

Melbourne Law School

Human Rights Law Program Report 2022

1. Overview

Professor John Tobin established the Human Rights Program in 2022, with the primary goal of curating and promoting the extensive range of teaching, research and engagement activities being undertaken within the Melbourne Law School (MLS) in the field of human rights. The Human Rights Program's secondary goal is to increase students' engagement with co-curricular activities and campus life, by fostering an inclusive, diverse and active community built on a shared passion for Human Rights.



Students enjoying one of the MLS human rights community activities in 2022

2. Projects

Human Rights Alumni Portrait Gallery

During 2022, 40 MLS students interviewed 30 MLS alumni working in the field of human rights. The Human Rights Alumni Portrait Gallery Project aims to create a sense of belonging among current MLS students with a commitment to human rights and social justice by connecting them with past students who have worked in the field of human rights through shared stories and discussions about future careers.

It is designed to connect them to the past, to recognise and celebrate the achievements of those who have walked the corridors of the law school before them and to inspire students to create their own legacy and make their own contributions in human rights law. A portrait of each alumni will be displayed in the Human Rights Hub (rooms 202/203) in early 2023. Alongside each portrait will be a QR code linking to a profile of the alumni created by MLS students.



To be continued...

A selection of images from the Human Rights Portrait Gallery Project of MLS Alumni

Testimonies

Below are testimonials from students who participated in the Alumni Portrait Gallery Project:

- 'Participating in the Alumni Portrait Gallery was really valuable — not just for the opportunity to speak with a legal professional doing meaningful and inspirational work within the human rights sphere, but also for the humanising element of that conversation. It's sometimes easy to forget when reading cases, reports or profiles that there is a person with their own complex life, interests, passions and relationships behind the work. Talking about those elements helped me to paint a more realistic and wholistic picture of what it means to pursue a career in human rights, and connect with someone who is doing that work' — Kaitlin Jempson, JD Student
- 'I had a fantastic experience interviewing Hugh De Krester of the Yoorrook Justice Commission alongside my good friend Nuria Yu. Hugh is an inspiring presence, and it was an incredible opportunity to hear his story and the lessons he had learnt along the way. Hugh was full of enthusiasm and showed a genuine interest in us as students. I was left motivated and energised, and I hope to apply Hugh's advice into my own legal journey.' — Benji Batten, JD Student
- 'Getting the chance to talk with Jason, a lawyer with so much experience in human rights law, has been one of the highlights of my degree. The University does not do a great job of highlighting the different paths you can take as a lawyer so getting to have a conversation with an alumnus, who is in a field of law that I'm interested in, was invaluable. I really appreciated hearing about his career path, the work he gets to do and his advice for young lawyers. Not only was hearing about his experience fascinating, but his advice has already been useful in thinking about the next steps for post-grad.' — Erica Wheatley, JD Student
- 'The opportunity to interact with Professor Hilary Charlesworth has been unlike anything. Her humility and experience was inspiring to both my colleague, Georgia, and me. It was a great learning experience as well as a fun chat about what it is like to be a Judge at the ICJ. I am extremely grateful to have had this chance to both work with a great team of people and also interview someone who has made a huge mark in the field of feminism and human rights through her writing and practice.' — Ananyaa Mahajan, JD Student
- 'Through doing the Human Rights Portrait Gallery, I got the opportunity to connect with Elly Patria. With how geared towards corporate careers Melbourne Law School is, I really appreciate the refreshing perspective that my interview with Elly brought. Her experience conveyed the value of human rights and the importance of working for community, whilst providing a balanced perspective on the role of human rights work in governments and corporate law firms. I really appreciated the opportunity and time that I had spent on the project and hope that Elly's story inspires others in the same way that it inspired me.' — Michelle Lam, JD Student
- 'Engaging with the Alumni Portrait Gallery has been an enriching experience. I interviewed Professor Di Otto. It was one of my best experiences since joining Melbourne Law School. My conversations with her have continued and have been profoundly helpful in my academic development.' — Sumedha Choudhury, JD Student



The Human Rights Portrait gallery on display at Level 2, MLS

Human Rights Pilot Program for High School Students

On Friday 7 October 2022 MLS hosted an inaugural Human Rights Workshop for secondary school students from public, private and independent schools in Melbourne. The participants included 67 students, from 12 Melbourne high schools, and 13 teachers. The workshop was supported by academic colleagues, and student volunteers from MLS.¹

The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness about human rights among students with an interest in human rights and social justice issues. It also exposed students to a university learning environment and built common connections among students.

The learning content included an introduction session on human rights and child rights, delivered by Professor John Tobin. This was followed by specialized sessions on child rights in the context of Statelessness, delivered by Katie Robertson and Indigenous Rights, delivered by Jaynaya Dwyer and Eddie Cubillo. The final session focused on translating ideas into action for human rights campaigning, delivered by Lee Carnie.

