

Interest Group: Clinical Legal Education

Real Client Contact in the Professional Legal Training Program at IJALS, USP

S Sharma

Fellow in Legal Practice & Coordinator, PDL Program, IJALS, USP, Suva, Fiji

This paper discusses the use of field placement program in the Professional Diploma in Legal Practice [PDL] taught at the Institute of Justice and Applied Legal Studies [IJALS] in the University of the South Pacific. In this program it is called the practice placement and extends for a period of 4 working weeks. This is an integral part of the program and is undertaken after 4 months in-house component which enables the delivery of skills training to the students in topics like presentation, interviewing, legal research, negotiation some advocacy and oral and written communication skills.

It is my wish to discuss in detail the appropriateness of field placement as a method of clinical education and investigate its' popularity with the students and their supervising solicitors. I am also keen to explore what other approaches are available to us should student numbers increase in future and sufficient places are not available for their placement. Last year the Law School at Vila in Vanuatu with the assistance of AUSAID set up the first USP Legal Center in Vanuatu's capital Vila. In my view this is a logical forward step in so far as legal training in South Pacific is concerned and I intend to investigate whether a similar center can be established in Suva to assist with the training needs of the PDL students at IJALS.

Our Diploma in Legal Practice is not only a post-graduate program but it is taught intensively in that students are required to dedicate full time to the program for the duration of 26 weeks and attendance is absolutely compulsory except in exceptional circumstances. In the neighboring jurisdictions, of the Australian States and New Zealand the legal Practice program is now delivered through DFL modes. There, many students nowadays are employed by Law Firms, Government Departments and commercial organizations with legal departments and their employers wish to see them complete their legal training whilst at work. Most recently College of Law [New Zealand] Limited was granted approval to deliver a program similar to that taught by its counterpart in numerous centers in Australia. I wish to investigate whether a similar delivery is likely to be demanded soon in the USP region and how ready we are to answer this call.