

FILLING A GAP IN LEGAL-EDUCATION SERVICE-LEARNING: A MODEL FOR A PROJECT-BASED COURSE TO SUPPORT PEDAGOGY, JOB-READINESS AND COMMUNITY

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Service-learning has become a significant feature of legal education because it integrates academic learning with practical experience, community engagement, and structured reflection. While service-learning in law schools is most commonly associated with clinical legal education, the dominance of clinic-based models limits understandings of how broader service-learning objectives can be achieved. Drawing on a case study from the University of Newcastle (Australia) School of Law and Justice, this article argues that project-based courses offer a valuable complementary model of service-learning that can be integrated into existing law school structures with relatively low cost and limited administrative burden. The skills and experiential learning that such a course provides are especially important as the use of AI becomes rapidly normalized.

The article situates the relevant Project Course within global service-learning scholarship and examines its pedagogical benefits and value for students, law schools and community partners. Using the 4M framework to analyze influences across individual, departmental, institutional, and national and international levels, the article shows how a project-course model aligns with the goals of clinical legal education while also filling gaps in the clinical space to maximize broader service-learning goals. Identifying key design and sustainability considerations, the article suggests how project-based service-learning can productively expand legal education, helping students to connect legal knowledge with public purpose, professional identity formation, and community-engaged practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is a pedagogical model that complements traditional legal education by combining academic instruction with practical experience, community engagement, and structured reflection.¹ The importance of service-learning is widely accepted as an essential element for building a foundation for student career-readiness.² In legal pedagogy, service-learning models have become increasingly integrated throughout law schools worldwide as they seek to redress a long-growing concern that legal education should not be limited to the mere transmission of doctrinal knowledge.³ That concern is founded on an understanding, gaining traction globally, that law students likewise need to learn how legal knowledge operates in practice, how law affects communities, and how lawyers exercise professional judgment in contexts shaped by ethical, civic, and social responsibilities.

Service-learning in law schools is most commonly associated with clinical legal education.⁴ Legal clinics provide students with supervised exposure to client responsibility, reflective learning, and access-to-justice work.⁵ Clinical legal education is therefore an important form of service-learning,⁶ but the scope of service-learning extends beyond the clinical model. In particular, service-learning need not be organized around client advice or representation. It may also take the form of supervised community-engaged research, legal-policy work, public legal education, and other activities directed toward a public or community purpose. Nevertheless, the prominence of clinical legal education narrows the institutional imagination of what can be achieved through legal service-learning. At the same time, practical considerations, including cost, supervision, and administrative demands, as well as assumptions about

¹ See generally Laurie Morin & Susan Waysdorf, *The Service-Learning Model in the Law School Curriculum*, 56 N.Y.L. SCH. L. REV. 561 (2011-2012).

² See, e.g., Francina Cantatore, *The Impact of Pro Bono Law Clinics on Employability and Work Readiness in Law Students*, 25 INT'L J. CLIN. L. EDUC. 147 (2018); Jill Alexander, *Modelling Employability Through Clinical Legal Education: Building Confidence and Professional Identity*, 57 L. TCHR. 135 (2023).

³ See, e.g., Paul McKeown, *An Analysis of Clinical Legal Education in Europe Through the Lens of the 4M Framework*, in CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION IN EUROPE: INNOVATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE (Paul McKeown, Laura Bugatti, Rachel Stalker, Aleksandra Klich, Liubou Krasnitskaya & Jason Tucker eds, 2026), at 15; see also Anthony G. Amsterdam, *Clinical Legal Education – A 21st-Century Perspective*, 34 J. LEGAL EDUC. 612 (1984).

⁴ See generally ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN LAW SCHOOLS, SECTION ON CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION, GLOSSARY FOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION (2017), <https://www.aals.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2017/05/AALS-policy-Vocabulary-list-FINAL.pdf>; see also Antoinette Sedillo Lopez, *Learning through Service in a Clinical Setting: The Effect of Specialization on Social Justice and Skills Training*, 7 CLIN. L. REV. 307 (2001).

⁵ See generally Stephen Wizner & Jane Aiken, *Teaching and Doing: The Role of Law School Clinics in Enhancing Access to Justice*, 73 FORDHAM L. REV. 997 (2004).

⁶ See generally Amsterdam, *supra* note 3.

the role and purpose of clinics within the curriculum,⁷ may limit the ways in which law schools can provide service-learning opportunities.

