

DWL Court Observation Program 2021

Student Testimonials

I was selected to shadow Justice McCallum at the Supreme Court of NSW as part of the program. The first thing I noticed upon starting the placement was how kind everyone had been. I was able to have a genuine conversation with Justice McCallum who informed me of the case that she would be hearing that day. I also met with her Honour's associate, Liz, and tipstaff, Kate, who kindly shared some insights regarding the behind-the-scenes processes that occurred before, during and after a trial. I felt lucky to have attended on a day where I witnessed a trial at the Court of Criminal Appeal and observed a cross-examination of a medical expert, as well as an individual representing themselves. After the trial, I was involved in a debriefing session where I could ask questions and participate in a discussion about the interesting points that arose during the trial.

"Being from a Culturally-Diverse Fijian-Indian background and belonging to an ethnic minority group in Australia, I was excited to be given the opportunity to find my place in the legal profession".



Observing a court environment allowed me to see the potential paths I could take with my law degree. Viewing the work of barristers brought the realisation that I may potentially aspire to become a barrister, which was a career path that I had not considered prior to this program.

I am thankful for Justice McCallum and DWL for enabling students like myself to gain exposure to the Australian Court System. It was inspiring to engage with someone who was once in my position as a law student and has generated so much success from these simple beginnings.

I would absolutely recommend this program to any diverse woman studying law who would like to be involved in a truly memorable experience that you simply could not attain through a textbook.

Dipali Chandra (Student participant from DWL's Court Observation Program)

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As a young, diverse woman aspiring to a career in the legal profession, the DWL Court Observation Program provided a fantastic opportunity to expand my professional network and glean greater insight into the inner workings of the Supreme Court of NSW.

For my placement, I had the privilege of shadowing His Honour Justice Hamill on bails at the Supreme Court of NSW. I was warmly welcomed by his wonderful Tipstaff Erica and Associate Sophie, who provided me with a tour of the building and shared wonderful insights into their roles at the Court. I then participated in a briefing session with His Honour and was invited to spend the day sitting up on the bench, enabling me to observe the courtroom from an entirely different perspective.

Throughout my placement, I was fortunate to witness a variety of bail applications centred on a diverse range of criminal charges, including possession of illicit substances, trespass, possession of prohibited firearms, breach of AVOs, common assault, property damage and sexual assault. I was able to observe the ways in which His Honour applied the s 18 factors of the Bail Act 2013 (NSW) to the factual circumstances of each case, allowing me to see how the knowledge and theories I have learnt in the classroom operate in the context of real people and real lives. I was most inspired by His Honour's incredibly eloquent ex tempore judgments, and the ease with which His Honour could distil complex and intricate scenarios into the salient facts and legal principles.



Maia Brauner
Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor
of Arts at Macquarie
University

One significant highlight however was the time spent outside of the courtroom, during which I was able to engage in discussions with His Honour regarding a particularly challenging application and to observe His Honour's deliberations. This provided me with a glimpse into the 'judicial mind', and made me appreciate the enormity of the responsibility that accompanies judicial decision-making. It was also interesting to observe the ways in which court proceedings have had to adapt to the pandemic through greater incorporation of AVL links, and the additional challenges that this imposes for maintaining procedural fairness.

Overall, this program provides a unique opportunity to not only witness first-hand the complex and delicate art of judicial decision-making but to pull back the curtains and observe the behind-the-scenes of our justice system. I cannot recommend the program highly enough, and extend my gratitude to the fabulous team at DWL and to all the judges who have voluntarily given up their time to provide guidance and mentorship to the next generation of women aspiring to the profession.

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Throughout a law degree, you visit a court many times, but there is never really the opportunity to step into the Judge's Chambers and experience what a day in the life of a judge involves. The Diverse Women in Law Court Observation Program provides this opportunity. **The program allowed me to unveil the shroud surrounding Court proceedings, by taking a "back-stage" view.**

In my placement, I had the privilege of observing **his Honour Judge Buscombe** in the District Court of NSW. I was able to see the court system from a whole new perspective and was truly inspired. **To be able to walk through the corridors that have shaped the common law is an opportunity I will never forget.**

Throughout the day I shadowed Judge Buscombe through many different events that are typical in a court setting. This included being able to sit at the bench, next to the Judge's associate, in a trial where witnesses gave evidence in front of a jury, and for the sentencing of an accused. Each proceeding that I was able to observe gave me an insight into the law and how it operates in reality.



One of the highlights from my day was having discussions with Judge Buscombe in his Honour's Chambers, which challenged my preconceived ideas and expanded my knowledge regarding the role of a Judge. Throughout the day Judge Buscombe was happy to answer my myriad of questions, and his insight was very much appreciated. I was also able to follow his Associate, Stephanie Kerr, throughout her daily activities and explored not only the Chambers but other areas such as the Registrar.

