

WHAT TO EXPECT OF YOUR LECTURERS IN THE LAW SCHOOL

I INTRODUCTION

Within the university, each faculty and school has different teaching practices, different procedures for communicating with students and different ways of supporting students' learning. As a result, you cannot expect the practices, procedures and means of support of one faculty to be exactly the same as those of another faculty.

For a number of reasons, practices, procedures and means of support are different in different faculties and schools. Those reasons include: different learning objectives; different forms of knowledge; and different desired critical and practical skills.

II IN THE LAW SCHOOL

In the Law School, the learning objectives, forms of knowledge, and desired critical and practical skills are shaped by the nature of the subject matter. As a law student, you are dealing with a changing body of information and you are learning how to analyse, interpret and critique that body of information.

As a result, the Law School values understanding and the ability to apply information about the law, and not merely the ability to reproduce specific facts. That is why we value discussion of, argument about, and exploration of the law from a variety of perspectives. Our teaching practices are designed to meet the learning objectives of the discipline of law, and of individual subjects, bearing in mind what we value.

III YOUR LECTURERS IN THE LAW SCHOOL

As academics, your lecturers have considerable research and administrative responsibilities as well as teaching responsibilities. Many of your lecturers are also active in a variety of ways in the community beyond the university. Therefore, you should be aware that your lecturers have many commitments and are not full-time teachers.

In addition, the lecturers in the Law School come from a range of backgrounds. Some have worked in the legal profession, and others have studied and worked in other universities, whether in Melbourne, or in another city or country. The body of academic staff in the Law School is also culturally and politically diverse. The diversity of the staff is an important aspect of the vibrant learning community in the Law School.

This diversity means that your lecturers will have a range of teaching styles and practices. And that means that you will need to adapt to those different teaching styles and practices as you go from subject to subject and encounter new lecturers. Just as your lecturers do not expect all students to be 'the same', do not expect that all your lecturers will be 'the same', except, of course, to the extent that your lecturers, in their teaching activities, are trying to achieve the best learning outcomes for students.

IV WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

To help you to understand the teaching practices in the Law School, and to ensure that you know what you can expect of your lecturers, we have developed a few guidelines.

A Consultation Hours

Your lecturer will advise you, usually at the beginning of semester, of their consultation, or ‘open door’ hours. Sometimes, it will not be possible to meet with a lecturer during their consultation hours. In such a case, your lecturer will be prepared to arrange an alternative time to meet with you. A mutually convenient time can usually be arranged around your own, and your lecturer’s, schedules.

B Other Consultations

Your lecturer will advise you, again usually at the beginning of semester, of how best to contact them outside the classroom. Some lecturers prefer e-mail and some prefer the telephone. But, when it comes to e-mail and phone communication, please note the points below.

1 E-mail

Some lecturers will respond to student queries via e-mail, but only to the extent that the queries are suited to this medium. For instance, e-mail is effectively and appropriately used to ask brief questions for the purposes of clarification or to ask questions of an administrative nature. But e-mail is an inappropriate medium for questions that raise complex issues relating to matters that are discussed in class. If you send an e-mail to your lecturer asking such questions, your lecturer is likely to respond by inviting you to come and discuss the matter with them during consultation hours. Do not expect to be ‘taught’ via e-mail.

Remember that your Law lecturer has commitments other than teaching, commitments that relate to research, administration, and activities beyond the university. Some lecturers will look at their university e-mails only once a week. Others will look at their university e-mails more frequently. You should not expect an immediate response to an e-mail (eg, within 48 hours). And you should never expect a lecturer to respond to an e-mail outside of office hours or at the weekend. Your lecturer may wish to set up other, or additional, guidelines with respect to e-mail, for instance if they will be away from the university for a period of time during semester. If that is the case, your lecturer will advise you of those guidelines.

If you need to discuss a matter urgently with your lecturer, and you are worried that an e-mail will not be read in time, you should seek the help of the subject co-ordinator, or the Undergraduate Studies Office. Always seek help on assessment-related matters in a timely fashion – that is, not at the last minute (see below).

2 Phone

Your lecturer will usually have a telephone number at the university, of which they will advise you and which may be found online. If you phone a lecturer and leave a

voicemail message on their phone, you may expect that the message will be heard within a week. In general, you are likely to receive a reply to a query more quickly if you send an e-mail than if you leave a phone message, but this depends on the lecturer in question. If you do leave a phone message, you should try to leave a landline number at which you may be reached, because at certain times it is not possible to call mobile phones from a university phone. You should not expect your lecturer to distribute to students their home phone number or their mobile phone number.

C Help with Assessment Tasks

Your lecturer will discuss with you, during class time, what assessment tasks you must undertake in a particular subject and what is expected of you when completing those tasks. In addition, your lecturer will, to a greater or lesser degree, ensure that some class time is dedicated to preparing you to undertake assessment tasks. For instance, in subjects where you must sit an end of semester examination, lecturers will usually make class time available for revision and for undertaking practice answers to hypothetical problems and other exercises.

Because, as university students, you are expected to be independent learners and because work submitted for assessment is expected to be the result of your own independent effort, your lecturers will confine themselves to helping you with general advice on assessment tasks that you must undertake. Do not expect lecturers to ‘tell you the answers’ to questions relating in any way to an assessment task. Working out the answers to such questions is precisely what the assessment task requires you to do.

D Review of Practice Problems and Essay Outlines

Before an assessment task is due or an examination is scheduled, your lecturer’s time becomes a very scarce commodity. It must be allocated among a number of students with varying needs. In making that allocation, your lecturer will aim to be fair so that no one student is unduly advantaged by taking up a disproportionate amount of the lecturer’s time. As a result, in the interests of fairness to other students, it may not be possible for you to see your lecturer a number of times in the lead-up to an assessment task.

