# THE DRIVING INFLUENCES OF WELLNESS AND WORK LIFE BALANCE IN LAWYER CAREER CHOICES AND THE PRACTICE OF LAW AND THE REFLECTIONS OF LAWYERS ON ACHIEVING WELLNESS AND WORK LIFE BALANCE WITHIN THEIR CAREERS

**[1]ALEXANDRA JOHNSTONE, [2]BARRY YAU**

[1]Lecturer, ANU Legal Workshop, Australian National University, Acton ACT 2601, Bachelor of Social Science, Bachelor of Laws (Honours), Australia,
[2]Lecturer, ANU Legal Workshop, Australian National University, Acton ACT 2601, Australia, (Co-researcher, not in attendance)
E-mail: [1]alexandra.johnstone@anu.edu.au, [2]barry.yau@anu.edu.au

Short bio for Alexandra Johnstone
Alexandra has worked with the Australian National University since late 2012 and is currently the Convenor for the subject: Corporate and Commercial Practice run for a specialist law firm. Alexandra is also the Co-Convenor for Commercial Practice for the Professional Practice Core subject for ANU Legal Workshop. Alexandra also convenes and teaches for the ANU Legal Workshop "Becoming a Practitioner" course in relation to legal writing and corporate commercial aspects of practice. Alexandra practised as a as a corporate commercial lawyer for over 14 years, including as a lawyer for the Olympic Roads and Transport Authority for the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Alexandra's corporate law career has involved predominately working in house and for Government and specialising in major projects, procurement and construction law, including both here and Vancouver.

**SHORT BIO FOR BARRY YAU:**

Barry has been a full-time law lecturer at the Australian National University since 2012. Barry convenes Commercial Practice in the Practical Legal Training program and is conducting a research project into student attitudes to the study of commercial law and the role legal ethics has in preparing students for commercial practice. Barry has previously practised as a lawyer in government and private practice for 13 years.

**SHORT SUMMARY OF PAPER:**

This qualitative research project examines the thoughts, direct experiences and narratives of law students, professional legal training students, and early career commercial lawyers, towards the study and practice of law. Our focus groups and individual interviews with students explore the narratives that drive and shape their attitudes, and the effect and influence these attitudes have on legal career options both actual and predicted. Our research project also considers early career commercial lawyers' reflections of their commercial law study, the effect this had on shaping attitudes and influencing career choice.

Our research study has spanned two years and is ongoing. Our preliminary results show a myriad of themes in relation to work life balance and wellness for lawyers within their career and in anticipation of their career. We examine in detail the underpinning attitudes of early career lawyers and students towards the study and practice of law, especially in large-tier firms.
We examine work life balance and wellness as distinct narratives underpinning decision-making and career experience and as drivers and strong influences for career and family choices. Official Australian statistics charting the number of lawyers over a nearly 50 year period provide a telling insight into the family expectations of law students by gender, and provide clues to predicting how work-life balance will influence law careers for the next 50 years.

Client and community relationship building activities also emerged as significant influences of lawyers' attitudes, their perceptions of the legal profession and the role of lawyers in society generally.

The comparison and contrast of law students' predictions and perceptions of law careers, and the reflections, recollections and even regrets of early career commercial lawyers, provide invaluable insight into perceptions and realities of law careers.
We also examine narratives deriving from media and popular culture impressions and projection. We also examine thinking underpinning career decisions that are interestingly founded on anecdotal or second hand information from third parties. In particular, we consider the narratives of these individuals as a driver for their actual or projected career choices.

**PROPOSED KEY WORDS, TIMING AND RESOURCES:**

Key words: law, wellness, work life balance, careers, narratives

It is proposed that this paper is presented solely by Alexandra Johnstone.
Minimum amount of time for presentation- 30 minutes but Alexandra would be grateful for any additional presentation time that would be and could present up to one hour if available.
Resources: none required, however if a projector was available for screening a PowerPoint presentation, that would be ideal

★★★