLE KOH

Declan: Chatting is a lot harder than it used to be. On my Twitter recently I saw someone stressing about how many messages they should send to a person who wasn't replying. They settled on three.

Janelle: I wouldn't say harder - I think a lot more work goes into it and we expect a lot more out of it than we used to, but so much of it has become intuitive. So much of it is just 'rules of engagement', things we're expected to know before we even start a conversation.

Declan: Do you worry that social media platforms are too limited by the context of their conception? Facebook seems largely like a virtual simulation of the inside of Mark Zuckerberg's head: white, middle-class, cis-gendered, heterosexual. Not to mention that it began as a campus 'hotties' rating system. What if his wife, Priscilla Chan, had created it instead? I'd like to think it would have been different; but a part of me worries that, given the nature of power structures in society, it wouldn't. You know, men can't always be expected to keep the ship of patriarchy sailing steadily on by themselves. We need those who don't necessarily benefit (assuming anyone really benefits) to help us out. As Jessa Crispin wrote in *Why I Am Not a Feminist*: 'Now that women are raised with access to power, we will not see a more egalitarian world, but the same world, just with more women in it.'

Janelle: I find it really hard to take Zuckerberg out and slot Chan in so easily - you would have to assume they had the same socioeconomic circumstances and privileges to even envisage a position where she would be, not simply capable of, but confident enough to helm a tech startup company in a male dominated industry.

It's an interesting point you make about women helping to keep the patriarchy sailing. It seems to me that women help by omission - lacking the confidence to make positive acts on a daily basis is what drives the patriarchy. Why is it that silence in the patriarchy is a sort of implied acquiescence?

Declan: Subjugation is pretty exhausting, even for the party on top; hence it's important to mould those in the weaker position to keep themselves there while

you're out enjoying a round of golf or whatever.

Janelle: I would say that the fact that Zuckerberg, a White American man created Facebook is not the only determinant of what goes on between the lines of our personal newsfeeds. It is also subject to the compositions within the society in which our feeds are created. It is hard to ignore the presence of African Americans, or Latin Americans, or Asian Americans in the US.

Declan: And yet this again often replicates old racial politics in contemporary online language. Look at the prevalence of white folks using black speech and images in GIFs and memes: isn't this just a new apparition of blackface being played out online?

People like Steven Buryani have talked about how AI is learning our worst impulses - even robots can be racists. Being made by humans, their algorithms inherit our biases and bigotries. In May last year, a report claimed that a computer program used by a US court for risk assessment was biased against black prisoners. The program (Compas) was much more prone to mistakenly label black defendants as likely to reoffend - wrongly flagging them at almost twice the rate as white people (45% to 24%).

Facebook itself is automated and robotic in certain areas, such as where it relies on algorithms to deliver news. So I guess it might not matter whether Chan or

Zuckerberg made Facebook - like an episode of *Rick and Morty* we could discover that in every possible world our technologies consistently reflect dominant societal structures regardless of automation. Perhaps this simply means that Facebook's origins as a compilation of hotties is the most honest and human thing about it, even if it does reflect a culture of objectification.

Janelle: It seems to me that the problem you have with Facebook is essentially one of form. You acknowledge that the structure of Facebook informs its content, and I agree - it would be naive to believe otherwise. But where does this understanding of structural discrimination leave us? It's necessary to understand the ways in which discrimination plays out, particularly by looking into the intersections between cultures, spaces wherein cross-cultural understanding can be provoked. And I think the great potential for Facebook is that each of our news feeds, though informed deeply by our own backgrounds, is also subject to being informed by the backgrounds of others. Because for every three Asians that like a funny video about their crazy Asian mother, maybe somewhere out there, there is one white person who 'gets it' too.

Declan Fry is a third-year JD student and Janelle Koh is a second-year JD student.



LOCKHEED MARTIN: RESEARCH & WARFARE



LUKE THOMAS

The man shooting the finger guns while wearing a VR headset, above, is Christopher ‘The Fixer’ Pyne. This photo was posted on his Facebook page in August after he visited University of Melbourne’s STELaRLab, the first Lockheed Martin-funded research facility outside the US.

Pyne’s visit to STELaRLAB was a showcase for the first bit of tech to come out of this partnership, the unveiling of autonomous unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) that are able to efficiently and cheaply survey power lines while recharging their batteries through an induction loop, allowing them to survey autonomously for days. Powerline surveying formerly cost the government \$1 billion a year to complete by helicopter, so even The Fixer was impressed by how well they fixed the energy industry.

STELaRLab fits nicely with the University’s ‘Growing Esteem’ 2015-2020 strategic plan, which explicitly contemplates public-private partnerships and industry connections as a way to ‘establish a small number of precincts as the locus platform for research commercialisation and impact creation.’

On the one hand, this is an understandable (and lucrative) partnership for the University. Lockheed Martin is an aerospace company as well as a weapons manufacturer, and not all of their products and services lead to civilian casualties. Their recent contracts include securing a bid to build communication satellites for the US government and to develop energy security

infrastructure for US army bases in Texas.

However, what most of the Australian government and University conversation around jobs, growth, and ‘impact creation’ omits is that, at its simplest, Lockheed Martin is the leading manufacturer of weapons for the US military industrial complex. And it has fought hard to retain its market share, no matter the implications for human rights or global stability.

They currently operate a multimillion-dollar PAC with targeted donations for US House Armed Services Committee members—and hold one of the largest defence industry lobbying budgets in the USA. A former Lockheed president even admitted to extensive bribery and political manipulation to secure contracts over their decades-long involvement with post-WWII US military expansion.

Their products are ubiquitous in global warfare. Their Hellfire missiles are dropped over Afghanistan. Their F-35A’s will patrol Korean skies. They maintain business ties with Saudi Arabia, despite brutal bombings in Yemen. And if the sale weren’t blocked by the Obama administration in 2015, the military forces suppressing human rights protesters in Bahrain would have been using Lockheed Martin aircraft.

While STELaRLAB improvements in UAV technology have wider, non-military application for infrastructure projects and energy security, it’s worth considering what impact their research will have on Lockheed’s arms manufacturing—and where they intend on using these innovations next.

Australia has had an increasing role in US warfare, and the recent Pine Gap revelations show just how connected the two countries are on intelligence and warfare. And while I’m not suggesting the recent advancements in UAV technology created by the brilliant engineers at STELaRLAB will be used for deadlier purposes, it’s clear from public statements that the STELaRLAB is being built to achieve Lockheed’s research goals.

Aviation Australia quoted Pyne at the recent event as saying the partnership “will make Australia a better ally to the US...more able to defend our nation and its people, more capable of projecting our power in the region and being a regional power that is standing up for the values that our countries . . . believe in.”

The Lockheed Martin–University of Melbourne relationship is both pragmatic and myopic. The reality of the competitive innovation and research industry is that the University is making a financially sound decision in seeking funding and facilities from a US weapons manufacturers. That’s the reality. The dream would be for the University to instead provide greater investment in researching how to reduce the use of these weapons to make a more peaceful world.

P.S. For a more thoroughly researched analysis of the growing militarisation of university research, check out Alex Edney-Browne’s excellent article: <https://medium.com/@alexedneybrowne/australian-universities-becoming-militarised-9b65f7c64076>

Luke Thomas is third-year JD student