

## Monash Academics Teach Via Satellite

By Erica Contini

It is 8am on a Thursday and the class has grown silent. All eyes are looking at Melissa Castan and David Yarrow in anticipation of an answer to a question just asked. Rather than simply answer the student's question outright, Melissa must first push the red 'un-mute' button so her voice can be sent across the Pacific to her students sitting in a classroom 14 time zones away, on a Wednesday evening at the University of Ottawa in Canada. This is not your typical classroom, nor is it a typical class. Utilizing video conference technology, Melissa and David participate as lecturers in an interactive seminar held for students taking a subject on comparative Indigenous rights at a number of universities across the globe.

The subject is offered by the University of Ottawa and brings together experts on Indigenous issues and students from the University of Ottawa in Canada, University of Oklahoma in the USA, the University of Auckland in New Zealand, and the University of Queensland here in Australia. The combination of experiences from around the

world provides students with a well rounded view of the issues, while enabling them to engage in comparative research and learning on the topic.

This truly global learning exercise is made possible through the use of teleconferencing technology...essentially a sophisticated webcam system. Students sitting in a lecture hall watch the lecture via live video while another camera focuses on them so that they can in turn be viewed by the lecturers. Professor Brad Morse, who recently visited the Castan Centre to speak about Indigenous rights, acts as facilitator for the program and is responsible for choosing which video stream is displayed. He can swap between students and lecturer so that students can interact with one another as well as with the lecturers face to face, while being thousands of kilometres apart.

The actual subject is broken down into two segments. The first consists of lectures given each day by a lecturer from one of the universities over the video link. The lecturer will give an overview of the indigenous law in the respective country, using powerpoint

and traditional teaching mechanisms available in a standard classroom. Students can ask questions during the lectures as if in a normal class. Once each country has presented, the course moves on to a seminar style approach with students interacting with one another and the lecturers over the same teleconferencing link, discussing topics such as Indigenous persons and international law, and comparative land rights.

The technology has given Melissa and David direct access to experts in their field and enabled them to teach students they would not have been able to teach without travelling half way across the globe. "The program provides an effective teaching mechanism and provides students an unparalleled experience", said Melissa. Melissa and David considered the seminars to be among their most rewarding teaching experiences, and while Monash does not currently offer the program as part of a unit, it is hoping to do so soon.

*Law student enquiries about participating in future seminars as part of their law degree should be directed to Melissa Castan.*

## Castan Centre Deputy Director Awarded her PhD

While the title of her doctoral thesis "From Convention to Classroom: The Long Road to Human Rights Education" describes the journey of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Paula Gerber's own long road to her PhD has come to an end. Having received glowing remarks from her examiners, Paula was awarded her PhD in a ceremony on 5 April 2008.

Paula's thesis explored the extent to which Australia (Melbourne) and the United States (Boston) are providing human rights education (HRE) in secondary schools in accordance with Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Paula interviewed numerous teachers and found low levels of HRE in both jurisdictions. She examined the existing theories on why States do, or do not, comply with

international human rights treaties, and found none of them adequately explained the HRE practices of Australia and the United States. Paula found that domestic factors were more influential than international human rights treaties, and in particular constitutional structures such as federalism, and the presence or absence of a domestic bill of rights, were particularly significant in influencing the level of human rights education on offer.

Six years of research and writing and plain hard work have certainly paid off. As one examiner noted "It is clear that Ms Gerber is gifted with certain literary qualities, which makes reading of her dissertation entertaining and rewarding." Another examiner commented that "Ms Gerber's dissertation is an ambitious and impressive piece of

scholarly research." The accolades she has received on her work are well deserved and we congratulate her on this great accomplishment.



Paula and her completed thesis