

WikiLeaks' Julian Assange takes centre stage

It is a sign of the meteoric rise of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks that many people still did not know who they were when Assange appeared at a joint Castan Centre/Liberty Victoria event in May this year. To allow him to talk freely, the lecture was an off-the-record event, but it is safe to say that it left all of those in attendance in no doubt about Assange's commitment to freedom of expression and information.

At the time, WikiLeaks had recently released the 'Collateral Murder' video showing a US gunship killing a number of unarmed people in Baghdad. Since then, WikiLeaks has released tens of thousands of classified documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including allegations of civilian deaths and torture. As a result, Assange has been accused of placing Afghan civilians' lives at risk and some commentators have even called for him to be labelled an 'enemy combatant' and hunted down by US forces. Assange has also been accused of sexual assault in Sweden, which he says is a set up, and is currently considering applying for asylum in Switzerland.

Whatever the future holds for Assange and his ground-breaking operation, we can rest assured that we haven't seen the last explosive documents released on WikiLeaks.

Introducing the Human Rights Online Project

In recent years, as computers, mobile phones, tablet PCs (such as iPads) and other devices have proliferated, people have spent ever more time on the Internet. With this development has come a thirst for information on human rights issues from the online community. To help satisfy this demand, the Castan Centre has been expanding its online presence, particularly in the burgeoning world of "social media", and has now consolidated its operations into the Human Rights Online Project.

In addition to its Facebook page, which allows those interested in the Centre's work to keep up to date with our latest events, submissions and news, the Centre has expanded into Twitter after a pilot experiment during our 2009 conference. Twitter allows users to post messages of no more than 140 characters, and has become a great way for people to post links to interesting articles, videos, blogs and other online resources. Because people "follow" each other's tweets, Twitter encourages communities of like-minded people and organisations to form, with everyone exchanging links to interesting information and encouraging action on important human rights issues. The Centre follows, and is followed by, journalists, human rights organisations, academics, politicians and members of the public.

In recent months, the Centre has added two more social media platforms to round out its Human Rights Online Project. The first is a YouTube channel, which has videos of recent public lectures, interviews with the returned 2010 Castan Centre Global Interns and footage from this year's human rights careers week, hosted by the Castan Centre at Clayton. Next year, the Centre hopes to start filming short interviews with academics, activists and others, especially those who give public lectures for the Centre.

Finally, a new Castan Centre blog site is up and running. The site features commentary pieces from Castan Centre academics and staff on important, topical human rights issues. The purpose of the blog is to post opinion style pieces online to help influence debate and discussion. We also have a companion blog for our Global Interns to use while on assignment overseas.

The Human Rights Online Project brings all of these strands together. The Facebook page keeps Centre followers aware of upcoming Castan Centre events, the YouTube channel helps with public education by providing an archive of high-quality public events, Twitter provides the public with real-time links to important human rights news and views, and the blog enables the Castan Centre to provide comment on topical human rights issues quickly. The Castan Centre website is the repository for in-depth Castan Centre information, including submissions made to parliamentary inquiries, papers presented at public events and careers information for students. What's more, the five platforms work in tandem with each other. YouTube videos are advertised on the Facebook page, news of the latest blog post is advertised via the Twitter feed and the Facebook page, and the website contains links to all four of the social media platforms.

The Centre has decided to invest time in these resources because it believes that people are using the internet to learn about human rights, and use that information to help create a stronger culture of human rights, both in Australia and around the world.

For links to all of the Castan Centre's social media projects, go to the Centre's website: www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre

Centre Deputy Directors receive teaching awards



Castan Centre Deputy Directors Dr Paula Gerber and Dr Adam McBeth both won Law Faculty teaching awards this past year. Paula received the Faculty Teaching Award while Adam received the Early Career Teacher Award.

In addition to the Faculty Teaching Award, Paula received a special commendation for the Monash University's Vice-Chancellor's Awards for

Teaching Excellence. She also received a 'Highly Commended' at the 2010 annual LexisNexis – Australasian Law Teachers Association award for excellence and innovation in the teaching of law. Paula received her highly commended award from the ALTA at its annual conference held in Auckland this past July. Congratulations to both Paula and Adam on their achievements.