Like many students, I came to Sydney Law School seeking a strong legal education. But didn’t realise that through the Faculty’s External Placement Program would get to be part of a real legal practice. Working with the Refugee Advice and Casework Service, had the opportunity to use my legal skills to benefit disadvantaged individuals and groups in our community. didn’t just study, participated. learned things you can’t learn in ... opportunities to many more students, giving them the same invaluable chance to both learn and be of service to others.”

Matt Costa, BA (Hons) 2006, LLB student
Sydney Law School Social Justice Program

In 2009 Sydney Law School will introduce an important opportunity for students to gain practical legal experience and provide vital services to disadvantaged members of our community.

In response to demand from the public, our students and the profession, a new Social Justice Program is being established. This will help expose students to real-world cases, enable them to apply knowledge gained in the classroom, and develop practical skills such as researching, case-writing, and client interviewing.

Opportunities will be created by partnering with community legal centres and other organisations offering legal advice and representation to special interest groups.

Students will experience firsthand the impact of a pro-bono service on the wider community.

The first for-credit unit of study is expected to be offered - with limited places - in semester 2, 2009.

A QUALITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS

In 2009 Sydney Law School secured a $50,000 grant through the University’s Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme to develop curriculum design guidelines and a model curriculum for the Social Justice Program.

The development of these guidelines and model curriculum will ensure good learning and teaching practice and consistency across all units in the Social Justice Program as it develops over the coming years.

The effectiveness of the Program will be evaluated in consultation with students, clinical legal partners, employers of our graduates, and the wider profession.

CLINICAL LEGAL PARTNERS

A number of established community legal organisations have expressed interest in partnering with Sydney Law School. They have an excellent track record in providing much-needed professional legal services to the community.

The Social Justice Program will arrange placements of students with various organisations. These may include the following bodies and others:

Sydney Law School Social Justice Program

Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS)

RACS is involved in a variety of legal work on behalf of refugees, including applications for protection visas, hearings at the Refugee Review Tribunal and Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH)

PILCH was established in NSW to identify areas of public interest where legal assistance may be provided by private lawyers; to match eligible clients with private lawyers prepared to act on a pro bono or other basis and to facilitate co-operation between private and public interest lawyers on public interest issues. PILCH has a diverse membership and support base including private law firms, barristers, the Bar Association, the Law Society, community legal centres, and government lawyers.

Disability Discrimination Legal Centre (DDLC)

The NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Centre was set up in 1994 to help people with disability use disability discrimination laws. Advice and legal services are provided to people with disability, their family, friends and advocates.

Sydney Centre for International Law (SCIL)

SCIL provides opportunities for law students to be involved in dozens of submissions to parliamentary and law reform bodies every year, as well as research on international and human rights law casework in a variety of forums.

Sydney University Law Society (SULS)

SULS has been pursuing various initiatives to extend the involvement of students in the Law School's Social Justice Program. SULS has been working to set up a new community legal service, focusing on areas of legal need for prisoners in NSW. Students will have the opportunity to assist lawyers with casework on prisoners' civil matters.

Policy work and law reform

In addition to involvement in legal work on behalf of clients, many of the organisations to be involved in the Social Justice Program are actively involved in research, policy work and law reform on behalf of the groups they represent. Students will have an opportunity to be involved in this work.

OTHER CLINICAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Sydney Law School has run Australia’s first externship program, the External Placement Program (EPP), since 1996. A highly successful clinical offering, it has been the blueprint for the numerous Australian externship programs that have followed.

In this unit of study students gain the opportunity to work for up to one day per week during the semester in a ‘public interest’ placement site.

In addition, students attend fortnightly seminars which are designed to promote discussion and reflection on a range of issues that may arise during the course of the placement as well as seminar presentations on matters relevant to public interest externships. The unit has a public interest focus which is reflected in the selection of placement sites.

Placement sites include:

- Aboriginal Legal Service*
- Amnesty International*
- Arts Law Centre*
- Aurora Project (Castan Centre for Human Rights)*
- Austcare*
- Australian Human Rights Commission (several units)*
- Australian Law Reform Commission*
- Climate Action Network Australia*
- Disability Discrimination Legal Centre*
- Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education*
- Environmental Defenders Office*
- Family Court of Australia (Federal Magistrate)*
- HIV/AIDS Legal Migration Advice and Rights Centre*
- Intellectual Disability Service*
- Legal Aid Commission of NSW: Childrens Legal Services*
- Legal of Coronial Inquest Unit*
- Mental Health Review Tribunal*
- National Association of Community Legal Centres*
- National Children’s and Youth Law Centre*
- National Native Title Tribunal*
- NSW Attorney-General’s Administrative Decisions SW Criminal Law Review Division*
- NSW Combined Community Legal Centres Group Advocacy and Human Rights Office*
- NSW Coroner’s Court*
- NSW Council for Civil Liberty*
- NSW Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)*
- NSW Ombudsman*
- NSW Public Defenders Office*
- Public Interest Advocacy Centre*
- Public Law Clearing House*
- Redfern Legal Centre Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme*
- Refugee Advice and Casework Service*
- Shadforth Youth Legal Centre*
- Welfare Rights Centre*
- Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Womens Legal Service*
- Women’s Legal Resources Centre*
- Two internal placements: Institute of Criminology; Sydney Centre for International Law