¹ Kew High School, Wesley College (St Kilda and Glen Waverley campus), Scotch College, Melbourne Girls College, Catholic Ladies College, Northcote High School, CGGS, Parade, University High School, and Carey College) and Thornbury High School.



Year 8 students at the inaugural human rights workshop

Students Feedback on the Human Rights workshop

The workshop received very positive feedback from students and teachers. Overall, the workshop was rated very good (45%) to excellent (54%) by respondents. Students were actively engaged, and appreciated the opportunity to learn about human rights, and meet with like-minded students.

From the survey, what the participants liked most about the workshop included:

- 'Everything, it was a real eye-opener'
- Speakers were passionate, variety of presenters, content well-pitched, inclusive space
- Opportunity for young people to connect with like-minded students from other schools and talk about issues that would have an impact on them
- Opportunity for students to contribute take away new knowledge
- Learning about human rights, statelessness, indigenous rights
- Interacting with the university students and tour of the university
- Opportunity to learn new ideas, discuss with others, and meet new people
- How to turn ideas into action including making a campaign

Human Rights Blog

During 2022 a human rights blog concept was developed, ready to be launched in 2023 by current MLS graduate students with an interest in human rights and with support from Professor John Tobin. The aims of the blog are to: (i) promote and protect human rights through discussion, debate, and public scholarship (ii) create a forum to share research, analysis and commentary by MLS postgraduate students, academics, and others working in human rights or with lived experience, on critical human rights issues in Australia, and globally.

The Human Rights Blog is co-created by postgraduate students and staff. It provides an opportunity for students to participate, lead and contribute to discussions and debates on human rights issues and gain editorial and public writing skills. Initially, the blog will invite contributions from postgraduate students, academics and faculty members working on human rights issues at the MLS and within the university.

The blog will be launched in early 2023: <https://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/law-human-rights-blog/>

3. Human Rights Community

During 2022, MLS established and convened a monthly or bi-weekly network of the MLS Human Rights PhD, Juris Doctorate, and Law Masters students to share their experiences and research interests, to work on projects together and to build collaboration and community.

During 2022, the Human Rights Community, comprised of Juris Doctorate and Law Masters students, met in rooms 202/203 on a fortnightly basis. In these meetings, students led discussions on human rights issues, heard from peers who have worked in the human rights field, learned about a future career in human rights and coordinated events such as our sausage sizzles and film screening.

In responses to a survey, 84% of respondents strongly agreed that they enjoyed being a part of the Community; 76% strongly agreed that the Community was a positive way for them to participate in student life at MLS.

Below are MLS students' reviews of their experience being a part of the Human Rights Community:

- 'Brilliant - by far the highlight of my JD so far. The expertise and passion of all the staff involved is unmatched. The Human Rights Community at MLS is in very safe hands under the guidance of a John Tobin.'
- 'The Human Rights community has undoubtedly provided many of us a safe space and community within the ever-daunting and competitively isolating halls of the Melbourne Law School. The cultural shift it represents and hopes to cause is incredibly comforting and I am extremely proud to be helping in its endeavor. Viva la community!'
- 'I've had the best time being a part of the Human Rights Community. It's so welcoming, inclusive, caring, the sense of community here really stands out compared to other student groups!'
- 'It's been a pleasure to spend time with the human rights community. It's so important to have a side of law not presented by firms from a purely commercial perspective, but by people working

to make things better because it's the right thing to do. It's been good to be reminded of that especially at law school.'

- 'It's been excellent! Have loved the welcoming and relaxed vibe of the meetings. Thank you for your hard work, John, we all really appreciate it.'
- 'I was able to participate for the events conducted in last year and had an opportunity to engage with Professor Tobin and other international students. Hope this year come to us with more opportunities to engage with each other and do something remarkable to the society.'
- 'I really enjoyed being a part of the Human Rights Community. It was a great opportunity to learn more about human rights law and the opportunities available to students, and the possible career paths. Coming to the meetings and activities has been a good way to meet new people and be involved in the law school community. The Alumni Portrait Gallery project was also a great opportunity to meet someone working in the field and have an extended conversation about their personal experience working in human rights law.'
- 'I really enjoyed the relaxed collegiate atmosphere - I found the casual catch ups and social events (BBQs, movies etc.) super friendly and good for ensuring community members continued to want to stay involved.'
- 'I think essential to the function of the Human Rights Community are those informal chats where we see familiar faces, meet people with the same values as us, and ultimately know that there is a faculty member & other students who care about us.'
- 'I've really enjoyed my time in the group so far - the work that Nuria and John put into it has paid off a lot, and it was the most enjoyable point of contact I had with the MLS community in 2022. Please keep up the good work!'
- 'Joining the Human Rights Community was one of the best decisions I made as a first-year student entering the JD. I feel that no other club or organisation on campus placed such value on simply hanging out and getting to know the other smart, interesting and passionate people who frequent MLS. I was honoured to be able to interview an alumnus working in a career I aspire to, and learn more about the incredible professional backgrounds of some of my peers. Thank you for everything, I can't wait for next year!'
- 'Absolutely brilliant!! Thanks John, looking forward to this year!!'
- 'I had an enjoyable time being part of the Human Rights Community. This experience enabled better and more in-depth interactions with fellow scholars regarding our mutual interests in human rights. Additionally, I had availed myself of this opportunity to reflect on subject contents and class discussions, and got exposed on first-hand human rights law performance in reality.'
- 'I only joined last semester and I am glad I did. I met new people, exchanged ideas and realised that the world is already a better place with these people. Grateful to John for organising this community. Thank you.'
- 'Overall, this experience has been life changing. Hearing a Kiribati student talk about their role in constitutional reform in their country, or how a student from Myanmar is remotely organising protests is where I'm learning most. It would not be possible without this community, and I'm hoping for more opportunities to connect with these wonderful, trail-blazing humans.'