Ultimately the opportunity did not only allow me to shadow Judge Buscombe but to be mentored by his Honour. The experience that I gained from partaking in the Court Observation Program ignited my ambition and uncovered new insights into the legal realm. **This experience allows diverse women to see an insight into their future and serves as a reminder of where we can be in the future.**

Dana Rutner

Fourth Year Bachelor of Law/ Bachelor of Journalism at UTS
Student participant in DWL's 2021 Court Observation Program

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As a young woman of colour in the final year of my law degree, I have been struggling with where I want to go in the legal profession. **Throughout law school, I did not see myself reflected in the judgements I studied and I definitely did not see a place for myself in the courts.** When it came to applying for jobs, I was curious about associateships but did not know where to begin, so I excluded myself from the process entirely. DWL's Court Observation Program is the first chance I have had to lift the curtain on court proceedings and see where I might fit in.

The opportunity to meet her Honour Judge Yehia at the training session and shadow her Honour Judge Penelope Wass has been invaluable in showing me examples of strong female leadership in the legal profession. Judge Wass is a commanding figure in the courtroom, but the moment I knocked on her office door at lunch to ask if we could have a chat, she was warm and approachable. She kindly spent her entire lunch hour speaking with me, sharing her journey to the Bench and answering all of the questions that I had, profound or trivial.



Her Associate, Louis, took the time to explain his role and how he came to work for Judge Wass, and made sure I felt welcome. Although I started the day nervous and unsure of what to expect, I left feeling like I had made connections that could support me in my development as a lawyer. **I would recommend this program if, like me, you are curious about associateships, advocacy or judicial office and don't know where to begin.** DWL has given me a foot in the door to explore possibilities in the legal profession that I previously did not think were open to me, by making the court environment seem more accessible to a diverse woman.

Vaidehi Mahapatra

Student at the University of Sydney

Student participant in DWL's 2021 Court Observation Program

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Being a diverse woman from a Fijian Indian background and the first to attend university, the program offered by Diverse Women in Law opened horizons as it allowed me to grasp a better understanding of the operation of the District Court Jurisdiction. The program offers a one-day placement where I was paired with Her Honour Judge Culver at the District Court. It was a fantastic experience to shadow Judge Culver as I was able to sit in a wide range of court hearings involving a trial with a jury. This experience allowed me to gain better insight into court etiquette and procedures. **In particular, I was better able to improve my advocacy skills by examining how legal practitioners execute their submissions before the court.**

Further, I had the opportunity to join Judge Culver on the bench during the court observation. Observing the court from the bench was a worthwhile experience as it enabled me to better see the courtroom from a different perspective. I found it inspiring to watch Judge Culver exercise her reasons and decision during the trial and it was profound to see her exercise her knowledge of Evidence Law. Another significant highlight was where I joined Judge Culver in her chambers and was able to ask questions about the legal industry, including her advice for future legal practitioners.



I am grateful to DWL for implementing a brilliant program for Diverse Women. It has ignited more passion and ambition for me in further becoming a good advocate within the legal profession. **For future diverse women studying law, I would like to say do not give up but take every chance given to you.** I applied for this program and never thought I would network with such fantastic, diverse students and legal practitioners. This program has helped me remarkably in honing knowledge about the legal profession and court procedures.

Joycelin Pillay

Final Year Bachelor of Law/Business Student at Western
Sydney University

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As a diverse woman with a mental health disability, I am so grateful to Diverse Women in Law for facilitating the Court Observation Program 2021. **It is immensely important for diversity to be celebrated in the legal profession, and this experience has been invaluable as I prepare to graduate and ultimately practise as a lawyer.**

In my placement, I was given the opportunity to be paired with the Honourable Justice Lonergan of the Supreme Court. I joined Her Honour in court on multiple occasions, and in chambers to discuss the nature and intricacies of the trial proceedings. I was able to gain an insight into the work of Her Honour's Tipstaff and Associate, by observing them navigate legal databases, proofread judgments and conduct legal research. I am very appreciative of the time and generosity that they extended to me during the program.

As a law student, I have often attended court (for study and for fun!), and each time I have been in awe of the Darlinghurst Supreme Court, and the formalities of court proceedings. The opportunity to observe the courtroom from the bench, with the guidance of Her Honour and Tipstaff was incredible. It allowed me to witness court procedures, immerse myself in court etiquette and gain an insight into positive legal and judicial advocacy, through the submissions of the parties and the decision making process of Her Honour.



Lilyanne Jones
Final Year Bachelor of Laws (Honours) and Arts
Macquarie University

A highlight of the program was joining Her Honour in chambers to observe the preparation that is involved in adjudicating in court. The chance to ask Her Honour questions regarding the proceedings was invaluable, and **I am grateful to Her Honour for sharing with me her own extensive and influential professional pathway, and the variety of pathways that are available in criminal law.**

Overall, the opportunity to shadow and be mentored by Justice Lonergan has been particularly important in allowing me to learn about and immerse myself in the Supreme Court jurisdiction, particularly the criminal division. This experience has motivated and inspired me to pursue and achieve my career goals. I hope that this testimonial will resonate with other diverse women studying law seeking to gain a practical glimpse into the judicial sphere of the legal profession.