

WRITER'S EVENING 28/02/2023



INTRODUCTION

- Introduction provided by UCCLR Editor-in-Chief Iseult O'Callaghan as well as introductions of each speaker:

SPEAKER SESSION

Speakers:

- UCCLR Editor-In-Chief Iseult O'Callaghan
- Dr Mark Coen
- Dr Amrei Muller
- UCCLR Deputy Editor Alessandra Acoggli

FIRST SPEAKER: *UCCLR Editor-In-Chief Iseult O'Callaghan*

- **Background:** Graduated from BCL Law with Politics in September 2022, Graduate teaching assistant for Company Law module, FE1 candidate, will start training contract next year but will first pursue a Masters's in the US in international law.
- As Secretary of last year's journal and Editor-in-Chief of this year's journal Iseult has read many dissertations, thesis, short articles, essays etc which have provided insight into 'cracking the essay writing code' and given skills which she successfully implemented in the later stages of her degree.
- **The Law Review:** Iseult explains that the UCCLR is a Student-led, peer-reviewed legal journal, seeking to publish a comprehensive journal of legal scholarship on an annual basis, typically comprising about 5 or 6 thesis-length articles, proudly sponsored by Arthur Cox. UCCLR work with an Academic Advisory Board within Sutherland which help UCCLR maintain its internationally recognised standards. UCCLR authors contribute to legal understanding and debate domestically and internationally.
- **The Sutherland Symposium:** Accepts shorter article or blog-like submissions on a rolling basis to our online companion publication, This is a great place to start for

people seeking to gain legal writing experience, or maybe just their first publication, and there is also the prize of €500 for the most outstanding article.

- **Case Note competition:** For 1st and 2nd years. Applications opening soon.
- **Legal Journal Criteria:** No specific theme this year to maintain wide call. Guidelines are available online. Contemporary legal issues, Irish domestic law but also European law, to wider international law, also consider pieces on legal history period jurisprudence. From undergraduate and graduate students from all Universities. 5,000-10,000 words, Oscola, deadline Friday 7th April.
- **Editorial Board Process:** Review submissions anonymously, then to peer review, then the author will work with members of the editorial board to bring the article up to publishable standard over the summer.
- **Symposium Criteria:** 2000 words, blog-like articles, case commentaries, letters, book reviews, slightly more flexible range of topical issues.

→ **Writing advice:**

- Stresses the need for having a clear legal angle (cannot be purely political or sociological), and to avoid narratives, reports or streams of consciousness.
- The best articles tend to be non-emotive, critical and of a novel application of law or insightful perspective on a legal issue.
- A clear argument must have been made, critical analysis is key (is the author challenging their own claim, considering other arguments)
- Editorial Board stage criteria:
 - Originality
 - Topicality
 - Strength of argument
 - Structure and Style
- Avoid basic drafting errors: grammar, spelling, syntax, verb tense, conjugation, vocabulary, and concise sentences - shows requisite skills for progressing to the later editorial stage.
- To Iseult, good essay writing is about pattern recognition and applying a formula as well as cultivating your own kind of personal style.
- Read successful submissions and put them into practice
- Encourages the audience to submit an article to the journal or symposium and take the time to implement the feedback whether it's successful or not

SECOND SPEAKER: *Deputy Editor Alessandra Acoggli*

- **Background:** PhD candidate (third-year PhD) at UCD Sutherland School of Law. Her research focuses on climate change, ecosystem protection and human rights and she holds an LLM in public international law as well as a one-year Master's degree in political science from the Université Libre de Bruxelles and a second Master's degree in law from the University of Salento.
- **PhD Programme:** She says to start with a topic you are passionate about and an idea you believe in. It is a long programme (3-4 years). It can be challenging to keep

going if you are not interested in the topic. The same applies to a UCDLR article. Choose a topic that motivates you. Then structure the idea behind the topic in a research proposal.

- **The Research Proposal:** Alessandra explains that this is what she worked on for most of the first year of her PhD. She was helped by her supervisor and believes that this part of the process really helps you make the topic your own.
 - She explains the different elements of a research proposal (context/literature review, research question, research aim, research objectives, methodology/theoretical framework & methods)
- **Writing advice:** Alessandra emphasises the importance of structure, of defining your intro, body and conclusion and then teasing them out. Says it is important to clearly roadmap your essay in the introduction and to really spell it out for the reader. Concludes by saying that she is more than happy to take questions on the PhD programme and writing generally.

