

Indigenous Support at the Law Faculty

The Northern Territory University Faculty of Law is committed to increasing the access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to studies in law. For several years now lecturer in law Martin Flynn has been providing support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For the last two years, the Faculty has made an Academic Support Tutor available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Fiona Hussin has filled this position on a part time basis for the last 18 months. In November 1996, Fiona was appointed to provide full time support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students. This is a new position which was established jointly between the Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies and the Faculty of Law.

Fiona is the coordinator of the Aboriginal Pre-Law Programme which is being run by the Faculty of Law between 20 January and 19 February 1997. Fiona described the programme as "a five week intensive preparatory course which aims to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the knowledge and concepts and techniques necessary for studies in law."

The Programme includes segments of the courses of Legal Process, Torts and Crime. Students will also learn some basic skills to assist them in their studies including using a law library, finding and reading a case, locating legislation, and study and exam technique.

Fiona said that at the end of the course, students would be assessed on the course contents. If students show that they have the ability to study law, they will receive an unconditional offer of a place in law at the NTU and other Law Schools.

When the academic year commences, Fiona will continue to provide the academic support in the form of tutorials to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students.

The faculty believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders will have increased access to studies in law as a result of these measures. Fiona said, "The attrition rate of Aboriginal and



Fiona at work with some of her students

Torres Strait Islander law students, especially first year students, is high. It is not enough simply to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders enrol in law. I see part of my role as Indigenous Support Coordinator to arrange ongoing academic and non-academic support for the students when required."

When asked about the factors contributing to the attrition rate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Fiona said, "The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (vol 1 p 409) has recognised that indigenous Australians make up a disproportionate number of members in the community who are in receipt of social security payments and who live in poverty. Even if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders do have access to studies in law, they are more likely to be faced with a financial stress than mainstream law students. This is a major barrier to success. Other factors include stereotyping, lack of confidence, family pressures, lack of schooling and inappropriate curricula'. The Faculty of Law believes that by conducting the Pre-Law Programme and pro-

viding additional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the attrition rate, particularly for first year law, will improve.

If anyone is interested in finding out more about the Aboriginal Pre-Law Programme, Fiona Hussin can be contacted at the Faculty of Law.

Fiona Hussin was inadvertently omitted from the list of Faculty of Law Staff reported in November *Balance*.

Her details are as follows:
LLB(Qld), Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory.

Research Interests

Aboriginal legal issues, Aboriginal legal education, domestic violence issues

Teaching Areas

Aboriginal Pre-Law Programme, Torts