

**A**s a law student, choosing electives can be a stressful time and if your university offers clinical placements that can be credited to your course, the decision is even harder. Having finally made the decision to complete a placement at Monash-Oakleigh Legal Service the only thing I regret is not doing it sooner.

### Real life experience

A placement is a unique opportunity to gain practical legal experience and see whether you would enjoy practising law after you graduate. You will have the chance to conduct client interviews, draft counsel briefs and maybe attend court with clients. You will be applying legal theory to real situations which is not something you can do sitting in a lecture theatre. One of the highlights of my placement was attending a client's hearing at the Magistrates' Court. I was with the client from the beginning. I gathered character references, arranged for a barrister to appear at court and drafted the counsel brief. I got to see all the work that is involved in preparing for court and how each of the letters I drafted or telephone calls that I made were used in court.

### Enhance your skills

A placement aims to strengthen your interviewing, negotiating, advocacy and drafting skills because of the variety of tasks that you are completing each day. These skills are essential for lawyers, and working on your practical skills early in your career is vital. Developing these skills, however, takes time. The first client interview I conducted was challenging. But I'm glad it was. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on the types of questions I asked (or failed to ask) and get feedback from my supervising solicitor on how I could improve. And like anything, practice makes perfect. At the end of my placement, I noticed a significant improvement in my interviewing and advocacy skills, and this was what I valued the most about completing a clinical placement.

### Practical focus

If you are starting to feel a bit burnt out from attending lectures, preparing for tutorials and reading textbooks, a placement can be the saving grace of your law degree. Due to its practical focus, a placement will feel completely different from traditional law units. You will be enhancing your legal knowledge, but you will be doing so by drafting letters about a client's contract matter or by attending a client's criminal court case.



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# Stepping out of the lecture theatre

TAKING UP A UNIVERSITY PLACEMENT AT A COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE CAN BE A REWARDING EXPERIENCE IN MANY WAYS.

### No formal exam

Not having a formal exam can be a powerful tool of persuasion for some, but daunting for others, as it means that a supervisor will be continually assessing your progress. However, once you start your placement and become familiar with your role, this anxiety will ease. And trust me – during exam time, you will be extremely thankful that there is one less unit that you have to study for. You may even find that you have more time to devote to your other units.

### Meeting people and gaining insight

During your placement, you will meet many different people, ranging from

mediators, interpreters and insurance companies to court personnel and lawyers. You will learn how to communicate with different parties which will improve your advocacy skills. You are also able to talk to barristers and solicitors working in a variety of different practice areas. They can give you valuable insights about their experiences after law school, why they chose to practise in a particular area of law, and what a typical day entails. It might even spark an interest in an area of law you had not even considered.

So what are you waiting for? ■

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