This article argues that some – even if not all – of these gaps can be remedied through a well-structured project-based course that provides a complementary, alternative model of community-engaged legal education. Through supervised legal or legal-policy projects that provide benefit to the broader community, students can deepen their academic and professional learning, develop their personal and professional capacities, enhance their intercultural competence and awareness of community needs, reflect critically on the civic and social-justice dimensions of law, and cultivate the adaptability and creativity required in an evolving legal profession. Such a course can realize the aims of service-learning without the need for dedicated infrastructure or staff, and without being constrained by the requirements of legal representation. As such, this type of course provides an opportunity to enhance existing service-learning methodologies with low investment costs and minimal administrative burden, building directly into established university course structures.

Pedagogical moves of this sort are becoming more critical in light of the proliferation of AI.⁸ Legal education and legal practice are undergoing seismic shifts. Through increasing efficiency and access to resources and information,⁹ AI can now perform with unprecedented speed some research, analysis, and drafting tasks that have traditionally occupied substantial amounts of junior lawyers' time. This shift alters both the work expected of new graduates and the skills they need in legal practice.¹⁰ In legal education, the capacity of AI to generate research and written work is creating concerns about the erosion of independent thinking¹¹ and causing professors to reconsider assessment design and the skills that law schools should cultivate.¹² A project course is not a panacea. But it provides significant added value in these changing circumstances. Among other contributions, the authentic engagement with

⁷ *Id.* at 617-18.

⁸ Paul McKeown, Rachel Stalker and Laura Bugatti, *Introduction*, in CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION IN EUROPE: INNOVATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE *supra* note 3, at 2.

⁹ Zubair Abbasi, *Legal Education in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence*, 7 L. TECH. & HUMANS 1 (2025); UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, *Rethinking Legal Education in the AI Era*, (July 9, 2026), <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/ai-strategy-statement>.

¹⁰ See generally INT'L BAR ASS'N & CTR. FOR AI & DIG. POL'Y, *THE FUTURE IS NOW: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION* (Sept. 2024), <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=The-future-is%20now-AI-and-the-legal-profession-report>.

¹¹ Haoming Lin, Wei Wei & Handan Lu, *Facilitator or Barrier? Systematic Review on the Relationship between Artificial Intelligence Technologies and the Development of Critical Thinking Skills*, 7 J. EDUC. TECH. & INNOVATION 11, 12 (2025).

¹² See generally Steve Lorteau & Douglas Sarro, *Artificial Intelligence in Legal Education: A Scoping Review*, 60 L. TCHR. 138 (2026); John Bliss, *Teaching Law in the Age of Generative AI*, 64 JURIMETRICS J. 111 (2024).

the law that such a course provides makes it possible for students to develop a cross-cutting suite of job-ready skills, such that traditional critical-thinking skills and social-interaction skills can be learned alongside, rather than in competition with, AI skills. In this way, the project-course model offers a path for building capacities that remain distinctively human while simultaneously being of increasing importance to the future of legal practice.

We examine the role that such a course can play in the legal-education service-learning environment through the “4M” framework. The 4M framework is an analytical tool that contributors to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)¹³ have formulated to structure understanding and interrogation of “layers of influence” within educational systems.¹⁴ In an insightful book chapter, Paul McKeown extends the use of 4M to analyze clinical legal education, having adopted the framework from its original broader foundations. Inspired by that instrumental extension, we find the 4M theoretical lens to be constructive for analyzing a pedagogical approach that sits outside of, but is complementary to, the clinical legal education framework.

In this article, we apply the 4M framework through a case study of the Project Course that one of the authors developed at the University of Newcastle (Australia) School of Law and Justice. Offered from 2020 to 2025, the Project Course was an elective in which law students completed projects with community, institutional, and public-interest partners, producing legally informed outputs intended for use beyond the classroom. Depending on the needs of each project, students were supervised by academic staff from the School, staff affiliated with university research centers, community partners, or a combination of these, while the course coordinator retained overall oversight of all projects. We show how a well-designed project course can maximize the productive impact of the service-learning model by supplementing clinical legal education and expanding the pathways through which students engage with the public, institutional, and community-facing dimensions of the law.

The article proceeds as follows. Part I introduces service-learning as a pedagogical framework, tracing its development in legal education in

¹³ A foundational work refers to the scholarship of teaching and learning in this way: “A scholarship of teaching is *not* synonymous with excellent teaching. It requires a kind of ‘going meta,’ in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning—the conditions under which it occurs, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth—and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom but to advancing practice beyond it.” Pat Hutchings & Lee S. Shulman, *The Scholarship of Teaching: New Elaborations, New Developments*, 31 *CHANGE: THE MAGAZINE OF HIGHER LEARNING* 10, 13 (1999).

