

CDU Indigenous Pre-law Program 2020

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In early February 2020 nine Aboriginal participants successfully completed the four-week intensive pre-law program in January and February this year, gaining them a place in the CDU law degree. All nine of those participants intend to begin their law studies in Semester 1 2020, which starts in early March.

This year marked the third year of the re-invigorated pre-law program, which has been made possible through a grant from the Law Society Public Purposes Trust. The program runs in close partnership with the Bilata Aboriginal Pathways Program and the Winkiku Rumbangi NT Indigenous Lawyers association.

Nineteen Aboriginal applicants applied for the 2020 program, with a number then withdrawing before the intensive began. Interestingly, a number of those who were not able to start the program said that their main difficulty was that they were not able to get four weeks leave approved from their place of employment. This reflects feedback we received from the 2019 program, and in 2020 we'll be focusing on meeting with a range of employers to make it easier for future applicants to be granted study leave. At the other end of the spectrum, NAAJA continues to lead the way in providing support for its employees, offering a range of study leave and other support mechanisms to encourage the professional development of its Aboriginal staff. This year seven participants came from outside of Darwin, including three from remote communities.



Pre-law student Tristan Mungatopi presenting his arguments in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory

Twelve participants started the program, with nine successfully completing all the required assessment tasks and activities. Assessment tasks included an oral presentation on a significant case or area of law reform, a written quiz about foundations of Australian law and courts, a 1000-word research essay using AGLC referencing, a 1.5-hour written exam where students had to provide legal advice based on a scenario and supplied legislation and cases, and a debate in the Supreme Court before His Honour Justice Hiley. The two debate topics this year were *'The primary barrier to economic and social development in remote NT Aboriginal communities is government interference and over-regulation'* and *'A treaty between the NT Government and Aboriginal Territorians is a waste of time and money.'* We thank Justice Hiley for generously giving his time to adjudicate two debates and provide feedback to the students.



Pre-law student Mililma May

Students also visited a number of law firms and courts to directly observe and interact with practitioners. In particular we thank the following people for hosting the students and providing valuable input:

- Justice Barr, Justice Hiley and Xavier La Canina of the NT Supreme Court
- Chief Judge Elizabeth Morris and Rebecca Plummer of the NT Local Court
- David Woodroffe, Nick Espie, John Rawnsley, James Parfitt and John Birrel of NAAJA
- Peter Kilduff and Alex Clunies-Ross of the NLC
- Sean Bowden and Dominic McCormack of Bowden McCormack Lawyers and Advisers
- Matthew Nathan, NT DPP
- Joshua Ingrams, Barrister at William Forster Chambers
- Justine Davis, Mediator



Pre-law students working on answering written problem scenario questions

This year we were also able to benefit from the growing cohort of local Aboriginal law students who are already part way through their degree. A number of these students met with the pre-law students to provide real-world advice about studying law and the demands of balancing work, life and family.

During the program, pre-law students also received specialist lectures from CDU law academics on topics including intellectual property law, constitutional law and federalism, international law, evidence law, statutory interpretation, legal research, torts, and commercial law. Many students commented on how the combination of lectures across a wide range of topics, plus site visits to a variety of firms, significantly expanded their understanding of how broad the law is and the variety of opportunities that exist for people with a law degree.

CDU Law is proud that we now have over 70 Aboriginal law students. Approximately half of those students are based interstate and half are local to the NT.

Although we continue to refine the program and materials, it seems that the range of activities and learning materials that have been developed for the program are successful in terms of increasing participants' motivation to study law, providing background legal studies information to fill in any existing gaps in knowledge, stretching participants' ability to engage with complex and technical legal information, developing core skills such as legal reasoning, research and writing, and creating a support network for students who progress into the law degree.

The CDU law discipline continues to seek practitioners and lawyers who are interested in becoming a tutor for our growing cohort of Aboriginal law students. If you are interested in becoming a tutor, please contact Ben Grimes. ■

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