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2016 Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Law – Welcome address

Professor Nick James, Executive Dean, Faculty of Law
25 February 2016

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Professor Nick James, and I am the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Law here at Bond. Welcome to the Gold Coast, welcome to Bond University, and welcome to the 2016 Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Sport. I would like first to acknowledge the traditional people on whose land we are gathered, and pay my respects to elders past and present.

I am delighted to formally welcome you to this year's colloquium. This is the sixth colloquium on sport held at Bond University. The first colloquia were initiatives of the Centre for Commercial Law and the Bond University Faculty of Law. This year's colloquium is a collaborative effort by the Faculty of Law, the Centre for Commercial Law, the Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine and the Faculty of Society of Design. The theme of this year's colloquium is 'Contemporary Issues in Mega and Professional Sporting Events'.

This welcome address by me is one of two addresses by Executive Deans that you will have the pleasure of enjoying at this colloquium. Tomorrow's proceedings will commence at 9.00am with an Opening Address by Professor Helen Chenery, the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine here at Bond. Imagine that, two Deans in two days, a lawyer and a doctor. Seriously though, this is consistent with the theme of interdisciplinarity that is so central to this colloquium that it is the first word in the colloquium's title. After the date.

Let me tell you a few things about interdisciplinarity. First: Interdisciplinarity is not recognised by the dictionary in Word. As I typed this speech last night Word kept underlining it with that annoying red squiggly line.

Second: Interdisciplinarity is ... not the way we usually do things around here. And by 'around here' I mean within the academy. As academics we like to specialise. The nature of our working conditions, of our employment, is such that we are encouraged to specialise. Through specialisation we acquire reputation and respect and promotion. We identify a field or discipline or sub-discipline in which we have a particular interest or proficiency, and we set out to master it, and to make it our own. As time passes, our expertise becomes both more sophisticated and more narrow and specialised until we can safely and proudly proclaim that this, this is my domain, this is my area of mastery. There is no-one in the world who knows

more than me about 12th century medieval hats, or the reduction in the scope of promissory estoppel as a consequence of the decisions of the Mason high court, or the sociological factors contributing to the development of the 'leg before wicket' rule in 1774.

And we guard our little territories with vigour and verbal violence. 'That's my idea, not your idea'. 'That's my work, not your work'. Perhaps this all stems from our classical preference for seeking to understand through analysis, by atomistically breaking things into pieces in order to identify and understand their components. We divide our experience into ideas and events, into science, and medicine, and philosophy, and psychology, and history, and law. And we divide again into contract law, and tort law, and criminal law and constitutional law, or into ancient history and modern history and contemporary events and futurology, and so on. And we try to make sense of our experiences by viewing them through these tiny windows and we wonder why our problems seem so big and our solutions never work.

And this is my third point about interdisciplinarity: it is essential. It is essential if we, as academics and scholars, are serious about actually doing good in the world by improving human understanding and addressing human suffering. The challenges facing us today cannot be understood and addressed by approaching them from a single perspective, no matter how well-educated and well-published the source of that single perspective. The challenges must be embraced by, captured within, a web of perspectives or points of view.

Problems can rarely be understood and solved by approaching them from a singular disciplinary perspective. 'This is a contract law problem, this is a tort law problem, this is a psychological problem, this is a medical problem, this is a sociological problem.' The world is not that simple, and the distinctions between the various disciplines and sub-disciplines are not real. They are fictions, fantasies, the results of our endless efforts to specialise and distinguish ourselves, which are themselves the consequences of our own ambitions and, perhaps, our insecurities.

When, say, a particular football player is concussed during a game, it is a contract law problem *and* a tort law problem *and* a criminal law problem. It is an industrial relations problem *and* it is a psychological problem *and* it is a medical problem *and* it is a sociological problem. We can only understand the problem, and effectively address the problem, if we approach it from all of these perspectives, and that is only possible if we step outside of our disciplinary silos and make friends with our colleagues across the hall and across the campus and across the world. We must embrace interdisciplinarity.

Which is precisely what you are going to be doing at this interdisciplinary colloquium. You are going to be examining, and hopefully addressing, some of the challenges that confront us in the world of sport. After Professor Chenery's opening address you will hear from our keynote speaker, Associate Professor Laura Misener from the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Western Ontario in Candia. After morning tea you will investigate some of the challenges associated with major sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, the Olympics and Formula 1 Grand Prix, and you will do so from a variety of perspectives including diplomacy theory, workplace health and safety laws, economic analysis and women's studies. After lunch you will be forced to choose between two streams, and you will enjoy presentations about the legal limits of liability in sport, about the 'courtsiding' phenomenon, and about discrimination in sport while at the same agonising over the fact that you are missing out on hearing the papers about high performance training, drugs in sport and social media and sport. Or vice versa, of course. And after afternoon tea, the group will reconvene for a roundtable discussion about sports concussion policies, lead by experts in law and medicine, a most fitting and appropriate illustration of the value of interdisciplinarity.

Hey, that wasn't so hard was it? Those of you who know me personally will know that my knowledge of all things sport-related, my enthusiasm for sports generally ... is really, really low. Non-existent actually. Right now I feel like a nerd in a room full of jocks.

When Annette asked me to delivery this welcome address I was pleased and flattered, then horrified, then despondent, then resigned, then horrified again, and then finally, at about 11pm last night, inspired. It would have been a lot easier for me if this was an Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Star Wars, or Batman, or even Foucauldian discourse analysis. But it isn't, its about sports, and, well, I hope you have enjoyed – or at least tolerated - an opening address for a sports colloquium that didn't actually have much to say at all about sports.

Thank you all for coming this evening, and once again, welcome to the 2016 Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Sport.

