



The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers
in higher education

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Examples from Australian universities

Research Assignment: Law Students Conducting Interviews with Practicing Lawyers

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Broad discipline area:

- Law

Year level:

- Fourth/fifth year

TRN strategy:

- Building a small-scale research activity into undergraduate assignments
- Teaching research methods, techniques and skills explicitly within subjects

Teaching and learning context:

- Large group lectures
- Intensive course delivery mode
- Real world learning
- Inquiry-based learning methodology
- Assessment item

Brief description of the initiative:

A 4,000-word research assignment for *Lawyers, Clients & Legal Services*, an elective taken in the fourth or fifth year of a Bachelor of Laws program with typical enrolment numbers of 30-60, involves in-depth interviews with at least two practising lawyers¹. Every week for a period of six weeks, the lecturer invites one practising lawyer to attend class during which the lawyer is interviewed. In this way, the lecturer models the interview process with six different lawyers, each with different areas of expertise. Students learn about the interview process and also gather research data for their assignments. The written assignment includes:

- Identification and justification of the research question(s) chosen by the student
- Literature review (identification and thorough analysis of relevant sources)
- Methodology employed
- Presentation and analysis of data with reference to the literature
 - At least two in-depth interviews with practising lawyers

- Reference to data from at least three in-class lawyer interviews
- Conclusions that relate directly to the research question(s)

This applied assignment has several TRN related benefits to students:

- It provides them with experience in conducting research interviews and the skills to carry out basic empirical research. These skills are transferable to the students' professional lives as lawyers frequently conduct client interviews.
- It gives them an opportunity for inquiry-based learning through interaction with 'real-world' law professionals who provide students with legal practice insights that are not available in the standard Australian legal curriculum.

For further details:

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ⁱ The course convenor obtains ethical clearance on behalf of the students who are required to provide potential interviewees with a letter of introduction explaining that the information provided will only be used for the purpose of the assignment and that their identity and/or workplace will not be revealed.