



20 February 2011

Stephen Bottomley
Head of School
ANU College of Law

Dear Professor Bottomley,

The Law Students' Society would like to draw your attention to some feedback we have received in regard to International Law LAWS2250 in Semester 2, 2010.

Tutorial Sign Ups

We received over 18 complaints about the tutorial sign ups for International Law (LAWS2250), which failed not once, but twice. In both instances, the cohort was informed tutorials would come live at 9am on a specified date, however the tutorials did not actually open until around 11am the first time, and 12:45pm the second time. This meant that students had to either spend 2-4 hours continually refreshing the page, or give up and try randomly throughout the day (risking their chance of enrolling in their choice of tutorial).

As one Arts/Law student stated:

“The CoL procedures in relation to tutorial sign ups are an absolute disgrace. Law students do not have the time to be sitting in front of a computer refreshing a page until tutorials become live. Most students have to work and others have commitments, which take them away from Internet access. The International Law tutorial sign up process has been inefficient and has caused inconvenience to many students, myself included.”

Similarly, another noted:

“The inability of the CoL to facilitate flexibility and offer options to the student body is embarrassing. The tutorial sign up process needs to be reviewed, as it relies heavily on constant Internet access... Perhaps a better idea for the CoL would be to stagger tutorial sign up places, ensuring that students won't be disadvantaged by being in class, at work etc. during the tutorial release.”

The tutorial sign-up failure was annoying for all students. But for those juggling jobs and other commitments and who desperately need flexibility in their degree, it was particularly frustrating. We know that the College proudly commits itself to providing access for all backgrounds and circumstances, and are concerned that administrative failures such as this compromise that commitment.

Lecture Recordings

Lecture Recording availability was another issue that was brought to our attention. The recordings were removed a fortnight after their initial upload, and were irretrievable after this point. The Law Students' Society understands the rationale behind taking lecture recordings down after two weeks, and agrees that mechanisms should be put in place to discourage students from “cramming” at the last minute. However, the LSS does not feel that taking down the recordings encourages students to learn throughout the semester for various reasons:

- (a) Removal of recordings unfairly disadvantages part-time students, JDs, students not from residential halls and colleges and isolated students, as they cannot get copies of the recordings as easily from fellow students;
- (b) For many students, the effort of sourcing lectures materials once they have been taken down serves as a hefty disincentive for them to catch up, and discourages engagement for the rest of the semester;
- (c) Further, the measure is oddly punitive to those students who *did* in fact keep up with lectures, but nevertheless might want to access original lecture materials anew ahead of exams or assessments.

We feel it is intuitive that the default position for the College should be the provision of the most learning materials to students as is possible at all times – ‘cramming’ can be discouraged through various other means and is in any case, in the experience of the writers, very often its own punishment.

Tutorials

The LSS is aware of the concerning tutorial attendance levels experienced throughout the course. We endeavoured to talk to as many students as possible to find out why in particular they were not attending these tutorials. Three broad reasons came up often during our consultations with students, namely:

1. They were not compulsory (nearly all students cited this as one of their reasons);
2. The preparation was overwhelming (about three quarters of students);
3. The time they received in sign ups was incompatible with their timetable (about one half).

Exam Revision Lecture

The Law Students’ Society also received some complaints over the Revision Lecture held the week before the exam. In particular, the way the second hour of the lecture was run was unclear, and students were provided with little information. At one instance during this second hour, a student who offered an answer was told by the lecturer “If you write that in the exam you will fail.” This kind of public humiliation in a packed lecture is unacceptable, especially because the answer offered by the student was deemed inappropriate because it was not specific enough, not because it was blatantly incorrect.

We would also like to note that we had over 100 students attend the LSS Pre-Exam Revision Lectures for International Law, many of which attended both tutorials. We do not think this is an indication as to the quality of the teaching of the student-run tutorials (they cannot, and should not, be compared to real tutorials). We feel that the high level of attendance rather demonstrates just how nervous and anxious students in the course were before the exam.

Exam Feedback

The LSS was also alerted to a concerning lack of feedback provided from exams. In particular, many exams were returned without comments, ticks or initials of the marker. Feedback is an intrinsic part of the learning process, and the LSS believes that the conclusion of a course does not necessarily mark the end of the learning process in a subject area.

Suggestions

The issues brought to our attention about International Law were **not about the teaching**, rather the administration of the course. We are very grateful for the expertise of the teaching staff in the course, and all benefited from their time, effort and wisdom. The LSS, in response to student feedback, would like to suggest potential changes to the administration of the course in the future, namely:

- (a) That the CoL ensures the tutorial sign ups are not mishandled again, and if possible, that staggered sign ups be established;
- (b) That lecture recordings not be removed after a fortnight;
- (c) That tutorial attendance becomes compulsory, and ideally is assessed;
- (d) That the International Law revision lecture is run more effectively; and
- (e) That improvements are made to examination feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Alice Crawford
President
ANU Law Students' Society
e: Iss@anu.edu.au

David Rowe
Vice-President (Education)
ANU Law Students' Society
e: Isseducation@anu.edu.au