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Foreword

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FOREWORD

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Welcome to our 2017 edition of the Legal Education Review — and my first as Editor in Chief. We are spoiled for choice in this edition, with a general volume and two special editions: one on teaching animal law, and the subject of a separate foreword by guest editor Meg Good, and another special edition put together by the Legal Education Active Learning Research Network ('LEARN') — discussed below.

Our general edition opens with an instructive overview of law students' critical thinking skills. In particular, authors Nick James and Kelley Burton make the case not only for the teaching of critical thinking skills, but provide strategies for assessment using a 'whole-of-curriculum approach'. The article draws on the literature and the authors' considerable experience to articulate not only the measures of student skills, but use this as a foundation to provide sample rubrics for assessment purposes.

While first year programs in law have received considerable attention, Lynne Taylor and her colleagues offer insights into 'The Student Experience in Second Year Programmes in New Zealand Law Schools'. The article reports on a study conducted across three New Zealand law schools, notably in terms of student engagement and wellbeing. This is a useful contribution to the literature both for Australian law schools as a benchmark, but also as an indication of how transition pedagogies are carried through a course of study in law.

It was my pleasure earlier in 2017 to have contributed to a new edited volume on 'wild law' judgments. The third article on our general edition is authored by Nicole Rogers, one of the editors of the wild law judgment project that generated the book. In her article, 'Performance and Pedagogy in the Wild Law Judgment Project', she provides a powerful rationale for drawing on the project—and others like it, such as the feminist judgments project—as a teaching resource. In light of the need for engaging our students in broader contexts of law, I anticipate that this article will provide legal academics with a useful starting point for re-evaluating their approach to teaching.

In the face of increasing calls for a more practice-ready graduating cohort, Rachael Field and Alpana Roy put the case for 'A Compulsory Dispute Resolution Capstone Subject: An Important Inclusion in a 21st Century Australian Law Curriculum'. Their argument canvasses the contemporary role of dispute resolution knowledge, skills, and attributes in professional practice, but also how dispute resolution might play an important role in legal education — so important, the authors argue, that it should not be relegated to elective status. The article analyses how best to structure the law curriculum to provide students with the best opportunity to learn dispute resolution skills, and concludes that a capstone subject is ideal. This is a useful perspective,

clarifying how curriculum design might best respond to an identified learning need.

Finally, the general edition includes an article by Anna Belgiorno-Nettis that provides ‘Student Perspectives on Talking About Sexual Assault in Australian Law Classes’. With increasing awareness of student experiences of sexual assault, including the recent report into sexual assault on Australian campuses, this article builds on the existing literature to analyse students’ own perspectives on the issue as it arises within the law curriculum. To that extent, it provides law teachers with valuable insights into how they might sensitively approach the topic of sexual assault in their teaching.

The special edition by LEARN comprises three articles, arising from papers shared between the authors as part of a project—LEARN—on promoting active student learning. More broadly, the papers analyse student learning in light of technology in legal education.

Of note, in two complementary articles, Melissa Castan and Ross Hyams, and the Griffith University LEARN team of Kylie Burns and her colleagues, each report on their students’ respective experiences in blended and flipped learning. Castan and Hyams have worked with first year students, and provide useful insights into the student experience with a blended classroom. Their work is complemented well by the Griffith University study, that reports on the experience of a number of cohorts in a blended learning environment. These two articles together provide both a case study into the ‘how’ of blended learning in law, but also demonstrate that we cannot take for granted assumptions about student learning.

Finally, the LEARN special edition includes an article by me on the nature of digital literacies in legal education. The article is broad—identifying five ‘domains’ within which to understand digital literacies. Its intent is to sketch the way in which we might give meaning to digital literacies within the context of legal education. While the digital context is inevitably imperative for graduates and their employers, very little has so far been said. This is an area ripe for investigation by legal education scholars.

The additional special edition is introduced by Meg Good, editor of the five articles on teaching animal law. The LER is happy to publish this collection, recognising its value both to animal law teachers in Australia, New Zealand, and beyond, but also to legal academics more widely, as a case study in how to grapple with emerging areas of law and interest in legal education.

My gratitude to the editorial committee for their hard work, and especially to our administrator at Bond University, Doreen Taylor who has overseen the move from the previous system to the new e-publications system over the past 18 months. My gratitude also to authors who continue to support the LER by submitting articles, and to our readership.

Kate Galloway
Editor-in-Chief