



Six questions for: André Dao

What made you apply for the Project Officer position?

I've been interested in human rights law ever since I started studying law, and have always intended on pursuing a career in that field. I soon became aware of the Castan Centre's work through the Centre's strong engagement online and in social media, so when I found out the position was available I was really keen to get involved with the Centre.

How are you finding the job thus far?

It's great! I really enjoy the variety of work I'm doing – from running student programs to working on the Centre's social media output. I've particularly enjoyed starting each day trawling the web for human rights related news for our Twitter feed – I feel particularly aware of human rights news not just in Australia but around the world. I get a similar feeling when a big legal development occurs – like the High Court judgment on *Momcilovic* or the Malaysia Solution – and the corridors are buzzing with academics discussing the ins and outs of the case. Working at the Centre, I really feel plugged into the human rights community.

What did you do before working for the Centre?

I was studying Arts/Law at the University of Melbourne. I've also been the Editor-in-Chief of Right Now, a human rights media organisation for a few of years. I do that in a volunteer capacity, and it complements my work at the Centre well. Currently, I'm writing my honours thesis in English Literature.

What are you writing your honours thesis on?

I'm writing on *The Book of Daniel*, a novel by E. L. Doctorow, which tells the fictional story of Daniel Isaacson, whose parents were executed by the US Government for being Communist spies. The story is based on the real-life case of the Rosenbergs, who were executed by electric chair in the 1950s. My thesis focuses on how the law is depicted in the novel, especially as a tool for narrative-making and memory building.

What do you do when you're not busy updating Twitter?

I really enjoy music, and when I have the time I still like to play a bit of piano. I also do some writing in my spare time – I'm hoping to find time to write more fiction after I finish my thesis.

What's your favourite TV show?

It would probably have to be *The Wire*, followed by *The Sopranos* in a close second. The thing I loved about *The Wire* was how realistic it seemed to be, with really memorable, individual characters, without losing its ability to tell a larger story about urban decay and the failure of American justice.



Where are they now? Jessie Taylor

What interactions did you have with the Castan Centre (internships, moot etc)?

I was selected for the internship to the Australian Delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. It just so happened that it was the final Commission before the changes that led to the birth of the Human Rights Council. I got to sit behind the "Australia" desk in the UN Plenary hall for the closing ceremony of the commission, listening to speeches and tributes to its long history. It was an amazing moment to participate in at such a young age. Witnessing the operation of the UN human rights machinery was an exercise in balancing hope and cynicism! I still benefit from it to this day.

Do you have anything to say about your experiences with the Castan Centre?

What a privilege it was to interact with such a well-respected academic centre right there in my own Law Faculty. One thing I love about the Centre is that its members and staff are not just top-notch academics and lawyers; they are passionate human rights devotees who have found their place in the Centre because they care deeply about the protection and promotion of human rights. Words can't express how much that matters, and what a difference it makes to the education of a fledgling human rights enthusiast!

What did you do after you graduated?

I was admitted to practice and began a fascinating couple of years where I did anything but practice law! I worked on the National Human Rights Consultation, went to Indonesia to make a film called "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea" (www.deepblueseafilm.com), and then finally landed a job as Associate to Justice Bromberg in the Federal Court of Australia. It was a wonderful period of time. Working as a judge's associate in particular is an amazing experience. When that ended I worked as a duty lawyer with Victoria Legal Aid, and in September 2011 was called to the Bar. I am now practising as a barrister. Every day I have cause to pause and reflect on how lucky I am to be so professionally fulfilled and challenged.

Do you have any advice for students interested in pursuing careers in human rights?

I will pass on the advice given to me by a trusted mentor when I was a student interested in pursuing a career in human rights. That is: before you can be a good human rights lawyer, you must be a good lawyer. Do the hard yards, earn your stripes and prove yourself capable in every area of the law that you set your mind to - even the 'boring' stuff. Then and only then will you be taken seriously as a human rights lawyer.

Also - remember that most human rights challenges are through the avenues of administrative law. Admin might seem horribly dry and boring during a bleak 8am lecture, but it is the playing field of David & Goliath. Learn it.

Oh and *illegitimi non carborundum* (sic)...!