Indigenous Pre-Law and Mentoring Program

Overview
The Charles Darwin University (CDU) College of Business and Law delivers an Indigenous pre-law and mentoring program commencing in January-February each year. The program is made up of two components; a 4-week full time intensive pre-law program delivered on-campus at the College of Business and Law (Casuarina campus), and an ongoing individual and group mentoring component.

Intensive pre-law component: Successful completion of the CDU pre-law intensive provides candidates a prospective pathway into to the CDU Bachelor of Laws program, with the potential to commence law studies immediately after completion of the pre-law program.

Residential options are available for participants who do not have accommodation available in Darwin. Candidates do not pay tuition or accommodation fees for the pre-law component of the program.

Delivered by a dedicated facilitator with both professional legal expertise and experience in delivering training and education to Aboriginal learners, the delivery and materials are tailored to meet the learning styles and needs of Aboriginal learners.

In addition to the skills learnt during the pre-law program, it also assists potential students be successful in their law studies by making them familiar and comfortable with the law environment and expectations for study. The relationships built with other pre-law students and lecturers will mean that successful candidates have a support network from the very first day of their law studies.

Individual and group mentoring: In the second component of the program, CDU provide an academic mentor who actively supports the Indigenous law students through to successful completion of their law degree. The mentor works with both individuals and with the group as a whole, fostering peer-to-peer support and learning.

This program is run in active partnership with the Bilata Indigenous Legal Pathways program.

Aim of the Program

Opportunity - To increase successful Indigenous participation in the CDU law degree and legal profession by providing new and attractive opportunities and pathways for study by:

- Removing barriers that prevent people from applying to an LLB program through formal processes; and
- Providing an alternate entry pathway for candidates who may have difficulty with formal requirements for entry to the LLB program.

Experience - To give candidates the experiences needed for successful participation in the LLB program by providing foundational skills, knowledge and relationships needed to study law.

- The program will be tailored to meet the learning needs of Indigenous learners.
- Students will begin law studies already familiar and comfortable with their environment, already having met many of their lecturers and with a pre-existing peer-support group established during the pre-law component.

Decision – to allow candidates to make an informed decision about starting an LLB based on their experiences in the pre-law intensive component.
Need for the Program

The NT Law Society reports that only 2% (10 of 533) of legal practitioners in the NT are Indigenous. Only 2.5% of CDU law students are Indigenous. These figures stand in stark contrast to NT population figures; Indigenous people make up 30-35% of the NT population. Thus, Indigenous people are grossly underrepresented in both studying and practicing law in the NT.

A similar Indigenous pre-law program was run at CDU (then NTU) in the 1990s. The Bilata program reports that 100% of current NT Indigenous practitioners from the NT came through that pre-law program.

Recruiting Candidates

The program will work operate in partnership with the Bilata program run by the NT Law Society and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, which works extensively with Indigenous high school students and encourages their participation in legal careers. School-based programs such as Clontarf and the Stars programs will refer school-leavers to the pre-law program. These partnerships will allow for a supported transition for Indigenous Year 12 students into the CDU law program.

Key Skills and Teaching Approach

The pre-law program focuses on 4 key skill areas:

1. Critical thinking and legal argument
2. Legal reading and research
3. Legal Writing
4. Public speaking and presentation

These skills will underpin the specific content that students will learn during their degree.

Each candidate will participate in a pre-program assessment. This assessment will determine whether the candidate is ready to participate in the intensive program and will provide the program facilitators with information to tailor the learning process to each candidates’ strengths and weaknesses. The pre-program assessment will comprise of short written answers and a relaxed interview discussion.

There will be a fast turn-around for assessment and evaluation results throughout the program so that students can incorporate feedback while the tasks are still fresh in their memory. Students will also work on actual assessment tasks from previous year law units. This will give them an accurate picture of the types of tasks that will be expected if they study law.

The program will be highly interactive and focused around developing skills rather than simply acquiring knowledge. Lectures will demonstrate skills and will use role plays, group work and active movement in the teaching environment. A spiral learning method will be used, which will give students multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate skills. Site visits to courts, parliament, law firms and government agencies such as DPP will help make the learning tangible.

In addition to assessment and evaluation activities, each student will participate in an exit interview. This interview will allow for debriefing about the program, and for a two-way exchange so that the pre-law program facilitators can incorporate feedback from the students on how to further improve the program. Most students will be told during the debriefing session whether or not they have been recommended for entry into the CDU law program.

How to Apply

CDU and Bilata are now working to recruit new candidates for the 2019 pre-law program. The 2019 Pre-law intensive will run from 8-31 January 2019. If you have any questions or are interested in participating in the 2019 Indigenous Pre-law intensive, please contact Ben Grimes on ben.grimes@cdu.edu.au