



AULSS



# AULSS WELLBEING GUIDE



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# Foreword

Mahatma Gandhi once said that *'health is the real wealth, not pieces of silver and gold'* and our mental health is something that, in the age of COVID-19, is more critical now than ever before.

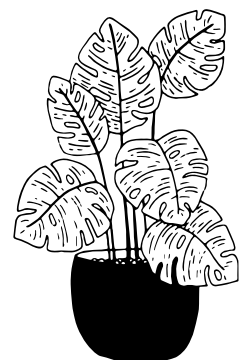
There is little doubt that university and law school can have undesirable impacts on wellbeing for a number of reasons - the sense of competition, focus on external achievements and the changing job market are just a few factors. The transition to online learning while largely practically successful, may increase the prevalence of distress.

While it is important not to shy away from the realities of the legal profession in light of coronavirus, the aim of this guide is to consolidate the importance of wellbeing as a core component of the law school experience in a solution-oriented, practical manner.

However, the Wellbeing Guide is not meant to substitute or compromise medical or psychological advice, so if anything in this guide raises personal issues for you, please refer to the resources available to students towards the end of this guide.

Hopefully this encourages you to follow your own path to wellbeing, one step at a time.

**Alex Arthur - Equity and Wellbeing Officer**



# Acknowledgement of Country

The AULSS would like to acknowledge and pay respects to the Kurna people as the traditional owners and custodians of the Adelaide Plains, the land on which the AULSS conducts its operations today. We would also like to extend our respects to the elders of the Kurna Nation, past, present and emerging.



# Advice from Graduates

It is only natural to worry about the future whilst at law school - it can often feel like you are not ready for the world of graduate jobs, long hours, interviews, as well as the sense of competition. The AULSS caught up with graduate solicitor, James Williams, and former magistrate, Melanie Little, to gain some perspective and advice as to the pressures faced by many law students as they progress through their degrees into employment.

## **James Williams**

James Williams is a recently graduated solicitor currently working at Stanley & Co Lawyers. Prior to joining the commercial and litigation team at Stanley and Co, James worked as a solicitor in the banking team at Piper Alderman Lawyers. He graduated in 2019 with a Bachelor of Laws (Honours, First Class) and a Bachelor of Economics (Advanced). During his time at law school he worked as a tutor for the Wirrtu Yarlu Department of the University and was involved as a Senior PASS Leader.

### ***What was your pathway through law school?***

I completed a Bachelor of Laws and Economics (Advanced) double degree. My economics degree focused mostly on the theoretical side of economics and involved a lot of calculus and game theory. My law electives tended to mostly centre around advocacy and research. I enjoyed being an active member of the Law School community and worked for the university as a tutor and volunteered as a PASS Leader.

### ***What difficulties, if any, did you face during your legal studies (e.g. work responsibilities, family commitments, health issues) and how did they influence how you approached study?***

I hurt my wrist quite badly (my writing hand) and was in a brace for approximately 6 months. The same year I was injured in a nasty car crash which saw me attending hospital twice a week for rehab on my back. Both of these injuries made study difficult and I dropped back to a part time load temporarily. I found the injuries especially challenging because they severely limited my ability to exercise which is something I really value and find is a great stress reliever. Taking a reduced study load turned out to be an excellent idea as it allowed me to maintain my grades and let my health get back on track. It took my 5 year double degree up to 6 years but keeping my GPA steady during this period allowed me to graduate with First Class Honours and one year is no big deal in the great scheme of things.

***What advice would you give to your younger self about the relationship of legal study to legal practice, and are there any general words of wisdom that you believe young people in the law could benefit from?***

**DIVERSIFY YOUR SELF WORTH.** I think the reason many people stress too much is because they place too much emphasis on one aspect of their life (e.g. their grades) without diversifying their self worth (effectively putting all their eggs in one basket). If you place 100% of your self worth in how good your grades are for example, you will naturally be devastated when you get a bad mark. However, if you actively cultivate other activities to take pride in (e.g. being a good partner/friend, your fitness, your hobbies etc.) you can offset some of the stress. Don't let grades (or anything) make up 100% of your self worth - yes things like good grades are important but diversifying your self worth (just like any important investment) is a good idea. A friend of mine put it really well when he said "Yeah, I might have lost my job but my deadlift is getting stronger.". In short, there are always new ways to build valuable skills even when opportunities do not present themselves.

