

Law Foundation of South Australia Fellowship

Report of Ashwini Ravindran

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I am very grateful to have received a Law Foundation of South Australia Fellowship to support my study at Harvard in 2025/2026. My year in the US was deeply enriching and fulfilling, and it has fundamentally changed the way that I think about law. My academic experience was made even more acute and poignant by the highly relevant real-world events occurring around me, which brought into sharp relief the practical significance of the seemingly abstract object of my studies: constitutional law and the rule of law. I return from my year abroad seeing these principles, and the Australian legal system itself, as more precious than ever.

In the fall semester, I took a course entitled ‘Constitutional Law: Separation of Powers, Federalism and Fourteenth Amendment’ with Professor Vlad Perju, which was a general doctrinal course on US constitutional law that set me up well for the remainder of the year. I also took a course on the First Amendment with Professor Noah Feldman, a seminar on the history of mens rea in Anglo-American law with Professor Elizabeth Kamali, and a seminar on the Federal Reserve with Professor Daniel Tarullo, which was timely given the Federal Government’s efforts at the time to fire one of the Federal Reserve Board Governors. In the intensive winter term, I studied state constitutional law with Judge Sutton of the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, which was one of the most engaging and interesting courses I took during my time at Harvard. In the spring, I took ‘Jurisprudence’ with Professor Scott Brewer, as well as a seminar on equity with Professor Henry Smith and a seminar on originalism with Professor Stephen Sachs, which was probably my highlight. My spring courses allowed me to explore more critical and analytical perspectives on legal doctrine, and have provided me with quite a few ideas for future legal scholarship.

During the winter and spring terms (but inspired by the courses I took in fall), I also wrote a 50-page LLM paper on constitutional interpretation, under the supervision of Professor Stephen Sachs. My paper was entitled ‘After the Text: Post-Ratification Practice in Constitutional Law and Interpretation in the United States and Australia’, and in it I argued that Australia should learn from the US’ extensive use of executive, legislative and state practice to decide constitutional

cases. This was the perfect opportunity for me to apply my newfound knowledge and analysis of US constitutional law to Australian law. To me, using comparative perspectives to improve our own legal system is the very purpose of studying law overseas, and I am glad that I was able to find space within my LLM program to undertake comparative research of this nature.

Outside of my coursework, I also participated in the Prison Legal Assistance Project, a student organisation at Harvard that offers free legal assistance to incarcerated persons in Massachusetts. In part, this involved volunteering for two hours per week in the PLAP office, taking calls from clients. Furthermore, in the spring term, under the supervision of an attorney and with the assistance of another student, I represented an incarcerated person in an internal disciplinary hearing, which involved submitting a discovery request, conducting a cross-examination of a prison officer, and making submissions to a hearing officer. This experience was rewarding and gave my otherwise very academic year a more practical flavour.

The international LL.M. cohort, which represented 59 countries, provided a valuable opportunity to connect with people from around the world, many of whom have become my close friends. These relationships made the year even more special.

Finally, it would be remiss of me to report on my year abroad without noting that earlier in 2025, due to a series of executive orders seeking to prohibit Harvard from admitting international students, my ability to study at Harvard was very much in doubt, and it was only an injunction issued by a federal court that allowed me to enter the country on a valid student visa. The irony that my studying US constitutional law was only made possible through the operation of the US constitutional system itself is not lost on me. It reflects that the core principles of an independent judiciary, limited government power and the rule of law have real-world implications. Perhaps the *least* important of these is for Australian students seeking to study a post-graduate degree abroad. The more significant impacts are, of course, felt by people far less fortunate than me. And while I am proud and grateful to have attended an institution that was committed to protecting those principles, I note that for many others, they remain as unfulfilled promises. I hope to use the immense privilege of this fellowship and of my Harvard education to work, throughout my life, towards their more full realisation.