¹⁴ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 9.

the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Here we show how the dominant institutional expression of service-learning in law schools tends to be through clinical legal education. Part II introduces the 4M framework. Through that analytical lens, we examine the University of Newcastle Project Course as a case study of course-structured, project-based service-learning. We consider the structure of the course, the projects and partnerships that resulted, its pedagogical benefits for students, and its reciprocal value for community partners. We then draw on the 4M framework to map out the relationship between the Project Course and clinical legal education, suggesting ways that a project course can fill gaps left by clinical legal education to maximize the potential of service-learning. Part III identifies sustainability and design considerations for law schools seeking to implement similar courses, including supervision, resourcing, student autonomy, partnership management, and institutional commitment. The article concludes by summarizing how project-based service-learning offers a valuable complementary model for service-learning in legal education, capable of connecting legal knowledge with public purpose in ways that are pedagogically rigorous and socially engaged.

I. SERVICE-LEARNING IN LEGAL EDUCATION

Service-learning is a teaching strategy that integrates learning, community service, and reflection to strengthen engagement, impart civic responsibility, and improve on traditional teaching methods.¹⁵ Its theoretical roots can be traced to John Dewey's account of experiential education,¹⁶ which was subsequently expounded on by David Kolb's experiential learning cycle¹⁷ and Paulo Freire's emphasis on critical pedagogy and praxis.¹⁸ Service-learning is not considered a fixed pedagogical strategy but instead has developed over time as a combination of experiential education, practical learning, action, social justice, reflection, and research.¹⁹

¹⁵ Maimoona Salam, Dayang N. A. Iskandar, Dayang H. A. Ibrahim & Mohammed S. Farooq, *Service-Learning in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review*, 20 ASIA PAC. EDUC. REV. 573, 575 (2019); Saul McLeod, *Kolb's Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Cycle*, (August 26, 2026), <https://fossil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/simplypsychology.org-Kolb-Learning-Styles.pdf>; Matthew Atkinson & Rachel Spencer, *Towards a Pedagogy of the Integration of Clinical Legal Education Within the Law Curriculum: Using De-Identified Clinic Files Within Tutorial Programs*, 25 LEGAL EDUC. REV. 121, 122–23 (2015).

¹⁶ See generally JOHN DEWEY, *EXPERIENCE & EDUCATION* (1938).

¹⁷ See Alice Kolb & David Kolb, *Eight Important Things to Know About the Experiential Learning Cycle*, 40 AUSTL. EDUC. LEADER 8 (2018).

¹⁸ Thomas Deans, *Service-Learning in Two Keys: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy in Relation to John Dewey's Pragmatism*, 6 MICH. J. CMTY. SERV. LEARNING 15, 20–22 (1999).

¹⁹ Dan Butin, *The Limits of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, 29 HIGHER EDUC. REV. 473, 490 (2006).

Service-learning addresses a sustained concern within legal education scholarship: doctrinal knowledge alone is insufficient to prepare students for legal practice.²⁰ Traditional legal pedagogy, with its emphasis on case analysis, legislation, and hypothetical problem-solving, remains foundational. Service-learning, however, supplements that pedagogy in two ways. On the one hand, it integrates educational objectives into its structure and outcomes to focus on enhancing students' understanding of their theoretical knowledge²¹; on the other hand, it provides students with opportunities to apply legal knowledge in practical settings,²² develop professional judgment, reflect on the social role of law, and engage with communities beyond the classroom. As such, service-learning is widely recognized as essential in modern legal education because it provides a framework through which law schools can connect academic study with practical capability, professional formation, and civic responsibility.²³

The primary form of service-learning in law schools has been through clinical legal education. Jeff Giddings defines clinical legal education as involving students taking responsibility for client work, receiving feedback and reflecting on their experiences and on the ethics of legal practice.²⁴ Such a model aligns with service-learning because both emphasize experiential engagement, structured reflection, and service to individuals or communities.²⁵

A. Comparative Development of Service-Learning

Service-learning in legal education has developed unevenly across jurisdictions. In the United States, it became associated with the growth of university legal clinics in the 1960s.²⁶ This period saw experimentation

²⁰ See generally Amsterdam, *supra* note 3.