- 'Has been a fantastic way to build a community and meet new students, faculty and alumni.'
- 'It has been a great way to connect with like-minded people in the JD, and not feel so alone in my passion for human rights. It has also become a community of general support, which I really appreciate. I have also valued having resources to draw upon when considering my own career in human rights.'
- 'It's a really comfortable and relaxing space in the law school! I feel heard and more positive about my future career.'

4. MLS Human Rights Events

During 2022 the MLS Human Rights program hosted the following events:

- On Tuesday 26 April 2022, the Human Rights Community welcomed its first speaker, Jon Faine AM, who is an MLS Vice Chancellor's Fellow, a columnist for The Age and a Former ABC Radio Melbourne Broadcaster. Jon spoke of the role of the media in the promotion and protection of democracy and shared valuable insights from his career in the law and the media.
- On Tuesday 9 August and Tuesday 13 September 2022, the Human Rights Community organised two sausage sizzles in front of the MLS building. Both events had an overwhelming turnout from MLS staff and students, who enjoyed free sausages and music in the sunshine. The sausage sizzles were a great way to encourage the members of the MLS community to take a well-earned break from work or study and socialise.
- On Wednesday 7 September 2022, the Human Rights Community organised a film screening of the film 'Dear Future Children'. The film followed the stories of three young human rights advocates from Hong Kong, Uganda and Chile. Between 30-40 people attended the screening, held in rooms 202/203. Attendees included both domestic and international students from the Juris Doctorate and Law Masters programs. Students engaged in a group discussion of the film after the screening, touching on topics such as the role of young people in human rights movements and protest culture in Melbourne.
- On Wednesday 12 October 2022, the Human Rights Community held a book launch event titled 'Creating Space for Women's Histories: Conflict, Memory, and Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka'. A member of the Human Rights Community took the initiative to organise this event, launching the book 'We are Present: Women's Histories of Conflict, Courage and Survival' by Radhika Hettiarachchi. Radhika is a historical dialogue practitioner with over 15 years' experience working in the field of conflict transformation, recovery, and peacebuilding. The event was attended by students from MLS and other faculties. Radhika led a discussion on justice in a post-conflict context and the importance of women's autonomy in telling their stories.
- On Wednesday 10 August, the Human Rights Community heard from Dr Michelle Telfer, the Director of the Gender Service at the Royal Children's Hospital. Dr Telfer spoke about her provision of lifesaving treatment for children and teenagers with gender dysphoria as well as her law reform advocacy.

- On Wednesday 5 October, volunteers from the Human Rights Community ran a Homework Club for migrant and refugee students in room 920. A member from the Community took the initiative to organise this event, which saw 15 students from migrant and refugee backgrounds take a tour of MLS, ask questions about university and receive homework help from MLS student volunteers.
- On Monday 5 December 2022, the book 'Decisional Privacy and the Rights of the Child', authored by former MLS PhD candidate, Dr Georgina Dimopoulos was launched. This book advances a theory of a child's right to decisional privacy. It draws on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and extends the work of respected children's rights scholars to address a significant gap in understanding the interconnections between privacy, family law and children's rights.



Posters from the Human Rights Community Events during 2022

5. Communications

MLS Human Rights Webpage

During 2022, MLS prepared an updated webpage for the Human Rights program which provides information for current and prospective students. The website (once live) can be accessed here: <https://law.unimelb.edu.au/research-programs/mls-hr-program>

Internship and Volunteering Guide

During 2022, MLS developed an e-guide for students on Human Rights internship opportunities to assist students in considering careers in Australian, regional and international institutions, NGOs and firms. See <https://law.unimelb.edu.au/research-programs/mls-hr-program/opportunities/clinics-internships>