

Law Foundation of South Australia Fellowship Report

Bachelor of Civil Law at the University of Oxford

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My Oxford Experience

The Law Foundation of South Australia's Fellowship enabled me to undertake the Bachelor of Civil Law (**BCL**) at the University of Oxford for the 2021/22 Academic Year. In contrast to other Masters of Laws programs, at Oxford only four subjects are studied in depth over the course of the entire year. My chosen subjects were Comparative Equality Law, Comparative Human Rights, Medical Law and Ethics and Children, Families and the State. I am happy to report I completed my degree with 'Distinction', being the highest available grade. I also received the Ely-Carter Award for the overall Best Performance in BCL Final Examinations and the Ruth Deech Award for outstanding performance in the BCL from St Anne's College.

The BCL is a uniquely wonderful experience. It has been a trying and terrific year all made possible by the Law Foundation's generosity. I could happily elaborate on the beautiful libraries I studied in, the joys of college formal dinners, the challenging articles and judgments I read from all over the common law world and the critical thinking skills I garnered. However, here I would like to report on three more subtle lessons during my time in Oxford.

The first key takeaway from my time on the BCL is that whilst I have worked hard, I am too a product of my privilege. Around the world there remain barriers to women's equal participation in education due to gender-based violence, poverty, and cultural norms. Even at Oxford, women were first conferred degrees in law in 1920. However, as recently as 2016 did the last male-only college at Oxford start admitting women. The rate of change is unacceptably slow. The BCL has reminded me of our collective responsibility to challenge the status quo and consider ways in which the law might better serve the South Australian community. This is especially important for those disadvantaged by their race, nationality, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation and/or religion. Women and other minorities remain underrepresented at the higher levels within the profession in South Australia. Upon my return I look forward to contributing to the development of affirmative action and education measures to make the profession more equitable and diverse.

The BCL is defined by its tutorial system. In addition to weekly seminars, tutorials occur every few weeks and involve circulating 2000-word essays amongst three other students and your tutor and then attending a feedback session. It often results in respectful albeit impassioned debates. To read essays drafted by those who's outlook, culture and experience differ greatly from your own is both an enriching and humbling experience. This formal learning was complimented by discussion groups and attendance at public lectures from both UK and international judges and academics. Highlights included England and Wales Law Commissioner for the commercial and common law division Professor Sarah Green, President of the Supreme Court Lord Reed, and Justice Chandrachud of the Indian Supreme Court. A key takeaway from my experience was to remain open-minded. I learnt how to dissect my own logic and challenge it from multiple angles. If we cannot question ourselves and change our own minds from time to time, how can we as solicitors and barristers change anyone else's?

Another hallmark of the BCL is its enormously lengthy readings lists which are, by design, not possible for one human being to complete. Materials are often international and comparative. This is a constant source of agony for the over-achievers who populate the BCL cohort. This leads to my final takeaway:

you cannot do it alone. The BCL incentivises students to work together. It served as a reminder we are not each other's competition. We are allies. This can sometimes be forgotten in the cut and thrust of the legal profession. I have gained dear friends from all over the world during my time at Oxford and cannot wait to celebrate their future successes.

Acknowledgements

The BCL has been an enormous privilege and a pleasure. I cannot overstate how incredibly grateful I am for this opportunity which would not have been possible without the generous support of the Law Foundation. I am too extremely thankful for my patient partner Callum, my mum, dad and stepmum, my sisters, my granny and grandpa, aunties, uncles, cousins as well as my wonderfully supportive friends during such a challenging year.

I have also been fortunate to be continuously inspired by the academics at the Adelaide Law School. In particular, Dr Paul Babie, Dr David Plater and Dr Laura Grenfell stoked my critical thinking and wholeheartedly encouraged me to apply to Oxford. To them I extend my sincere thanks. As will come as no surprise, there is no shortage of outstanding legal minds in the Oxford Law Faculty. I would particularly like to thank Dr Barbara Havelková, Dr Sandra Fredman QC and Professor Jonathan Herring. In the words of Isaac Newton, "if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants". I encourage any ambitious South Australian law students who dream of studying overseas to apply in future.