THIRD SPEAKER: Dr Mark Coen

- **Background:** Dr Coen is an assistant professor at Sutherland. He teaches criminal law, the laws of evidence and many others modules. He is currently, the LLM Dissertation Coordinator and his research has been published in a plethora of prestigious international journals. He most recently co-authored a new book: A Dublin Magdalene Laundry, on Magdalene Laundries and Church-State power in Ireland along with Catherine O'Donnell and Madhbh O'Rourke, which will be launched on the 7th of March.
 - Begins by praising everyone for attending and for taking an interest in improving their legal writing. Also extends the invitations to anyone who is interested to attend the book launch on March 7th.
- **Writing advice:**
- **Topic:** Choose something that interests you and that you're passionate about rather than what you think will impress. There are going to be challenges and roadblocks, but an underlying love for the subject will help you get over this.
 - **Methodologies:** Use the methodologies that interest you (e.g. if you are interested in history, archival work could be a good strategy - although he notes that archival work is time-consuming). Mark reflects on his own background, that this is his 9th year in UCD having lectured in other universities before this, and says that he has incorporated a number of different methodologies into his work in recent years (e.g. interviewing judges). It can be good to use different methodologies (the comparative approach is common among students, but interviewing people of interest could also be an opportunity).
 - **Originality:** Ask what has been done on this topic already. When writing stress why the topic is relevant, novel, and worthwhile. The advantage of a small jurisdiction is that there are good pickings - less scholarship on domestic topics. It is a good idea to focus on novelty and recent developments - show how a case changed the law in a fundamental area.

- **Importance of being published:** Particularly important for master's applications. Often require a writing sample for master's applications (in your application can show that this piece was so good it was published). - Says he is happy to talk to students applying to masters, has given guidance to students applying to Oxford, and would be happy to put students in touch with past pupils that have gone on to Oxford.
- **Structure:** Make it easy to read. Guide the reader from the general to the specific as they read on. Take the reader by the hand - you are taking the reader through this garden and they shouldn't ever be lost in the garden or wondering. A reader should never be left wondering - signpost where you are going to bring them from the beginning.
- **Clarity and Language:** Emphasises clarity above all else. Clarity of structure and clarity of argument. Keep the language as plain as you can. Students are exposed to verbose, pompous writing (sources tend to be old) but no reason why you should be writing in 2023 like a judge centuries ago. Language has changed and writing has changed. If you can convey the same meaning while using fewer words, then remove those words. Encourages students to check out the 'Plain English' movement. Get someone to proofread your work. It should be coherent to someone with no legal knowledge. Leave a piece and come back to it in a few days, because you will come back to it with fresh eyes.
- **Accuracy:** Get the small things written. It will unnerve the reader if you have inconsistencies (e.g. the Court of Appeal not the Court of Appeals). Mark notes that he works with internship students and they remarked how important attention to detail was in law firms - getting work back with every mistake spotted and tracked changes.
- **Document absences:** If you go looking for something using a thorough search and don't find it, that itself is a finding - can note that a search for the following yielded nothing.
- **Sectioning:** You can start by writing the section in the middle first. If you spot something of interest, file it away for later - may change the structure of your article in the future and include it.

FOURTH SPEAKER: *Dr Amrei Muller*

- **Background:** Ad Astra fellow at Sutherland and School of law, teaching international human rights and humanitarian law. Undergraduate research coordinator. Completed LLM and PhD at the University of Nottingham, She has conducted post-doctoral research and taught in numerous universities across Europe and is widely published in lots of international and legal journals.
- Dr Muller begins by praising and congratulating the UCDLR for managing to have such a good Law Review within the Law School and states that this is really not something you can take for granted.
- **Finding an interesting research question:**
 - Something that has not been overly researched. Follow your interest so the research project does not become a huge burden, and ensure it is sustainable for you.

