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Enhancing the Law Student Experience and Employability Skills through a Law Clinic and Experiential Learning Curricula

Francina Cantatore
Bond University, francina_cantatore@bond.edu.au

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ENHANCING THE LAW STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS THROUGH A LAW CLINIC AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CURRICULA

“As a teacher I have an obligation to my students to support their employability, their altruistic public service, their career journey and lifelong learning” – Francina Cantatore

ESTABLISHING A PRO BONO LAW CLINIC:

I established and manage the Bond Law Clinic, which:

- is a teaching clinic that has taken student involvement and practical engagement to a new level,
- constitutes a resource for student learning and service to the community,
- provides free legal advice to small businesses, entrepreneurs and not-for-profit organisations,
- allows students to assist local legal practitioners in preparing and providing legal advice to real clients,
- provides a “hands-on” learning experience for students,
- integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection,
- enhances students’ employability skills through:
  - improving communication skills
  - developing legal reasoning and critical thinking skills
  - real world client experience working in a professional environment.

IMPLEMENTING PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING:

Drawing on my practical legal experience in commercial law, I:

- Use ‘real life’ problem questions to stimulate student learning,
- Invite legal practitioners to present guest lectures,
- Include topical or newsworthy topics, and integrating them into tutorial discussion questions,
- Allow students to engage actively with clients and practising lawyers in the Bond Law Clinic.

CREATING RESOURCES FOR STUDENT LEARNING:

My curricula, resources and services promote:

- Interactions in “real” legal contexts and situations through practice-based exercises to develop student problem-solving and analytical skills, linking theory to practice;
- Development of legal professional identity through continued constructive feedback; and
- Graduate employability skills and lifelong learning through building students’ professional skill-set and their desire to improve on past results.

AND INCLUDE

- Creating practice-based resources, fact sheets and templates for use in the Bond Law Clinic.
- Creating a curriculum that engages students in active learning.
- Providing students with links to online resources.
- Devising Practice Manuals and Student Volunteer Guides for use in the Clinic.
- Publishing practice-based articles and a book relating to my teaching areas.

AND TO

Teach students:

- the importance of ensuring client confidentiality and ethical practice habits;
- to resolve legal problems creatively by considering the possible outcomes of actual client problems encountered in practice;
- to build valuable professional networks.

Students have identified many positive benefits in the Bond Law Clinic initiative, including the opportunity for students to:

- “work in a supportive, safe and encouraging environment” (Law Student, 2013);
- “build confidence to distill real issues and to assist clients in finding practical answers” (Law Student, 2014);
- “practically apply the professional skills that they learn throughout their degree in a legal setting” (Law Student, 2013);
- as well as the appreciation that the Clinic “is an excellent learning tool for students and a much needed service for the community” (Law Student, 2014).

“As a law student, gaining exposure to the real-world clients at the Bond Law Clinic was an intimidating exercise. Your direct assistance and guidance helped me to remain confident and professional throughout the placement. Your enthusiasm for my learning helped me to develop initiative in dealing with clients one on one, managing client files and providing a resource base for the clinic by drafting fact sheets for the clients. These skills and experiences guided me through a successful application for a graduate position at a top-tier law firm.”

(Law Student, 2014)