²¹ Robert Bringle, *Designing Interventions to Promote Civic Engagement*, in PROCESSES OF COMMUNITY CHANGE AND SOCIAL ACTION 167, 168 (Allen M. Omoto ed. 2005).

²² Michael Cassidy, *Beyond Practical Skills: Nine Steps for Improving Legal Education Now*, 53 B.C.L. REV. 1515, 1521 (2012).

²³ Anna Smedley-Lopez, Heidi Johnson & Arlene Amarante, *SLICES: Critical Theory as Praxis and Research-Based Service-Learning*, 39 HUMBOLDT J. SOC. REL. 176, 177 (2017); Matthew Atkinson & Rachel Spencer, *Towards a Pedagogy of the Integration of Clinical Legal Education Within the Law Curriculum: Using De-Identified Clinic Files Within Tutorial Programs*, 25 LEGAL EDUC. REV. 121, 121 (2015).

²⁴ Jeff Giddings, *Why No Clinic Is an Island: The Merits and Challenges of Integrating Clinical Insights Across the Law Curriculum*, 34 WASH. U. J. L. & POL'Y 261, 265 (2010).

²⁵ Adrian Evans, Anna Cody, Anna Copeland, Jeff Giddings, Mary Anne Noone, Simon Rice, *Best Practices Australian Clinical Legal Education* (September 2012), at 4, <https://cald.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Best-Practices-Australian-Clinical-Legal-Education-Sept-2012.pdf>.

²⁶ Louise G. Trubek, *U.S. Legal Education and Legal Services for the Indigent: A Historical and Personal Perspective*, 5 MD. J. CONTEMP. LEGAL ISSUES, 383, 385 (1994).

with clinical legal education and legal ethics. Sandy Ogilvy suggests that that experimentation coincided with the adoption of the new Codes and Canons of Ethics by the American Bar Association (“ABA”) at the same time as the Ford Foundation Council on Legal Education for Professional Responsibility was providing grants to law schools for the purpose of starting or expanding legal clinics and externships.²⁷ By 1980, nearly every law school in the US had at least one clinical course, although with varying success.²⁸

In 1992, the ABA produced the *Report of the ABA Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession: Narrowing the Gap*, commonly referred to as the MacCrate Report. This initiative was a response to an inquiry into the “skills and values necessary for a lawyer to assume responsibility for handling a legal matter.”²⁹ Shifting the focus to skills-based education, the MacCrate Report concluded that there were ten fundamental “lawyering” skills and four fundamental values that should be promoted and taught in law schools.³⁰ But even though the MacCrate Report heralded discussion about the role of skills development in legal education,³¹ its recommendations were not widely adopted.³² Fifteen years later, however, the Carnegie Report, *Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law*, became an influential point of reference in debates about legal education reform.³³

²⁷ Sandy Ogilvy, *Celebrating CLEPR's 40th Anniversary: The Early Development of Clinical Legal Education and Legal Ethics Instruction in U.S. Law Schools*, 16 CLIN. L. REV. 1, 5, 12 (2009).

²⁸ *Id.* at 15.

²⁹ ABA SECTION OF LEGAL EDUCATION AND ADMISSIONS TO THE BAR, LEGAL EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – AN EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM (REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON LAW SCHOOLS AND THE PROFESSION: NARROWING THE GAP) (1992) [hereinafter MACCRATE REPORT] at xi, as cited in Eugene Clark, *Legal Education and Professional Development - an Educational Continuum, Report of the Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession: Narrowing the Gap*, 4 LEGAL EDUC. REV. 1 (1993).

³⁰ The fundamental skills are problem solving, legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, factual investigation, communication, counselling, negotiation, litigation and alternative dispute resolution practices, organization and management of legal work and recognition and resolution of ethical dilemmas. The fundamental values are to provide competent representation, strive to promote justice, fairness and morality, improve the profession and undertake professional self-development. Wallace Loh, *Introduction: The MacCrate Report – Heuristic or Prescriptive?*, 69 WASH. L. REV. 505, 508-509 (1994).

³¹ Bryant Garth, *From MacCrate to Carnegie: Very Different Movements for Curricular Reform*, 17 J. LEGAL WRITING INST. 261, 262 (2011).

³² See Gary Shaw, *A Heretical View of Teaching: A Contrarian Looks at Teaching, the Carnegie Report and Best Practices*, 28 TOURO L. REV. 1239, 1240 n.5 (2012); Russell Pierce, *MacCrate's Missed Opportunity: The MacCrate Report's Failure to Advance Professional Values Symposium*, 23 PACE L. REV. 575, 592 (2002); John Sonsteng, *A Legal Education Renaissance: A Practical Approach for the Twenty-first Century*, 34 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 303, 332 (2007).

