

Dissertation on Scholarship Experience

Attending the annual Samuel Griffith Society Conference in August 2009 was an experience I will remember for a very long time. I had become intrigued at a scholarship provided by the Mannkal Economic Education Foundation which asked for applicants to write a paper which addressed the 5th objective of the Samuel Griffiths Society – “...to establish a clear position in support of the decentralisation of government power.” As a West Australian, I believe in the need for our system of federalist Government to return to the status quo which the founding fathers of the constitution intended. Since the federation of Australia in 1901 there has been a slow but steady shift towards a centralised system of government. Fiscal imbalances begin to grow, and as the decades pass powers of State Governments have been continually handed (forcefully) to the Commonwealth. In my opinion, the income tax power transfer in 1942 was the turning point and slippery slide towards centralist government. I was fortunate enough to be awarded this scholarship from Mannkal to attend the Samuel Griffith Society Conference.

Where better to learn more about the intricacies of fiscal imbalance and the affect the tax powers of both the Commonwealth and States have had on the distribution of power than by sitting next to Dr Brian Pape at the conferences first formal dinner, the Barrister who challenged the Commonwealth's power to make the \$900 stimulus payments. This was the start of many conversations, discussions and debates I had with many men and women I had only ever read about. It was an amazing learning experience to interact with persons who have had such a dramatic impact on the Australian political, judicial and legal environment. Their wealth of knowledge was outstanding, and more importantly they were such warm characters who went out of their way to make myself, and the other scholarship holders, so comfortable.

The papers presented at the conference were both entertaining, intelligent and thought provoking. Two of the most fascinating were those by the WA and NSW Attorney-General's, who, although from different sides of the political coin, both talked so passionately against a bill of rights. But unlike what I had expected, the conference was not a place where opinions were similar. Although all members of the society support the fundamental notion of upholding the constitution, each speaker's paper was often hotly debated and the Q and A sessions were often a fiery encounter. This robust debate, the presentation of both arguments and the discussion between speakers was a great learning experience. The knowledge I absorbed throughout the conference, the people I met and the conversations and discussion had were the major benefits of the scholarship.

I would encourage any student with an interest in constitutional, legal or political affairs to not only apply for this scholarship, but if they have the chance, to attend the Samuel Griffith Society Conference. As the Conference is in Western Australia next year it should be a great opportunity for more Western Australian students to attend. I can only hope that my association with the Society can continue for many years to come.

When asked to suggest areas in which the scholarship could be improved I struggled to find a way in which it could be improved substantially. The only suggestion I would perhaps make for future years is for all the scholarship winners to possibly travel together at the same time.

The 2009 conference was a grand experience. I returned home with a wealth of knowledge and some great stories which I am sure I will continue to tell for many years to come. I am very grateful

to the Mannkal Economic Foundation for providing this opportunity, as well as the Samuel Griffith Society and all the individuals present at the conference that were so fascinating, warm and passionate.

Zach Cole