

## The Law Reform and Social Justice Program

### STUDENT PROFILE: *Christopher Patz*



I am from Canberra. Deciding to attend the ANU was hence a very big decision; it meant suppressing a youthful urge to flee and "find myself" some place else. In my final year of undergraduate study, I feel that decision has been vindicated (not least because it didn't stop me from finding myself, in the various squatted *casas okupadas* of Madrid on student exchange).

I studied Law in addition to Political Science and Spanish. I say 'in addition to' for a reason. It reflects the idea I share that what we know as *The Law* is premised on a whole galaxy of ideas, values, perspectives, assumptions and other terms one is more likely to discover in the study of the Humanities than in the study of the Law, *per se*. The law does not exist independent of us, nor is it somehow immune to the inadequacies of its creators and sustainers. What lies behind *The Law* are fundamental questions about how we, as human beings, decide to live together and organise ourselves in a society.

On the question of who might lay claim to our society, the Law Reform and Social Justice Program provided me with the opportunity to volunteer at one of Australia's many migrant and refugee settlement centers. At the time I was taking a course in Politics called *Globalism and the Politics of Identity*.

I enjoyed the work, which involved designing community programs for recently settled adolescent migrants and refugees, tutoring, and navigating Department of Immigration Humanitarian Visa application processes. Because of this work experience, and having taken a course in International Human Rights Law, I was later employed by the Carter Centre as an International Observer to the out-of-country voting for the South Sudanese referendum for independence. With a partner, I evaluated the registration and polling practice against International Human Rights instruments and send daily reports to Atlanta and Khartoum alongside other observers in the UK, US, Canada, Kenya, Uganda and Egypt where the diaspora voting was underway. This contributed to a certified human rights compliant referendum. At the ANU and at Melbourne's West Bulldogs football club in West Footscray I watched two thousand South Sudanese vote to create the world's newest nation, and embrace their collective right to self-determination after decades of civil conflict.

I have had many invitations to visit the Sudan, and one day I will oblige in order to contribute what I can to the much-needed assistance for creating that new country. Self-determination is in a lot of ways where the challenge begins, not where it ends. Despite the modest marks I managed to attain in Corporations Law, I have already been of some assistance to a group of young Sudanese professionals, helping them to incorporate as an organisation to assist their communities with resettlement here in Australia, and to provide support to those in the South.

Having a law reform and social justice program at the ANU College of Law helps those students who want to, to use their study of the law in different and pragmatic ways. It opens opportunities to non-traditional careers through allowing students to create and sustain their own projects, with their own initiative and with their own interests. To this end it provides ample support and encouragement. But above all, it is empowering, as it helps students to realize their potential to shape their own path, and traverse the divide between *The Law* and social life.

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### The LR&SJ Program



The Law Reform and Social Justice (LR+SJ) Program at the Australian National University. LR+SJ is part of the ANU College of Law. It was established in 2007 with the creation of the position of Director of Law Reform and Social Justice, currently filled by [Associate Professor Simon Rice](#).

Please see the website to discover more about the [Law Reform and Justice Program](#).