³³ See generally WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN, ANNE COLBY, JUDITH WELCH WEGNER, LLOYD BOND & LEE S. SHULMAN, *EDUCATING LAWYERS: PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSION OF LAW*

The Carnegie Report recognized that students need a dynamic curriculum that teaches a combination of skills such as understanding, enactment, experience, and analysis in order to be prepared for legal practice.³⁴ In this way, legal education can adapt to the challenge of balancing the interests of legal educators with the ethical and social responsibility demands of the legal profession by bridging the gap between analytical and practical knowledge to produce competent and committed professionals.³⁵ In comparison with traditional teaching methods, the proposed methods focused on the benefits that could be provided to students through interdisciplinary, experiential, and reflective curricular approaches.³⁶

A standout contribution of the Carnegie Report was its conceptualization of legal education through three apprenticeships: legal knowledge and analysis; practical skill; and professional identity.³⁷ While recognizing the strength of law schools in teaching legal analysis, the report criticized the insufficient integration within legal curricula of practical judgment and professional formation. This critique aligns with the aims of service-learning, which seeks to connect academic study with practical engagement, reflection, and public responsibility. Similarly, the 2007 *Best Practices for Legal Education: A Vision and A Road Map* aimed to address the deficiencies in law schools in preparing students to be practice-ready, suggesting a twelve-step program for the reform of legal education that included goal setting, instruction based on knowledge, skills and values, and reflection.³⁸

The development of clinical and service-learning models in the United Kingdom followed a different path. The first legal clinic was established at the University of Kent in 1973,³⁹ but closed only a few years later. The clinic's difficulties can be understood across several levels of the 4M framework. At the micro level, students reportedly struggled to reconcile demands to think as lawyers with expectations of social critique, while, at the meso level, uncertainty over whether the clinic should prioritize legal training or social objectives contributed to a lack of strategic direction and, ultimately, the withdrawal of university

(Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2007) [hereinafter CARNEGIE REPORT].

³⁴ *Id.* at 8.

³⁵ *Id.* at 22.

³⁶ Peter Felton & Patti H. Clayton, *Service Learning*, 128 NEW DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHING & LEARNING 75, 77 (2011).

³⁷ CARNEGIE REPORT, *supra* note 33.

³⁸ ROY STUCKEY AND OTHERS, BEST PRACTICES FOR LEGAL EDUCATION: A VISION AND A ROAD MAP (Clinical Legal Education Association 2007); Beverly Jennison, *Beyond Langdell: Innovating Legal Education*, 62 CATHOLIC U. L. REV. 643, 660-662 (2013).

³⁹ Elizabeth Ruinard, Evan Hamman & Judith McNamara, *Community Projects: Extending the Community Lawyering Model*, 21 INT'L J. CLIN. LEGAL EDUC. 1, 5 (2014).

funding.⁴⁰ Against that backdrop, only four legal clinics operated within UK universities in the 1980s.⁴¹ One explanation offered for this slower development in the UK is that the existence of state-funded legal aid reduced the perceived need for university-based legal service provision,⁴² as compared with the United States. Since the 1990s, however, clinical programs have experienced renewed growth in the UK,⁴³ reflecting broader interest in experiential learning.

In Australia, service-learning in law developed alongside broader shifts in legal education.⁴⁴ Earlier models of legal education tended to focus on doctrinal legal principles and case studies.⁴⁵ Over time, employers and business organizations began to call attention to the need for law schools to prepare students with professional skills alongside legal knowledge.⁴⁶ In a context of increasing competition among schools themselves, the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley Review) emphasized the need for universities to prepare graduates better for work.⁴⁷ Law schools thereafter expanded experiential learning through legal clinics, community legal center partnerships, and pro bono services.⁴⁸

In 2012, the Council of Australian Law Deans endorsed the influential report *Best Practices: Australian Clinical Legal Education*, prepared by a national team of clinical legal educators.⁴⁹ The report highlighted the pedagogical value specifically of clinical methodology in legal education.⁵⁰ The report's authors also affirmed the importance of recognizing social justice in legal education and teaching students in ways that

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ Emma Jones, Hugh McFaul & Francine Ryan, *Clinical Legal Education in the United Kingdom: Origins, Growth and the Technological Innovations and Challenges of Its Future*, 4 GER. J. LEGAL EDUC. 107, 113 (2017).

