

LEAD Scholarship Report for UQef Board Meeting



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Overview

The UQ Law Leadership, Excellence and Diversity (LEAD) Scholarship supports students who have experienced educational, social and/or financial disadvantage with a scholarship of \$8000 for up to five years. Thanks to the ongoing commitment from the UQeF, we were once again able to offer up to 17 LEAD Scholarships for students commencing in 2022.

This report also identifies the current support mechanisms that are in place to support the current LEAD Scholars, and highlights areas of consideration where development is needed, or is in progress, so that we can continue to support our students in the best way possible.

Scholarship applications in 2022

The promotional campaign lasted four months, from the opening of applications on Monday 2 August 2021 to the closing of applications on Friday 12 November 2021. The target audience was Year 12, high school leavers, who can provide evidence of financial and/or other disadvantage(s).

Results

A total of 176 applications were received in 2021 (complete and incomplete). This is marginally higher than the 172 that were received in 2020.

Of the applications:

- 72 completed (vs. 79 in 2020)
- 70 students were eligible for the scholarship (vs. 72 in 2020)
- 12 were interviewed in November 2021, 2 in January 2022
- 7 students were offered and accepted their scholarships

Application Shortlisting

- The application shortlisting process begins with an assessment by the Student Support and Wellness Officer of the Law School. They work closely with UQ Admissions to access, and remain up to date with, the applicants' QTAC Educational Access Scheme ('EAS') rankings. It is on this basis that we assess applicants' financial hardship status in order to shortlist them for an interview.
- Where there are potential issues for the applicant to complete their EAS application to QTAC (such as access to financial documentation from their parents), we often provide them with the benefit of the doubt, and if supported by other information that they have provided through their written application, we determine whether they meet the other criteria, to merit an interview to proceed to the next stage of assessment.
- It is our understanding that our assessment of financial hardship and reliance on QTAC's EAS rankings is stricter than for other financial hardship-based scholarships within the wider UQ scholarship awards system, particularly because our applicants are recent school leavers and we can leverage QTAC's assessment in this way.

Gap-year Student Applicants

In their current form, the rules of the LEAD Scholarship do not allow for a recent schooler, who has taken a gap-year, to apply for the Scholarship. To be eligible, the rules specify that the applicant must be completing their final year of study, in the year of their application. In recent years we have identified, mostly through

student feedback, that this eligibility requirement may in fact be an undesirable barrier for otherwise worthy candidates. We would be open to exploring the possibility of removing this restriction, if it aligned with the consensus of the UQeF.

LEAD Scholars Support and Engagement

Overview

The LEAD Scholarship program is now in its sixth year of operation. At the end of this semester, we will expect to have our first cohort of two LEAD Scholars graduate from their UQ bachelor program. Although it would have been all four students from our 2017 cohort graduating, two of those students have made variances to their program, mostly for convenience, resulting in a delayed graduation until the end of this year.

The breakdown of students currently in the program are as follows: 4 from the 2017 cohort, 7 from the 2018 cohort, 10 from the 2019 cohort, 13 from the 2020 cohort, 9 from the 2021 cohort, and 7 from the 2022 cohort. We currently have a total of 50 current LEAD Scholars.

The UQ Law School continues to make a concentrated effort to support these, and other vulnerable and at-risk students, through the 'Law, Life and Wellbeing' co-curricular program, facilitated by the Student Support, and Wellness Officer. This will often involve one-on-one pastoral care appointments, or more formal appointments, together with the student's academic mentors, or with the Director of Teaching and Learning if issues of academic progression arise, or if more tailored assistance is required.

We continue to facilitate regular coffee catchups and 'swotvac' pizza lunches with the entire cohort, and their respective academic mentors. The students also receive informal mentoring from our Honorary Professor, the Honourable Anthe Philippides, who also facilitates 'Music and the Arts Circle' events, where she personally funds opportunities for our students to attend concerts, exhibitions, and arts festivals as a way to encourage a rounded student formative experience, and to connect students with one another, as well as with others from the legal profession who also attend.