## **Melanie Little**

Melanie Little is a former magistrate in various courts including Port Adelaide Magistrates Court and the Youth Court. After graduating with a Bachelor of Laws in 1984, a Master of Philosophy in Social Justice in 1994 from Stirling University in Scotland, she took up an associateship with Supreme Court judge Elliot Johnston QC. Melanie worked as an advocate in areas such as guardianship law and anti-discrimination law across these jurisdictions in addition to her varied criminal practice all over Australia (she describes the latter practice in which she has 'seen it all'). She commenced her judicial career in 2003 in the Northern Territory and South Australia before retirement. Melanie is currently involved in a range of community groups, particularly in environmental activism.

### ***What was your pathway through law school?***

I undertook a full time degree at the Adelaide Law School and I was able to work part time on Friday evenings, weekends and in the Christmas break. This meant I could attend university full time. I really appreciated being able to spend time with fellow students as part of my learning experience - we could help each other understand legal principles and learn about time management for assignments. Being full time and able to study on site during the day was a good learning environment though I understand that's not always possible. Undertaking volunteer work at community legal services helped me direct my legal career to areas of interest. I took awhile to understand how to interpret cases and legislation and to apply that learning to legal principles. As painful as that process was, it meant I was more able to adapt to legal practice.

***What difficulties, if any, did you face during your legal studies (e.g. work responsibilities, family commitments, health issues) and how did they influence how you approached study?***

Finances were tight at times and that was a stressor. As soon as I decided to start tertiary education full time (after working in book shops for a few years before study) I decided that I needed to sell my car. This meant I had more disposable income, regular exercise and thinking and reflection time (or down time) while walking or on public transport. Studying and understanding legal principles did need some reflection time - in many ways it's like learning a whole new language and you need to process what you are learning. Thinking about it now I realize this was important.

***What advice would you give to your younger self about the relationship from legal study to legal practice, and are there any general words of wisdom that you believe young people in the law could benefit from?***

Moving from law school to legal practice is a big step. Exams are a test of general principles however clients do not arrive at your office with an issue to be resolved neatly hidden within the instructions they give you (like an exam paper does!). Applying legal principles does not always provide a solution to what a client is seeking to achieve or redress - that's an important thing to remember. My time spent working in retail, using public transport and undertaking voluntary work in a range of community based legal agencies, exposed me to a wide range of people and experiences, and that gave me a good start when working with clients. Still, even that did not prepare me for a client very early in my career who believed he was the author Stephen King and he was living in suburban Adelaide to remain incognito. And so began my journey of discovery of the complexity of the world and the inter-relationship of these complexities with the law.

# Stressors for Law Students

Most students who enter the bowels of Ligertwood are usually accomplished school leavers or mature-age students looking for their next step towards becoming lawyers. Whatever your background, law school can be the most testing - yet rewarding - time of your life, so here are a few common stressors and tips on how to mitigate them.

## **GPA**

A lack of a perfect GPA is unlikely to be a barrier to employment. This is not to say that GPA *isn't* important, it's just that there are many skills such as initiative or communication that are valuable and your GPA can't reflect - having interview or sales skills, dealing with failure and so on are all valuable. GPA's are just one measure of suitability for firms - many will consider candidates with GPA's of 5.0 minimum. If this is a concern for you, speak to the Careers & Sponsorship Portfolio or the Careers Service in the Resources section later.

## **Competition and Comparing Yourself**

Law school is often an inherently competitive environment and this is often infused in everything from mooting to clerkship applications. We can place further pressures on ourselves due to a competitive job market. However, the harm comes when this seeps into other areas of your life - using this comparison to motivate yourself to 'do as well' or 'be better than' is probably not the way to go - you can't control what others do, nor do you fully understand the circumstances of others. This mindset does more harm than good and can often leave you disappointed or constantly fixated on being better than your peers. Think of it like driving - if you're constantly looking in your rearview or side mirrors it's likely that someone may overtake you!

