

1-1-2011

Foreword

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Recommended Citation

Jepson, Marie and Mason, Keith (2011) "Foreword," *Legal Education Review*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://epublications.bond.edu.au/ler/vol21/iss2/1>

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Foreword — Special Issue

Student wellbeing is an extremely important issue in legal education today — there is little point in training law students if they become miserable in the process. The loss of a single law student or graduate through suicidal depression is one loss too many. The Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation arose from one such occasion — a vibrant, promising young man and son, whose death triggered a realisation that friends and associates were having similar experiences. Being high achievers, depression and anxiety are viewed as weaknesses to be hidden. This in many ways only perpetuates the problem as it cuts off the sufferer from available medical assistance and willing support from friends and family.

To bring the issue of anxiety and depression in the profession and law school into the light, and normalise the experience of sufferers, we commissioned a large study, reported in the 2009 Brain and Mind Research Institute report, *Courting the Blues: Attitudes towards Depression in Australian Law Students and Legal Practitioners*. No longer could it be ignored, and we are pleased that the report served to prompt shifts across the profession, from training and support programs for practitioners to improved pastoral care and resilience workshops for law students.

This special issue furthers our understanding of law student wellbeing through both research and practical responses. In the first of six articles, Molly Townes O'Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall report on empirical research into the relationship between student distress and the law curriculum, identifying changes in student thinking styles, self-concept and sense of wellbeing. They include ideas for curricular reform which were generated from discussion between students and faculty. Anna Huggins, Sally Kift and Rachael Field address the self-management threshold learning outcome for law, which encompasses personal development. They propose curriculum design approaches for self-management that promote student engagement, autonomy, and reflective practice.

Colin James makes an important contribution by drawing from the fields of neuroscience and positive psychology to propose strategies for improving students' levels of psychological literacy to help them identify risk factors in themselves and others, to reduce the stigma attached with mental illness, to improve self-awareness and strengthen resilience. Kate Galloway, Rachel Bradshaw, Neil Dunbar and Jamie Fellows identify the link between embedded pastoral care in the law school and student wellbeing, and argue that teachers who

incorporate pastoral care as part of their teaching philosophy produce not only more confident students, but better learning outcomes.

Asmi Wood focuses on Indigenous student wellbeing, identifying gaps for Indigenous law students in areas such as educational and financial readiness, incomplete support networks, insufficient recognition of the holistic experiences and responsibilities Indigenous law students face, and a lack of authenticity between the learning of the rule of law and experience of their people in dispossession and non-recognition of Indigenous law. He puts forward a case study on an effective program for law school which supports Indigenous student wellbeing and success and thereby contributes to closing the gaps faced by Indigenous law students. Matthew Ball adds to the debate by examining the attempts to govern depression, which steer efforts in the direction of student self-government — students are to self-assess their wellbeing, to identify risk factors in those around them, and to take responsibility and steps to address their own lack of wellbeing and that of others, through a community of care. He argues that this privatises the issue of depression, focusing on identification of individual illness and actions to treat it rather than focusing on the overall contexts in which people are becoming unwell, including the law school environment and the broader social environment.

We commend the special issue to readers, be they law students, lawyers, legal educators, or architects of the law curriculum and ‘governors’ of the system of legal education more broadly.

Marie Jepson
TJMF Founder

Keith Mason
Chairman of TJMF Board