These additional offerings of support continue to be a flagship feature of the LEAD Scholarship program, which emphasises the importance of connection and belonging to the School, as well as providing the opportunity for the students to build their own sense of community and feel motivated to engage further, whether it be through mooting, pro bono, or other volunteering and co-curricular initiatives.

Leadership, Equity and Diversity

The demographic of Scholarship recipients from the 2022 cohort once again represents a highly diverse group of students. The students come from locations such as Caloundra, Woodend (Ipswich), Point Vernon (Fraser Coast), Trafalgar (Inner Regional Victoria), Jindalee, Brendale, and The Gap.

These high-achieving students have demonstrated academic excellence despite unique challenges of unstable and complicated family environments. Some specific challenges include high caring responsibilities for their immediate family members, the responsibility to financial assist with household expenses such as rent and groceries, or entering into an environment where the student would lack any form of support once turning 18 years of age. One student in particular is an Australian Permanent Humanitarian Visa Holder, who arrived in Australia as a refugee from Syria and only began to learn English in Year 10 of high school when she arrived.

Academic Mentors

Each cohort of LEAD Scholars is paired with two academic mentors (1 male, 1 female) from the Law School who journey alongside the Scholar as they progress through their degree. The academic mentors consist of lecturers or researchers who volunteer their time to meet with the students as a group at least four times a semester for first-years, and twice a semester for students in their second year or beyond.

The academic mentors often provide advice on study techniques, connect or refer their LEAD Scholar to other available support, provide encouragement and motivation, and help to facilitate discussion between the peers to build a sense of community and solidarity.

Each cohort of Scholars, the two academic mentors, and the Student Support and Wellness Officer, will usually meet over coffee on campus. Once a semester, there is also an opportunity for all the Scholarship cohorts and their respective mentors to gather as a community over a pizza lunch on campus. This large group gathering has received excellent feedback, particularly from first-year students who benefit from the informal mentoring of the older students.

College Memberships

Given that a majority of the LEAD Scholars leave their rural family homes to study or have experienced some form of a disadvantaged background, the Law School also offers each student the opportunity for a supplementary donor-funded scholarship for residential or non-residential memberships at UQ colleges. This is quite a costly endeavour due to the high fees charged by the colleges. The Law School is continuing to review the efficacy of this component, assessing on a regular basis for individual student needs, circumstances and expected benefit.

Residential memberships grant the student convenient accommodation throughout the semester, along with food, an active community, access to internet and other recreational facilities, as well as study groups and tutoring.

Non-residential memberships grant the student the opportunity to use all the amenities, receive meals, and take part in all the social and academic activities facilitated on the college campus throughout the semester.

Retention

The Law School appreciates that LEAD Scholars are vulnerable and have less-than-optimal support networks or familial encouragement. Notwithstanding, our retention rate in comparison to other hardship scholarship programs at UQ is high due to the various student-support mechanisms in place on a school level. Notwithstanding, a total of eight students have withdrawn from the LEAD Scholars program:

2017 Cohort

- One student transferred their enrolment within UQ after one semester to pursue a Bachelor in Business Management.
- One student withdrew after three semesters due to family interstate relocation. This student later returned to UQ Law and is now being supported through the Roslyn Griffith Scholarship instead.

2018 Cohort

- One student transferred their enrolment within UQ after three semesters to pursue a Bachelors of Arts/Education (Secondary).

2019 Cohort

- One student withdrew in semester 1 of 2021 due to health concerns and Covid-19-related stressors. We continued to support this student through multiple attempts to make concessions for their study load and alternative assessment pieces. This student unfortunately experienced frequent hospitalisation due to mental health issues and after much consideration, the best decision at the present time for their health was to withdraw from their university studies.
- One student took a pre-approved 12-month break from study during 2020. They returned in semester 1 of 2021. However, this student continued to struggle with significant mental health issues and due to ongoing hospitalisation, the health advice supported withdrawal from their university studies.