Try adopting a solution-focused mindset - try talking to your peers or educators about how they learn course content, or work on your own systems to optimise how you work. Ask to form a study group, attend some PASS sessions, email your tutorial leaders if you're uncertain about some things! As mundane as it sounds, you can always use the discussion boards for your courses - there is a fair chance others will have the same questions as you do.

Most importantly, help each other out. Law can be made more collaborative than competitive as everyone is in the same boat. By helping each other out, you can learn more and probably end up doing better together! It is critical to remember that self-comparison is an illusion - other people may *look* like they know exactly what they are doing, but the truth is that often we are all trying to do the best with what we have.



# Mindset

A core principle of wellbeing is your mindset - by definition a mindset is the product of thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behavioural patterns that reflect in how we see the world. In her namesake book, behavioural psychologist Carol Dweck formulated the 'growth mindset' - the idea that our abilities, aspects of personality and traits are malleable and improvable. In contrast, a 'fixed mindset' is the belief that those things are inherent, static and unimprovable, best illustrated by the infographic below:



## **Using a growth mindset to combat setbacks**

No one likes setbacks but they are an inevitable part of life and the university experience. So if we can't avoid setbacks, how can we accept and grow? With a growth mindset involving the ability to adapt, learn and improve, setbacks do not become an endpoint, merely a rest stop.

### ***If setbacks happen***

1. **Grieve for it:** Let yourself feel all the emotions that come with not achieving your goal, no matter how extreme. Take as much time and help as you need, informally and informally.
2. **Write down what went wrong, the process that needs changing and how you can implement it:** a journal is excellent for this allowing honesty with a form of release. Talking it over informally or through counselling if necessary may also help.
3. **Take action:** The action you take (or do not take) depends on the individual but break it down into manageable components and just start.

It may also help to focus on refining your study habits and track your goals day by day in something like a calendar. Reframe what you do not understand and ask for assistance from lecturers and tutors - they are there to help you. If you require further support, it may be appropriate to speak to a course coordinator, student advisor or Student Life Disability Support.

## An Ode to First Years: *Uni isn't usually like this*

**Congratulations** first years, you have completed your first torts assignment. What's more, you did it without in-class seminars or lectures. After sampling three weeks at uni, you were told to stay home, without first a chance to figure out what uni is really like. You didn't even get to go on the Engi Pubcrawl! Truly criminal!

Well, we are here to tell you, *uni it isn't usually like this... and it certainly isn't usually this hard.*

It is normal if you are finding it difficult to stay motivated in a home environment, where you don't have lots of other students and lecturers to bounce your ideas off. And we understand this is compounded by the fact you haven't had much of a chance to make lots of new uni friends. Nevertheless, there are a few tips which can be taken up to make the most of the situation which we are all in.

1. **Understand what is going on in class:** Try your best to keep up with your seminars, especially torts. By your next assignment, and the exam, you will want to understand every step of the negligence inquiry. So make it your micro-mission each week to comprehend the difference steps. This will be much easier than trying to teach yourself the whole process come exam time.

2. **Reach out to your peers:** In those very seminar classes we have just told you to attend, don't be afraid to reach out to your fellow classmates if you feel confident. A lot of us old and jaded law students made some of our closest friends in those classes. So maybe be brave and start a group chat with a couple of class members to talk through concepts learned that week.

3. **Research is your friend:** If you find a concept in a lecture baffling, all is not lost and you need not feel disheartened. There are a number of resources you can employ to help you nail that topic. Firstly, examine the material your course coordinator has given you. Look at the readings, ask questions in seminars. If this is to no avail, now is the time to start using Libguides and hitting up some of those resources the law library provides online. Halsbury's Laws of Australia is an excellent place to start to get a broad overview on a topic, with helpful links to cases. There are many other websites and internet platforms which can help, so Libguides is really worth checking out. If in doubt, ask the librarians and book an appointment with them. See the AULSS First Year Guide for further tips!

