

● Seeking Justice (L-R): Kimberleigh Rogers, Kate Bartlett and Michael Tourkakes

# STEPPING STONE TO LAW

MANY STUDENTS ARE OPTING TO STUDY A TAFE COURSE AS A STEPPING STONE TO A DEGREE, INCLUDING LAW, WRITES **KAMINI RAJARETHNAM**.

**L**AW SCHOOL CAN BE A GRINDING, HUMBLING EXPERIENCE that requires mental toughness and hard work. Three Victoria University graduates were prepared for the challenge thanks to the practical skills they first gained at TAFE.

When Michael Tourkakes was in high school he wanted to study biomedical chemistry or biotechnology. However he realised in Year 12 that calculating logarithms in a laboratory wasn't as inspiring as he first imagined. But not having studied legal or business subjects at school, he was unable to pursue law at university, the profession he realised he really wanted.

Rather than be discouraged, Tourkakes sought help from a career counsellor who suggested he enrol in VU's two-year Advanced Diploma of Legal Practice, which would prepare him for further study in law.

Today, eight years later he is a junior solicitor at boutique-sized firm LAC Lawyers in Melbourne's CBD where he advises clients on a range of topics including intellectual property, unfair dismissal and taxation.

"The advanced diploma is an area of the industry that is different, but I saw it as a stepping stone that would potentially get me into a law degree," says Tourkakes.

Unlike many of his peers studying undergraduate degrees, Tourkakes found the transition into his law degree relatively stress-free because of the strong foundation he developed during his diploma course.

"Many of my friends really struggled going straight from high school to university degrees, whereas I found the learning concepts in first year easier to understand because I learnt about the fundamentals in my TAFE course," says Tourkakes.

Law graduate Kate Bartlett shared a similar experience at VU. Unlike Tourkakes, Bartlett knew she wanted to be either a lawyer or a pilot from a young age. After high school, she studied physics at VU before realising that a career in law was what she really wanted. However she didn't meet the prerequisites for the Bachelor of Laws program at VU because legal studies had not been offered at her high school.

She took the advice of a career counsellor at VU and sought to gain industry experience and undertake related studies at TAFE. She enrolled in the Advanced Diploma in Legal Practice at VU and completed it while working as a legal secretary for law firm Blake Dawson (now Ashurst Australia). While Bartlett felt a diploma would further her employment prospects as a law clerk, the driving factor for selecting the advanced

## PATHWAYS INTO LAW

**STUDENTS CAN CONTINUE** through one of VU's registered pathways from the Advanced Diploma of Legal Practice to either the Bachelor of Arts (Legal Practice) or the Bachelor of Legal Practice Management. Students can also lodge an internal transfer application to the Bachelor of Laws, and are considered on academic results and availability of places. Visit the website to find out more about study pathways: [vu.edu.au/courses/study-pathways](http://vu.edu.au/courses/study-pathways)

diploma was the ability to continue into a law degree.

"My job helped me through my diploma, and vice versa," says Bartlett. She went on to study law and graduated in 2011.

Bartlett now works as a practising lawyer at Russell Kennedy, a commercial law firm in Melbourne's CBD.

First-year Bachelor of Laws student Kimberleigh Rogers made the same move into law as Bartlett and Tourkakes. Like them, Rogers chose to study the diploma when she missed out on a place in the undergraduate law course.

"I still got to study the field of law straight after school, and I found the diploma a lot easier than going straight into a degree," says Rogers. "The bachelor course was a bit of a shock at the beginning, but I understand the theory a lot easier because of the basics I learnt at TAFE." Rogers is a firm believer in the right of everyone to receive justice and plans

to work as a solicitor specialising in family law after university.

Studying a TAFE course as a stepping stone to get into a degree is commonplace for many students who don't qualify for direct entry into a degree program.

Research has shown that TAFE graduates make great higher education students because they have the practical knowledge in their field that can be applied directly to the subjects they study in an undergraduate degree. The bonus of already being in the study groove also makes for a smooth transition into higher education.

From nursing to education, engineering to business, many professional fields of study are now offered at both a vocational and higher education level at VU, allowing students to gain practical foundation skills before they progress to degree studies. Students can also receive up to one year's credit in their degree for their TAFE study. 