- Note down any interesting topics or questions you come across that you would like to explore further (e.g. she has a folder for this and comes back to it when she engages in new research).
 - Follow your intuition, particularly in the beginning, act on this intuition, and do basic research on the topic at which point you may choose it or may select a different topic.
 - Do not follow the herd - there are waves in academia of certain topics that may drive you in directions you are not interested in - avoid the noise. Select issues that are not commonly covered and then choose a certain niche aspect of it for research - you may be ahead of the curve.
- **Researching:** Researching requires patience and perseverance. Research takes time which can conflict with today's need to have things fast. But good research requires digging into sources and unitary structure. Think and reflect and discuss things. Research does not give you immediate rewards. A good research paper can take a long time but is very rewarding. Not everyone has the personality to go into research.
 - **The Undergraduate Research Module:** For third and fourth-year students. Have a supervisor but requires independent research and organization skills. Students have produced excellent papers that have been published in the UCCLR and other places. Can help you figure out what you want to do in the future and your considerations for postgraduate studies.

Q&A SESSION

Moderated by Iseult O'Callaghan

→ **Question 1:**

Ruth asks what you do if you have research questions that you might find interesting, but also may provoke controversy, or might be contentious. How do you deal with that kind of criticism?

- **Answer: Mark Coen**
 - **Answers the question by referring to his own experiences as an author**
 - Dr Coen notes that his upcoming book may be controversial and criticism could be quite public e.g. he received an email from RTE where someone said that it is not really possible to have a nuanced debate about Magdalene Laundries. Also received criticism that they are unfairly blaming only the nuns. He discusses how in writing the book they sought to write a fair and balanced account, they reviewed the archives of the Bishops of Dublin - the Sisters of Charity do not allow anyone access to their archives and declined to interview. What they discovered in research was quite bleak. Rather than simply blaming the nuns they are showing how Irish society at the time enthusiastically supported these laundries, they were embedded in lots of other aspects of Irish life.

- He has also received criticism in the past for writing about LGBTQ+ Employees of the Catholic Church and the provisioning law at that time that allowed them to be discriminated against - was criticised in the Irish Catholic and called an equality Commissar
- Mark argues that though it may be slightly scary you have to have the courage of your convictions. Further in writing for the UCDLR it will go through the editorial board and be peer-reviewed. There is a safety in that other people have read the piece and helped to edit it.
- **Answer: Amrei Muller**
 - Dr Muller points out that this issue is likely to become more complicated in the years to come particularly in relation to the rise of disinformation. It could become more difficult, particularly on contemporary issues. She gives the example of the law on armed conflict and how it has recently become highly politicised so you are open to criticism even if you go about it in a neutral way.

→ **Question 2:**

What type of guidance do students receive during the research module?

- **Answer: Amrei Muller**
 - There are sessions where they give guidance to students, especially in the beginning. Guidance on how to choose a research question and how you formulate data, guidance on clarity and structure and many of the points raised in this session. You will receive advice on research methods, organising research, and how you use UCD Library and other resources.
 - You choose your topic and are then assigned a supervisor.
 - In the second trimester: you work on your paper independently and also have one meeting with your supervisor.
 - She welcomes students to email her if they have any questions about the research module.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- **Mark Coen**
 - Dr Coen notes that you can get great guidance from things that have already been published, Encourages students to look at recent editions of the law review - how they structure, paraphrase, use headings, how to prepare a reader for a quote etc. Look at editions of the Irish Criminal Law Journal through Westlaw - and other journals.
 - The Breadcrumb trail point: Look at the sources that relevant articles use. Look at the institutional web pages of academics in the field, and see what else they have written.
- **Iseult O'Callaghan**
 - Iseult notes that past editions of the UCDLR are available on HeinOnline. Past articles are referencable. She also notes that it was of huge importance for her own master's applications that she had a pending publication - the

Symposium is still available as an option if the legal journal deadline is too close.

- Finally, if anybody does have any further questions, they can reach out to the Law Review Board at UCD or submit a query through our contact form on the website, or indeed reach out to Dr Cohen and Dr Muller about the research modules and masters.
- Isuelt concludes by thanking our speakers and the audience. She reminds the attendees of the upcoming deadline and wishes all the writers the best of luck.