4. **You are doing just fine:** Remember to be kind to yourself. First year is all about learning, not about being perfect. A law degree is not a walk in the park, and right now you are learning the tools to get you through it. Again, give yourself time. Your hard work will pay off one way or another if you stay consistent, adopt a system to achieve your goals and stay in touch with peers.

# Self-Care & Productivity Tips

- **Manage your energy and reward yourself:** Figure out when and how you work best - a calendar is ideal for time management and getting enough sleep is critical. Work for short periods of time, get up from your desk regularly, and reward yourself! 150 words = 1 snack is justified, right?!
- **Working under pressure is *possible* but not recommended:** Planning fallacy is common because people are prone to procrastinate and underestimate the time needed to complete the task to a standard they are happy with. It's worth thinking about what your individual study habits are, whether they align with your aspirations and values.
- **Beware of overcommitting yourself:** There are only 24 hours in a day, so invest your time in what you most enjoy and what is most relevant to helping you achieve your goals. To put this into perspective, channel your inner Marie Kondo and ask yourself whether what you're doing sparks joy.
- **Be mindful of technology use:** Try turning off notifications, putting your phone in another room or putting aside set time to go on your phone. Delaying a reward in the short term = long-term gains over time.
- **Be self-compassionate:** Don't put study above all else - ensure you have time to yourself. Having some wind-down time will make the study time more efficient too! It's important also to be *specific* and *actionable* in your self-talk as this is more likely to help find solutions to problems. Self-awareness and compassion can be fostered through a journal - document your achievement, improvements and what you are grateful for.
- **Take action if you are procrastinating:** Procrastination is the mind's way of dealing with what is overwhelming - likely due to a fear of starting the task for it will not meet up to expectations, or they prioritise short-term interests. The best way to nip it in the bud is to make a quick plan and just *start*. Set a timer and just work for ten minutes. Stop, repeat and break. This focuses on the process over the result, making it more likely to achieve your goals.
- **Take part in something!** The Competitions Portfolio offer a range of competitions to challenge different legal skills in various environments. The friendships you can foster through doing something meaningful outside of study are invaluable. However, don't be afraid to think broadly - it can be a club, student politics, volunteering, sports or events by the AULSS Activities portfolio!
- **Take initiative with friendships:** this can not only improve your wellbeing but may lead to more fulfilling relationships generally. It takes a few minutes to contact someone, but it may make their day or start a great new friendship!

- **Say what's on your mind!** Find someone with a listening ear, studying law or not, and just tell them what's on your mind. Sometimes listing off all those assignments, complaining about the AGLC 4th Ed. and things you have to get done can clear your mind!

### **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism can become an insidious trait of many students and can infiltrate many aspects of the law school experience. One way to combat perfectionism when it's holding you back is through the '80/20 rule' - possibly familiar to anyone with an economics background, the rule works in the sense that 80% of the results can be achieved with 20% of the effort.

Think about every single time you have written an essay. 80% of the work usually comes from doing that first draft.

The advantage of this rule is that a first draft gets you much further along the road to completion and a possibility of further improvement in the editing process. While the hypothetical essay may not be as good as it could be, it is far better to have it done than to be in a state of decision-paralysis overshadowed by the need to be perfect.

To help reframe a problem in line with the 80/20 rule, ask these kinds of questions:

- How would I briefly summarise this / what are the key concepts?
- Does this remind me of anything that I already know in this domain of knowledge?
- Does this remind me of anything in another unrelated domain of knowledge?
- What other things do I know that support the veracity of this concept?
- Can I think of anything else I know that contradicts this concept?
- Do I know any concrete or practical examples that illustrate or illuminate this concept?
- How challenging is it for me to comprehend this?
- If this is a WHAT, can I explain the WHY? (or vice versa, as applicable)
- Why is this so important to know?
- Do I find this interesting? Why is that the case, or why not?
- Do I find this surprising?
- Why is that or why is that not the case?
- How can I apply this in the real world?

[Source: *'How to Read Academic Content Once And Remember It Forever, David Handel, 2019*]

It's also important to question why you might want to be 'perfect' - are you aiming high because you enjoy the process of learning and growing or because of how it will look to others? If you feel this is an issue, services are available to align your goals with your values, aspirations and skills [See Resources below].