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Carol-Joy Patrick, Faith Valencia-Forrester, Bridget Backhaus, Rosie McGregor, Glenda Cain & Kate Lloyd, *The State of Service-Learning in Australia*, 23 J. HIGHER EDUC. OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT 185 (2019).

⁴⁵ Ross Hyams, *Student Assessment in the Clinical Environment—What We Can Learn from the US Experience*, 10 INT'L J. CLIN. LEGAL EDUC. 77, 78 (2006).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ DENISE BRADLEY, PETER NOONAN, HELEN NUGENT & BILL SCALES, REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: FINAL REPORT, DEPT. ED., EMP. & WORKPLACE RELATIONS (AUS) (17 Dec. 2008), at 78, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2008-12/apo-nid15776.pdf>; Jeff Giddings, *A Circle Game: Issues in Australian Clinical Education*, 10 LEGAL EDUC. REV. 33, 39–40 (1999).

⁴⁸ John Corker, *Student Experiential Learning in a Social Justice Context—the Way Forward*, in COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY LEGAL EDUCATION: PRO BONO, CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING (Patrick Keyzer, Amy Kenworthy & Gail S. Wilson eds, 2009), at 2.

⁴⁹ Evans et al., *supra* note 25, at 4.

⁵⁰ Evans et al., *supra* note 25.

build their awareness of individual and social responsibility.⁵¹ Clinical legal education has since become the prominent form of service-learning in Australia, now implemented in some form across most Australian law schools, enabling students to gain exposure to practical skills and social justice praxis before they move into legal practice.

B. Service-Learning in the Form of Clinical Legal Education in Australia, with an Example from the University of Newcastle

At the School of Law and Justice at the University of Newcastle (Australia), clinical legal education has been firmly established through the School's Practical Legal Training ("PLT") Program. In New South Wales, the state where the School is located, the usual pathway to legal practice requires completion of both the relevant academic qualification and accredited practical legal training.⁵² In most Australian law school programs, students complete their practical legal training separately after graduation. Since the early 1990s, however, the University of Newcastle's PLT Program has enabled students to complete, within the five-year Bachelor of Laws (Honours) degree and three-year Juris Doctor degree, the practical legal training components required for admission as a lawyer, without needing to take on the separate program after graduation.⁵³

The University of Newcastle is the only university in Australia that automatically embeds accredited PLT training for all interested students within the LLB(Hons) and JD programs. Through the PLT Program, students in their fourth year LLB(Hons) / second year JD participate in the legal clinic at the University of Newcastle Legal Center (the "Legal Center") to work on real-world matters under a supervising lawyer. This work involves interviews with clients, discussion and analysis of legal issues with supervising lawyers, and the preparation of draft documents and legal research.

In the fifth year of their LLB(Hons) / third year of their JD, students in the PLT Program undertake an external placement with a local

⁵¹ Margaret Thornton, *The New Knowledge Economy and the Transformation of the Law Discipline*, 19 INT'L J. LEGAL PROF. 265, 277 (2012); Kim Economides, *Being a lawyer: Professionalism, values and service*, in ENCOUNTERS WITH CONSTITUTIONAL INTERPRETATION AND LEGAL EDUCATION: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF MICHAEL COPER (James Stellios ed, 2018), at 154, 159.

⁵² LAW SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, PRACTICAL LEGAL TRAINING (last visited Sept. 6, 2026), <https://www.lawsociety.com.au/practical-legal-training>.

⁵³ SCHOOL OF LAW AND JUSTICE, LAW IN PRACTICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE (last visited July 25, 2026), <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/law-and-justice/experience/law-in-practice>. Although the PLT components of the LLB(Hons) and the JD are substantively equivalent, the LLB(Hons) degree requires five years of full-time study because students must complete it together with a second degree, whereas the JD can be completed in three years because it comprises only law courses. *Id.*

firm or agency to gain exposure to legal practice in a professional environment. In this way, the placement reflects the experiential dimension of service-learning by engaging students in practical activities relevant to legal practice in a professional setting. For example, students are required to prepare court documents, provide letters of advice, and draft contracts. Students receive feedback on their work from lawyers experienced in the relevant area of law. The University of Newcastle prioritizes early exposure to clinic-based learning through mandatory first-year and optional second- and third-year observations at the Legal Center, through which students sit in on clinic activities, albeit without actively contributing. This allows for clinical activities to be integrated throughout a student's years of study rather than only focusing on later years. This approach – integrating involvement in the Legal Center from the beginning of a student's degree – enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of the clinical program.⁵⁴