Some lecturers will review practice problems and essay outlines that you may prepare in the lead-up to an assessment task like an end of semester examination. However, other lecturers will decide that it is inappropriate to do this – generally for equity reasons.

If your lecturer offers to review draft responses or outlines, you should respect whatever limits are set. For instance, if a lecturer is prepared to look at one practice problem answer, do not submit more than one.

Common courtesy demands that when you are submitting practice problem answers and essay outlines to your lecturer for review, you do not submit only rough notes that are difficult to decipher and you do not expect to receive the lecturer’s comments before a reasonable period of time has elapsed. It is also unreasonable to expect a lecturer to review draft responses the day before an end of semester examination.

If your lecturer decides not to review draft responses, they will assist you to prepare for assessment tasks in other ways – for example, by discussing expectations and revision strategies, or by working through problems or analysing past exam papers in class. As is explained below, the lecturer in question will have made their decision about how best to support students to undertake assessment tasks after careful consideration.

E Feedback on Assessment Tasks

When you have completed an assessment task, you may expect feedback on it from the marker (who may not be your classroom lecturer). Where the assessment task is not an end of semester examination, feedback will usually contain a written component in addition to your mark or grade. Once you have reviewed the marker's comments, which will generally include suggestions for improvement, you may like to make a time outside class to talk with the marker about your assignment and their suggestions.

Where the assessment task is an end of semester examination, feedback may not contain a written component. However, you are entitled to see your examination paper and to know the breakdown of your marks for the paper. Your marker/s will usually also be prepared to discuss your examination with you, whether one-to-one or at a dedicated examination feedback session.

You should be aware, when seeking feedback from your marker on an assessment task, that you have no right to request that an essay or examination paper be marked a second time. If you have failed, your paper will already have been second marked, in line with Faculty policy. Detailed information on the Law School's assessment rules and guidelines is available on the LLB website at: <http://undergraduate.law.unimelb.edu.au/index.cfm?objectId=315761BB-B0D0-AB80-E28F27FD2D32122D>.

F Feedback on individual progress

As adult learners in a tertiary environment, law students are expected to be pro-active about seeking support and advice in relation to their studies, particularly if they are experiencing difficulties or concerned to improve their academic achievement. Your lecturer will be happy to discuss your individual progress with you during consultation hours or by appointment.

Support and advice are also available from a range of additional services in the Law School and the University. For example, the Language and Learning Adviser in Law will be able to assist you to design a personalized academic skills development plan and to direct you to appropriate resources. The LLB Student Welfare Officer, Equity and Diversity, is available to assist students facing personal difficulties that are affecting their studies. Contact the Undergraduate Studies Office to find out more about these services and the other services available to you.

Please note that lecturers will not usually contact students individually to discuss their progress. This is because we encourage students to take responsibility for their learning and achievement. Lecturers will always be happy to discuss your progress with you, but they will leave it to you to initiate that discussion and, indeed, will

assume that you are satisfied with your individual progress and achievement unless you do so.

G Attending Class

The Law School is committed to campus-based, face-to-face learning, and, in order to ensure the success of this method of learning, you are expected to attend class. However, from time to time you may find that you are unable to attend a class, and, to accommodate those situations, you are not required to attend class except to the extent that a subject imposes an attendance requirement.

If you are unable to attend a class, you should not expect your lecturer to re-teach material that has been covered in a class you have missed, whether to you or to any number of students who happen to have missed that class. In some cases, the provision of Lectopia may provide some assistance if you unavoidably miss a class. However, as many classes are discussion based and Lectopia cannot record all speakers, it is often of limited use. Also, some lecturers do not use Lectopia (see below) because it can restrict class participation. In any event, it is up to you to catch up if you miss a class by working through the prescribed readings and talking with other students about the issues and questions discussed in class.

H PowerPoint, Lecture Notes, Lectopia

As was mentioned earlier, different lecturers will adopt different styles and practices to achieve the common objective of achieving the best learning outcomes for students. This is the case when it comes to PowerPoint, lecture notes and Lectopia. Some lecturers use PowerPoint slides and others do not. Some upload lecture notes online and others do not. Some use Lectopia and others do not.

When it comes to PowerPoint, lecture notes and Lectopia, there is no single approach to or style of teaching that is 'right' for all lecturers, all students and all subjects. For example, a lecturer may decide not to use PowerPoint in order to retain a higher degree of flexibility in the management of classes than would be possible otherwise. Another lecturer may use PowerPoint because such flexibility, given the nature of the subject, is not so important. In all cases where a decision has been made to use, or not to use, such resources, your lecturer will have given careful consideration to the reasons for and against.

V OVERALL

Overall, what to expect of your lecturers in the Law School is shaped by three facts.

- Your lecturers are not only teachers. They are also researchers, administrators and involved in the wider community. They do not and cannot dedicate all of their working time to teaching. But you benefit from this because your lecturers bring their non-teaching expertise and experience into the classroom.
- Each of your lecturers is different, in background, experience and expertise. It means that your lecturers will have different teaching styles and practices, some of which may be well-suited to your particular learning preferences and

experiences, and some of which may require you to adapt. This diversity is a good thing because it corresponds to the diversity in the student body and contributes to a vibrant learning community.

- When your lecturers make decisions about how they teach, those decisions are the product of careful consideration and experienced academic judgment. You may be disappointed by some of those decisions, but you should respect them. They are made with the objective of achieving the best learning outcomes for all students, in light of available resources and pedagogical aims.