

## **ACU's unique pro bono placement program wins Uniservitate Award**

Australian Catholic University's (ACU) Thomas More Law School has received global recognition of its distinctive pro bono placement program by winning first prize in the Uniservitate Award.

The national law school's Pro Bono Legal Service and Education Program has taken out one of two first prize awards in the Asia and Oceania Uniservitate Hub. Winners of seven regional hubs globally receive €5,000 (AUD \$8,000) and an invitation for one academic and one student to attend the fifth Uniservitate Global Symposium in Rome. The winners will also have a private audience with Pope Francis during the Symposium.

The Thomas More Law School will receive the award at a regional ceremony at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, on 25 September 2024.

Law lecturer and national coordinator of the Pro Bono Program Ian Lam said the Thomas More Law School was honoured to receive global recognition from Uniservitate. Mr Lam, who is also undertaking research into the benefits of community service for training future lawyers, said many complex community problems intersected with legal matters.

"ACU staff and students are not confined by legal boundaries but possess a deeper concern for the disadvantaged," Mr Lam said.

"Our compulsory pro bono placement makes ACU a pioneer in integrating legal education with community service in Australia."

Established in 2014, the Thomas More Law School pro bono program supports around 250 students annually across three Australian capital cities to provide supervised legal service to individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage.

As part of the program, all ACU law undergraduate students are required to undertake 80 hours of pro bono placements in law firms or with leading barristers, community legal centres, NGOs, government departments, or social justice agencies. This contributes more than 20,000 hours of pro bono legal service every year.

Interim Dean of ACU's Thomas More Law School Associate Professor Kunle Ola said most students who complete their pro bono placement go on to find additional pro bono work.

"A lot of them also find paid employment opportunities following their pro bono work, making it sustainable for them to develop their careers and livelihoods," Associate Professor Ola said.

"This also enables our students to coordinate and inspire the next generation of ACU law students."

Associate Professor Ola noted that as a Catholic university, ACU offered students unique opportunities to support the pro bono branch of commercial law practices and the booming Catholic welfare sector.

"Proud of our Catholic identity, we strive to connect our law students to the legal and compliance professionals in the Catholic sector. Our strong partnerships with Catholic missions showcase our holistic approach to developing strong relationships with Catholic institutions and other community that share similar values," he said.

Executive Dean of ACU's Faculty of Law and Business Professor Andrew O'Neil congratulated the Thomas More Law School for receiving the prestigious honour.

"I warmly congratulate Ian Lam and the Thomas More Law School on this incredible achievement, which recognises our Law School as a global leader in community engagement," Professor O'Neil said.

"Our Faculty is committed to supporting future lawyers as they grow into the next generation of leaders in community engagement, committed to the pursuit of knowledge, the dignity of the human person, and the common good," Professor O'Neil said.

"ACU's Law School Pro Bono Program exemplifies that commitment. Our students benefit from learning from law academics who are deeply passionate about people and communities experiencing disadvantage. The Pro

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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Bono Legal Service and Education Program forms part of ACU’s commitment to community-engaged learning opportunities for undergraduate students.”

Uniservitate is an international program dedicated to the promotion of service-learning in Catholic higher education. The program encourages Catholic higher education institutions across seven regional networks to embrace Pope Francis’s call for the education of “mind, heart and hands” to address complex social issues.

The fifth Uniservitate Global Symposium will be held on November 7-8 in Rome at the Libera Università Maria SS. Assunta (LUMSA).

**Media Contact: Emilie Ng, 0475 963 606, [emilie.ng@acu.edu.au](mailto:emilie.ng@acu.edu.au)**