

SAULCA winter workshop

The South African University Law Clinics Association (SAULCA), (formerly known as Association of University Legal Aid Institution (AULAI)), held a winter workshop in Muldersdrift earlier this year.

SAULCA is a voluntary association for all South African university law clinics to promote and protect the interests, values and goals of its members. Until 2013, it used to be known as the AULAI, which was established in 1986. These law clinics are one of the major providers of *pro bono* legal aid and civil and human rights assistance in the country. The law clinics employ advocates, practicing attorneys, candidate attorneys and in some instances paralegals. They are attached to faculties of law and law schools at all major universities in the country. As opposed to the normal theory-based lecture hall pedagogy, law clinics apply a clinical skills-developing methodology whereby students learn through doing. This experiential learning model allows students to consult with actual clients, open files, assist with the drafting of legal documents and attend court appearances as observers, all under the close supervision of qualified attorneys at the law clinic. Community engagement is used as a vehicle to provide free legal services to those people who cannot afford legal representation. SAULCA's vision is to be a professional and efficient organisation, committed to democratic values and human rights, and dedicated to promoting excellence in clinical legal education and access to justice. Skills deficits is one of the primary concerns relating to the product delivered by the current LLB, and it is envisaged that law clinics will in future have to play an even more prominent role to remedy this.

Delegates from 18 university law clinics in South Africa attended the workshop. The represented universities were Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Rhodes University, University of the Free State, University of Pretoria, University of Johannesburg, University of South Africa, University of Witwatersrand, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban Campus (Howard College), North West University (Potchefstroom Campus), North West University (Mafikeng Campus), University of Limpopo, University of Venda, University of Cape Town, University of Stellenbosch, University of the Western Cape and Walter Sisulu University.

The theme of the workshop was 'Developing Best Practices for Clinical Law Programmes at Law Clinics in South Africa' and built on the success of the 2013 Winter Bosberaad held in Port Elizabeth. Professor Vivienne Lawack, Executive Dean of Law at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, in her capacity as the chairperson of the South African Law Deans Association and Mr Nic Swart, Chief Executive Officer of the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) and Director of Legal Education and Development of the LSSA, opened the workshop with inspiring messages relating to the –

- importance of university law clinics;
- need for university-funding of law clinics; and
- need of practical training of law students in the university law clinic-environment.

The workshop was structured as plenary sessions, supplemented by group discussions. SAULCA members Abraham Klaasen (North West University, Potchefstroom Campus), Jobst Bodenstein (Rhodes University), Daven Dass (University of the Witwatersrand) and Eddie Hanekom (University of Johannesburg) delivered informative plenary sessions on the topics of alignment of teaching objectives and outcomes, teaching methodologies, different teaching methods and assessment. As far as the group discussions were concerned, the groups consisted of delegates from different university law clinics and the discussions focused on various aspects of best practices at law clinics relating to the abovementioned topics.

The President of SAULCA, Professor Jobst Bodenstein, also facilitated a discussion on the ever-present funding issues related to law clinics.

The delegates agreed that they had learned valuable lessons from the various discussions with regard to teaching methods, assessments, etcetera at their own law clinics, which could be improved on and strengthened.

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