II. BEYOND THE CLINIC: THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE PROJECT COURSE AS A COMPLEMENT TO THE CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION MODEL

Although clinical legal education has been an important development in ensuring the widespread implementation of service-learning programs, its prominence has produced a shortcoming: it has narrowed the institutional imagination of other productive service-learning methods for enhancing legal curricula. To explore what an expanded imagination can make possible, the article introduces the Project Course at the Newcastle School of Law and Justice. The Project Course offers a successful, efficient, and low-cost framework for project-based learning that other universities could adopt as a complement to clinical legal education, providing a powerful and well-rounded service-learning experience for students.

The analysis presents the Project Course through the lens of the 4M framework, explained below. This framework helps to situate the course not only within the structure of legal pedagogy but also at the intersection of several of the internal and external forces that impact that pedagogy and influence its sustainability.

The analysis then broadens to compare the Project Course with clinical legal education. Drawing on insight from the 4M framework, the comparison demonstrates how the benefits of the Project Course both support the core foundations of service-learning and fill several of the gaps left by clinical legal education in that space.

⁵⁴ See also Giddings, *supra* note 24, at 262.

A. *The 4M Framework*

The 4M framework provides a tool for revealing and mapping the “layers of influence” that impact on component parts of an educational system.⁵⁵ The four layers of interest are: the micro, at the level of the individual, whether student or faculty member; the meso, in relation to the relevant department or faculty; the macro, addressing the university; and the mega, extending to national and international sources of influence.⁵⁶

In other words, the components of a curriculum do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, each is born of and subject to the ongoing influence of a multitude of factors that shape it and determine its sustainability and success. Each layer, in turn, influences a given initiative in different ways. Some initiatives might be suggested by students or inspired by staff, others might be imposed from the outside, such as by a regulatory body. Either way, each will need some support at the school and university levels, where both funding and administrative approval will be foundational steps. At the same time, national and international trends may then empower or inhibit any forward momentum.

Ideally, therefore, the four layers will be in harmony. In any event, it is essential to understand the influences so as to be able to address and manage them. The Project Course discussed here is an excellent example: as explained further below, the course as originally run was well-aligned with all four layers. But when school support evaporated, this broadly successful version of the course came to an end notwithstanding the remaining alignment with the other three layers.

B. *Structure and Design of the Project Course*

From 2020 to 2025, the University of Newcastle School of Law and Justice offered an elective project-based course formally known as LAWS6091 but generally referred to in the School as “the Project Course.” Its elective status was important because students chose to enroll in the course on the basis of interest in particular projects, or in the self-motivated project-based mode of learning itself.

⁵⁵ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 9.

⁵⁶ The framework itself has been used in the broader scholarship of teaching and learning literature as an analytical lens. *See generally* Nicola Simmons, *The 4M Framework as Analytic Lens for SoTL's Impact: A Study of Seven Scholars*, 8 TEACHING & LEARNING INQUIRY 76 (2020); Ekaterina Pechenkina, *Chasing Impact: The Tale of Three SoTL Studies*, 8 TEACHING & LEARNING INQUIRY 91, 93 (2020). The framework has more recently come to be referred to as 4M. Jennifer Friberg, *Might the 4M Framework Support SoTL Advocacy?*, THE SoTL ADVOCATE (July 11, 2016), <https://illinoisstateuniversitysotl.wordpress.com/2016/07/11/might-the-4m-framework-support-sotl-advocacy/#comments>, cited in Nicola Simmons, *The 4M Framework as Analytic Lens for SoTL's Impact: A Study of Seven Scholars*, 8 TEACHING & LEARNING INQUIRY 76, 77 (2020).

The Project Course was offered each semester, enrolling more than 200 students over five and a half years. The course was open to fourth- and fifth-year LLB(Hons) students and second- and third-year JD students, many of whom were also engaged with legal clinics through the School's PLT program.

Before each semester, the Course Coordinator circulated a list of available projects, each of which was largely adaptable to student interests, supervisor expertise, and the needs of community or institutional partners. Students could either apply to participate in one of those projects or propose a project of their own. In either case, students were required to submit an expression of interest identifying the project they wished to take part in, explaining their reasons for choosing it, and outlining what they hoped to learn and contribute. This process assisted in matching students with projects and supervisors, while also encouraging students to approach the course as an exercise in purposeful, self-directed learning. Depending on the nature of the project, students worked either individually or collaboratively with other students, supervisors, and external contacts.