2020 Cohort

- One student transferred their enrolment within UQ after one semester to pursue a Bachelors of Mathematics/Education (Secondary).

2021 Cohort

- One student suffered ongoing medical issues due to a very challenging home environment involving domestic violence and associated mental health issues and a physical disability. We are continuing to support this student who is attempting a part-time load instead. However, with the uncertainty of their ability to return to full-time study, or to achieve the required minimum GPA, we unfortunately had to suspend their monetary scholarship support.
- One student transferred to a Bachelor of Advance Business course after one semester to pursue their goals, which more aligned with that degree.

Areas for Consideration

Our report last year highlighted an increase in Scholars requesting special consideration and permission to continue with their Scholarship while undertaking a part-time study load, as opposed to the full-time study load that is normally required under the rules of the Scholarship. In most cases this has been due to health issues, but in one case it has been because of a change in circumstances that required the student to defer some of their study to enable them to increase their hours with their employer in order to establish a more secure financial situation for themselves for when they returned to full-time study. In another instance, it has been to enable a student to successfully complete another academic opportunity, namely, the New Colombo Scholarship program, which has a component of a full-time internship.

These measures continue to be made on a case-by-case basis in direct consultation with the Dean of the Law School, and the Director of Teaching and Learning, the academic mentors (where necessary), and the Student Support and Wellness Officer, who is usually their first point of contact and most aware of their personal circumstances.

Peer Writing Assistance

Last year, we had been focussing on identifying further avenues of support that we could offer our Scholars beyond the community-building and mentoring initiatives already present. We have identified that many of our Scholars, although academically gifted, and with proven tenacity and resilience, sometimes lack skills in academic writing — including the ability to write persuasively, use correct grammar, or demonstrate nuanced writing abilities for a legal context. We appreciate that our LEAD scholars are from diverse backgrounds and from rural areas, meaning that the educational and formative experiences that they would have had access to throughout their secondary schooling would have varied.

It is for this reason that we are currently exploring the option to provide peer-assisted writing support for students that demonstrate such a need from our scholarship cohorts. Currently the Law School provides this service to our international student cohort, through a student assistant, who has an extended background and working history in TESOL within a tertiary setting. These sessions have proven extremely beneficial to our international students, and in turn to our academics, who can now more equitably assess these students for their legal comprehension and application, rather than facing the hurdles of trying to understand assessment pieces that, for lack of native language experience, would otherwise fail to communicate the student's true message or intentions.

We have so far linked two Scholarship students in with our peer-writing support assistant, and we will eagerly monitor the effectiveness and benefits of this initiative.

Testimonials of Impact

Recent Testimonials

We have prepared a featured article on our four scholars from the 2017 cohort who will graduate this year. To read in full, please visit our website [here](#).

1. “By connecting us with people who are also recipients of the LEAD Scholarship — as well as Faculty members who reach out and care for your wellbeing both personally and academically — those are the tools that are vital to do your best and excel here at UQ Law.” (2017 Cohort)
2. “Being able to go to dedicated academics who have done it all before for advice and support, and who are looking out for you consistently, it’s priceless.” (2017 Cohort)
3. “If you’re someone who doesn’t have money or financial funding, it really dictates your university experience. It becomes really difficult to take opportunities that run alongside your degree. You want to take risks and adventures, but you just don’t have the resources to. I’ve been able to not only take career opportunities like the ODPP [a 4-week full-time placement] without added financial stressors, but also life experiences that have made me who I am today.” (2017 Cohort)



Previous Testimonials

1. “Connecting with other members of the college as well as LEAD Scholars created an easy bridge for the immense transition to university life.” (2020 Cohort)
2. “This year has presented many exciting and daunting challenges, a main one being settling into Brisbane and making friends in a completely new environment. Academically, this year has been a massive shift from high school, and I believe the extra support and tutoring offered through my associate membership has benefited me greatly. During assessment time, having a space to work in and gain help from peers and tutors has enabled me to achieve better academically and have a support