As Stephen Hawking once said, 'the Universe does not allow for perfection, but you can still reach the stars'.

# Resources

## ***Adelaide University Student Care and Adelaide University Student Life Counselling Support***

- Free, confidential and available to all enrolled students seeking to address issues that may be affecting their study and life.
- Ground Floor, Horace Lamb Building. North Terrace Campus - Adelaide University
- T: +61 8 8313 5663
- If you require urgent support after 4pm you can contact the University Crisis Line on 1300 167 654 or 0488 884 197
- Currently, student can access phone or virtual appointments once a registration form has been completed. Find the form here: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/counselling/access-counselling-support/counselling-registration-form>

## ***Student Life Disability Support***

- Disability Support can help you manage ways to accommodate your disability or medical condition whilst at Uni so you can focus your energy towards your studies.
- We encourage you to register with our service as soon as you enrol in your courses, or as soon as possible, so that we have sufficient time to discuss the impact of your condition on your studies, and to put the right supports in place for you. Registering with Disability Support will enable us to start discussing your needs with you and how we might be able to support you in your studies. If you have complex requirements, you can register before you have been made an offer of study.
- DAP's (Disability Access Plans) and AEA's (Alternative Exam Arrangements) are key services that allow anyone with a temporary or permanent condition that may interfere with study to seek help.
- To arrange an appointment, a completed registration form is required, via: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/disability/how-to-register/disability-service-registration-form>
- To register for longer-term disability support, a completed registration form is required, via: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/disability/how-to-register>

## ***Studiosity - Adelaide University***

- Free, after-hours online study help tool available to all University of Adelaide students through enrolment in MyUni. Get feedback on your essay or report draft in less than 24 hours, or live, expert assistance with subjects like writing, maths, science, economics and more.
- See Adelaide Uni's website to download the app.
- Please note this may not be available for all courses so check with the coordinator.

## ***The Writing Centre - Adelaide University***

- Aims to help all students, no matter their skill level, in their development as writers through one-on-one consultations.
- Level 3 East, Hub Central - Adelaide University
- T: +61 8 8313 0280
- Appointments can be made online via: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/>

## ***Lex Salus - Adelaide University***

- An initiative of the Adelaide Law School aimed at raising law student awareness of the importance of mental, physical and nutritional health across all year levels of the degree, and of the various counselling, disability and equity services both within and outside university that can provide help.
- Website: <https://law.adelaide.edu.au/study/lex-salus>

## ***Adelaide University Law School Student Advisor***

- Enrolment and other degree related queries can be directed to Sharmin Rahman, Law School Student Advisor.
- T: (08) 8313 3357
- [sharmin.rahman@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:sharmin.rahman@adelaide.edu.au)

## ***PASS sessions for Law Courses - Adelaide University***

- Free seminars run by recent students of the course who performed especially well.
- Horace Lamb 2015 - Division of Academic and Student Engagement - Adelaide University
- Website: <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/pass/>

## ***Adelaide University Career Services***

- Our mission at the University of Adelaide Career Services is twofold: one, prepare our highly skilled students for their professional careers; and two, connect them with industry and employers. We currently provide fully virtual support to our students during COVID-19.

### Student & industry enquiries

- T: +61 8 8313 5123
- [career.services@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:career.services@adelaide.edu.au)

Career Services are currently offered via phone, email, Zoom and digital events. Ask Careers web chat is also available between 9:30am - 11:30am on weekday mornings. CareerHub is also open 24/7.

### Global employer enquiries

- T: +61 8 8313 9909
- [global\\_career@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:global_career@adelaide.edu.au)

## ***Lifeline Australia***

- Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.
- T: 13 11 14
- Website: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

## ***BeyondBlue***

- Beyond Blue provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live.
- T: 1300 22 4636
- Website and online chat support: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

## ***Headspace***

- Free service for people aged between 12-25 providing information relating to general mental health, physical health, work & study and alcohol and other drugs.
- Website: <https://headspace.org.au/>

# Acknowledgements

## CONTRIBUTIONS

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