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LA TROBE UNIVERSITY LAW
STUDENTS' SOCIETY
CAREERS' GUIDE FOR 2010

La Trobe University
Law Students' Society

FOREWORD
23 August 2010

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
LAW STUDENTS' SOCIETY
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FOREWORD

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG*

I salute the publication of the 2010 La Trobe careers' guide.

Although I took an active part in my student law society (indeed, it was the beginning of a juggernaut of student politics that helped shape my life – nothing quite like it until Julia Gillard, Peter Costello, Tony Abbott and Joe Hockey), we did nothing like this guide back in the 1950s and 60s. Why was this so? It was because in those days, getting a job in the law was largely a matter of the old boys' network. And I mean old boys. There were few opportunities for women. Very few women even studied law forty years ago. In my first at the Sydney Law School in 1958, there were only seven women in a class of 100 males. One of them was the already formidable Bronwyn Bishop!

Despite my excellent grades at university and at school, I had no family connections with law. I found it very hard to get my first job as an articled clerk. All the big firms rejected my brilliant transcripts. Most did not even grant me an interview. This was so despite my obvious brilliance! Once I had my university degree under my belt, it was easier to get a job as a young solicitor. But even then, I tripped up. The firm that offered me work in its interesting marine law department, Ebsworth & Ebsworth, withdrew the offer when one of the partners lost his seat in the federal election. He had to return to the fold. Still, I quickly secured another job. It opened up opportunities, rare in those days, to be in-house counsel – appearing as a solicitor advocate in court. Thus began my life as an advocate.

* Justice of the High Court of Australia 1996-2009.

As this careers' guide shows, the opportunities available to young lawyers today are much greater than they were in my time. Moreover, equal opportunity principles require a fairer and more equitable distribution of jobs and selection of candidates. Even after the global financial crisis, opportunities are opening up in overseas jurisdictions in ways that were not even dreamed of in my day. The ambit of legal employment has greatly expanded. Lawyers are no longer locked into the 'golden path' of clerk, solicitor, barrister, silk and judge. There is more imagination and there are different opportunities.

Today the opportunities extend to the public sector where lawyers can play a part in the government of their society. They extend to private sector lawyering for corporations and firms. To work in law reform commissions, the Police Service, prosecution authorities, and advisory bodies that now proliferate. The golden path still remains for those who want to take that arduous journey through lawyers' offices, the Bar and judges' chambers. There are many ways today that a lawyer can find fulfilment and satisfaction in the practice of the skills learned at law school.

Law is not just an ordinary job. Its discipline helps all of us to analyse problems; classify solutions; reason to conclusions; and also to promote the rule of law in our society and the world.

Even when a lawyer has concluded his or her primary professional career, opportunities abound. After my retirement from the High Court of Australia in 2009, I have been inundated with opportunities for further service. Twelve Australian universities have appointed me as an Adjunct Professor. The Institute of Arbitrators & Mediators Australia elected me its President in 2009-1010. Recently, I was appointed to the International Centre for Settlement of International Disputes in Washington. And to two international inquiries, respectively of the Commonwealth of Nations and UNDP. Opportunities to take part in mediation and arbitration abound. International committees beckon because a lawyer's skill is always appreciated. Voluntary engagement with civil society is often welcome and interesting. Teaching, training others and being involved in society is something that the law prepares us for.

To the young lawyers of today at La Trobe, I send best wishes. Make sure to keep a space for the work-life balance. If things get you down, talk about it with your colleagues and friends and seek help. It is nothing to be ashamed of. If at first you don't get the dream job you were looking for, persist and things will get better. Remember that law includes a commitment to justice, extending to the vulnerable. Embracing yourself. Make a difference. Ensure that you leave the world, and the law, in better shape. And may good luck accompany you on your journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot above the 'i'.

23 August 2010.