- system. I am so grateful to have received this scholarship and the associate membership to college.” (2020 Cohort)
3. “Thanks to this support network I gained the confidence which helped achieve great success in extracurricular and leadership opportunities without compromising my studies. I genuinely cannot think of a better introduction to my studies of law than what I obtained as a result of the LEAD Scholarship and the associate membership with King’s College which they awarded me. I couldn’t be more grateful for this opportunity.” (2020 Cohort)
 4. “The college associateship in collaboration with the LEAD scholarship has greatly impacted my personal and academic life over the past year. The tutoring program at Duchesne college has offered much support and guidance to my studies, especially during the pandemic where the transition to online learning was daunting and difficult. Being able to not worry about lunch during the week has also been a great blessing, both financially and terms of time. Additionally, the networking and social opportunities at college have made integration into Uni life immeasurably easier and more pleasant. Overall, I would say that the college associateship experience has been terrific. Thank you so much for your consideration and continued support.” (2020 Cohort)
 5. “The non-residential college membership at St Leo’s College has been a wonderful asset towards my university life. The tutoring and academic mentoring program has not only helped me to further consolidate my understanding of course content from Law and Science but has given me the opportunity to establish connections with peers, continue to practice communication skills and intermingle with new people I would have not gotten the chance to. Hence this greatly supported my transition into University. I really enjoy the friendly academic and social atmosphere the non-residential membership has created for me whenever I am at the college. Furthermore, knowing that there are a wide range of facilities that I can benefit from with the other students at the college, such as the gym, library and learning spaces has only further enhanced my starting University experience.” (2020 Cohort)
 6. “This is long overdue, and I should’ve said it much earlier, but thank you so much for everything that you have done for me this year. I’m still pinching myself to see if this entire scholarship is real, because it really does seem too good to be true. I received way more than I originally thought this year from the LEAD Scholarship team and I’m unexplainably grateful. Thank you for making the university transition a million times easier than it should have been and thank you for even considering me in the first place as a scholar for this opportunity — it has helped me and my family beyond measure this year.” (2019 Cohort)
 7. “I’d say my experience with the LEAD Scholarships has been a lifesaver. As the first in my immediate family going to Uni, it’s a nice to have a network of mentors and older scholarship recipients to talk to and get advice from. It was also really lovely to have a few people in my cohort who I knew and had something in common with, and who were in similar situations. I met one of my very closest friends through the LEAD coffee catch ups!” (2019 Cohort)
 8. “The law school has been exceptionally helpful, from before the scholarship interviews right up to now. I couldn’t have asked for a better network to help me transition into university.” (2019 Cohort)
 9. “I have found associate membership such a blessing in helping me settle into university and continue to thrive away from familiarity and I am so grateful to have had it as part of my scholarship. Though the law library is wonderful, when it’s full of panicky law students I can find the environment quite overwhelming and it’s so great to have a place I can go and study and recharge, as often times it’s hard to find space on campus to do so. I have been able to take advantage of both the college counsellor and chaplain when I’ve had periods of severe anxiety and worry, as well as their tutoring program for my law subjects. The ability to walk down for lunch has also relieved me of a huge financial and temporal burden, and ensures I’m not just eating beans and rice and actually have a varied diet!” (2019 Cohort)

10. "The non-residential membership to the Women's College has been a highly valuable experience, which has significantly benefited my studies. The tutoring and academic mentoring program available through the College has provided priceless assistance, facilitating clarification of course content and practical advice for assessment. By connecting with fellow LEAD scholars during orientation week, I was able to establish connections that have continued into the academic sphere. Existing relationships with fellow peers have cultivated my confidence in the transition to university, primarily in participation with class activities and student collaboration. My introduction to studying law at the University of Queensland would have been less advantageous and lacking countless opportunities if I was to not have the amazing experience of being a non-residential member to a college." (2020 Cohort)