

MAGISTRATES COURT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

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29th March 2012

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Running since 2005, the Magistrates' Court Program has enabled hundreds of VLS students to assist community members who have come to Court without a lawyer. This provides valuable grass root insights into, and experience of, the criminal justice system in action.
- The Magistrates' Court Program is a partnership between Victoria Law School, and Victoria Legal Aid (Melbourne & Sunshine offices).
- Law students work with the Victoria Legal Aid Duty Lawyer teams servicing the Magistrates' Courts at Melbourne, Sunshine and Werribee.
- The program has a maximum capacity of 24 student volunteers at any one time. Students work throughout the year, including non-semester times.

ROLE OF VLA AT COURT

- Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) provide 'duty lawyers' at many courts and tribunals across Victoria. These lawyers provide assistance to people who have a court hearing on the day, but do not have their own lawyer.
- The duty lawyers are assisted at court by VLA administrative staff who provide clerical assistance.
- The students in the Magistrates' Court program are primarily tasked with assisting the VLA clerical staff.

ROLE OF STUDENTS

Students are tasked with a number of duties which may include:

- Conducting preliminary interviews with clients and obtaining administrative information for the lawyers.
- Obtaining the prosecution briefs from the police prosecutors, documents from the sheriff and court itself, and photocopying any relevant information.
- Assisting the VLA staff as may be required (the courts are often extremely busy or has been described, 'organised chaos', and the students provide VLA staff with a welcome extra pair of hands.)

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

- The Magistrates' Court program provides students with the opportunity to contextualise the subject matter they have learnt in units such as criminal law, advocacy and civil procedure
- Students are also encouraged to shadow the VLA lawyers when they have finished their clerical duties
 - This gives students an opportunity to experience first hand, the different types of interviewing and advocacy techniques employed by the lawyers.
- Networking
 - Networking is critical for all law students and provides them with the best opportunity of gaining post-graduate employment. The program allows students to interact with barristers, solicitors, court staff and other associated organisations

CONCLUSION

The Magistrates' Court program provides students:

- Practical learning experience, allowing them to contextualise and develop on many of the units studied at Victoria Law School.
- Equipping them with many of the skills they will later require should they choose to practice law.