
SCHOOL OF INSPIRATION: THEN AND NOW

Armando Gardiman AM (BJuris/LLB '80), Managing Partner, Turner Freeman Lawyers and **William (Bill) O'Brien** (BJuris/LLB '79), Founding Partner, William O'Brien & Ross Hudson Solicitors, met in 1974 on their first day of Law School. They became best friends back then and remain close friends today. UNSW Law invited the pair back to campus for a visit where they toured the Law Building, had lunch with Professor David Dixon, sat in on Professor Alex Steel's Criminal Law lecture and compared notes and experiences with current fourth year Commerce Law student and Scientia Scholar, George Pasas.



Armando Gardiman

(BJuris/LLB '80)

Armando Gardiman and Bill O'Brien believe that a shared philosophy, and the common ideals of giving back to the community and fighting inequality, strengthened a great friendship, and allowed it to endure to this day.

Armando has been with Turner Freeman since he completed his Law degree in 1980. Five years later he became a partner and established Turner Freeman's Parramatta office, where he works from today. As he led the firm's expansion in the late 1980s, opening more offices in Western Sydney

and regional New South Wales, Armando quickly established himself as a leader in asbestos litigation. Since his first asbestos related case in 1982, Armando has acted on behalf of clients suffering from mesothelioma with a more successful case record than any other lawyer in Australia. Through his work, Armando has helped reform legislation in NSW, and in turn all other states in Australia, around dust disease claims. He

is a founding member of the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia and has written numerous publications on dust disease litigation.



Bill O'Brien

(BJuris/LLB '79)

Bill O'Brien, an accredited criminal law specialist, has acted as an advocate in the criminal justice system since he graduated from

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UNSW Law. He began his career working out of a small country law firm, appearing in Dubbo and other regional courts. After completing a mandatory twelve months of supervised practice and gaining his unrestricted practising certificate, he worked as a sole practitioner. Armed with the feeling of empowerment he gained as a Law student, Bill found himself running cases in the High Court out of his one-person office. Soon, the firm expanded to three offices in NSW and, in 2012, he founded William O'Brien & Ross Hudson Solicitors with his colleague Ross Hudson. His drive to take action on the inequalities that existed in society inspired him to start a firm that could and would make a difference in the lives of others.

Keen to re-visit the place where it all began, Armando and Bill returned to UNSW Law some 36 years after completing their degrees, where they sat down with current Law student and Scientia Scholar, George Pasas, to chat about the similarities and differences between the Law School of their student days and of his.

Thinking back to the start of their degrees, Armando and Bill explained that in 1974, UNSW Law was in its infancy. Some

viewed it as the up and coming alternative to Sydney University which, at the time, was the only institution that would grant a Law degree in NSW.

“[UNSW Law] was a fabulous place with extraordinary intellects that challenged you and made you think about the law and the effects of the law on ordinary people,” Armando told George.



George Pasas

Commerce Law Student and Scientia Scholar

“It didn’t have the look and feel of USyd, which was the only thing to compare it to. As a young university it lacked tradition but it was a great place full of constant conversation and demonstrations,” Bill added.

George, winner of a 2015 UNSW Alumni Award for his contribution to the University as a student volunteer, was surprised to hear that years ago, students might have had mixed emotions after being accepted to study Law at UNSW. Now ranked 13th best Law School in the world, George has only ever known UNSW Law’s reputation as an international leader.

Watching the flow of students pass through the Law Building between classes, Bill continued, “[In the ’70s,] there was always an issue to take up, whether it was migration or minorities. It was relaxed but interesting... there were lots of great people that had social consciences and they were interested in discussing issues of concern at the time.”

This, George said, is something that hasn’t changed. “[The Law School] still fosters those same ideals of putting something back into the community and levelling out inequalities,” he explained. “We have the Law Centres and the opportunity to do internships within them... [and] everyone has to spend a night at Kingsford Legal Centre, so there’s lots of exposure.”

Armando was impressed by the Law School’s continued commitment to social justice. “[The Law School] was a great place for imbuing in young people an understanding that there are thousands of people out there that are not as fortunate as us and they all, at some point, require some legal assistance. If you can help, then you should,” he said.

The chat between past and present UNSW Law students also revealed a significant difference in the

breadth of opportunities available to Law graduates. Compared to today, opportunities to practise law in the 1970s and early 1980s were quite limited. Sports and Entertainment Law, Environmental Law and even a Science/Law degree did not exist.

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Armando and Bill believe that the potential to take an overseas secondment was, at the time, unheard of. Technology had not yet progressed to where it is now and large international law firms were yet to become a common employer. Sole or suburban practices worked on domestic issues, workers compensation, conveyancing and Criminal Law.

However, sitting in on Professor Alex Steel’s Criminal Law tutorial, with students working off laptops, and discussing the video clips shown in class, it was clear to our alumni how much has changed since UNSW Law first opened its doors; a time when students handed their papers in by pigeonholes rather than email.

As they said goodbye, Bill offered George a few words of advice: “Today the Law is broad enough to accommodate any interest. Follow your passion... Sort that out and start paving the way.”

Armando also commented on the change in his classroom experience. “The theoretical subject matter is so much easier to understand when you have 35 years of practical experience behind you!” he said.

Having spent their Law School days studying on upper campus, Armando and Bill were keen to see the “new” Law Building, and George was an obliging guide, walking them through classrooms, lecture theatres, the Centres Precinct, the Law Library and the Kingsford Legal Centre. Standing outside the Law Building, the men were slightly surprised by the large and diverse group of students walking towards the Law School. As they watched people from nearly every corner of the globe turn up for class, they recalled a less culturally diverse campus, but one that was just as lively – and perhaps featured a bit more facial hair!

“There was a food co-op where the Law Building now stands. The co-op was the

centre of our lives. It was all very vegan and counter-cultural and there were concerts all the time at the Roundhouse and on the old Library Lawn,” Bill said.

After catching up with Professor Dixon and a number of other academics who they remembered from their time at UNSW Law, sampling the campus lunch options, exploring the Law School’s facilities and spending a couple of hours back in the classroom, Armando and Bill’s visit neared its end. Having enjoyed his day at UNSW Law, and the many fond memories it conjured, Armando told George, “This place in the 1970s was an extraordinary place. The fact that we’re still friends today is indicative of the place UNSW Law was.”

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