This structure speaks to the micro-level of the course, with its focus on students as well as supervisors. At the same time, one can see structural elements of other levels, including international echoes of the mega. This is because the projects themselves all aimed to support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),⁵⁷ which, as such, serve as a background "political driver" to the projects.⁵⁸ The specific SDGs that were covered included: quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, climate action and peace, justice and strong institutions. This orientation likewise connected the course to the social-justice and public-purpose dimensions of service-learning, while allowing individual projects to differ substantially in topic, method, and output.

The course learning outcomes reflected the project-based design of the course. By the end of the course, students were expected to be able to:

1. *Design an advanced project regarding a specialized topic relating in some respect to law and/or legal policy.*
2. *Carry out research as applicable to the project by using primary and secondary sources, as well as the possible use of interdisciplinary material, in order to meet the goal of the project.*

⁵⁷ G.A. Res. 70/1, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sept. 25, 2015); *see also* U.N. Dept. Econ. & Soc. Affairs, The 17 Goals, (Sept. 6, 2026), <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

⁵⁸ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 29.

3. *Demonstrate professional project management skills such as timeliness, initiative and responsiveness.*
4. *Effectively communicate the resulting project at an appropriate level for the relevant audience.*

These learning outcomes show that the course was not designed as volunteering or general work experience. Rather, it embedded legal research, communication, project management, and professional responsibility into the completion of a defined project. The emphasis on audience was important because most of the projects required students to produce outputs intended for use beyond the classroom, including by community partners, public institutions, university centers, or non-specialist audiences. Viewed through the lens of the 4M framework, the course connected four levels of influence within legal education. At the micro level, students developed legal and professional capabilities through supervised project work, while at the meso level these experiences were embedded within the law school's curricular and pedagogical objectives. The course also linked these micro- and meso-level activities to the macro level by situating student projects within broader university priorities and community engagement. At the mega level, the legal and policy issues addressed through the projects were often shaped by wider social, professional, national, and international developments. In this way, the course linked individual student learning and law-school pedagogy with broader institutional, community, and external contexts.

Following the completion of their project, students were required to complete two tasks. First, there was a reflection. The reflection component drove students to develop a deeper understanding of their learning objectives and how the project impacted their personal life and professional development.⁵⁹ It was not a part of the formal assessment for the course and students were thus motivated to consider and reflect authentically upon their experiences rather than crafting a text for purposes of trying to appeal to the grader.

The second mandatory task was for each student to submit a portfolio of their work – including drafts, research and key communications – from throughout the course. The purpose was for skills-building, with an eye to project management, and also ensuring that students remained actively engaged in the learning experience.⁶⁰

The grading of the Project Course was different from the usual manner of traditional law courses. In the Project Course, each student

⁵⁹ See Laurie Morin & Susan Waysdorf, *Teaching the Reflective Approach Within the Service-Learning Model*, 62 J. LEGAL EDUC. 600, 603 (2013).

⁶⁰ See Anna Carpenter, *Developing 'NextGen' Lawyers through Project-Based Learning*, in MODERNISING LEGAL EDUCATION (Catrina Denvir ed, 2019), at 126, 137.

was assessed not only by reference to their final output, but also by reference to their engagement with the course. The purpose of this approach was to encourage students to take on new areas of learning and step out of their comfort zones to become more versatile in different skills. In other words, if grading had been based solely on output, there would have been a risk that students would seek to perform tasks that they were already most confident in so as to ensure the highest possible grade. By realigning the structural incentives, supervisors were able to motivate students to skills-build in novel areas and to reward them for doing so. At the same time, the focus on self-motivated learning permitted students to act in regard to their own project, increasing confidence while still also benefiting from essential collaboration with supervisors and sometimes other students.

C. The Project Course in Practice: Projects, Partners, and Outputs

The Project Course translated service-learning principles into practice through partnerships directed toward identifiable public, community, or institutional purposes. Its projects shared a common structure: students undertook supervised work that produced concrete outputs, such as research reports, policy submissions, legislative materials, and community legal education resources. The projects nevertheless varied in scale, subject matter, and institutional setting.

Strong partnerships underpinned the operation of the Project Course.⁶¹ Rather than requiring students to complete abstract or simulated tasks, the course connected students' work to the needs of external international and domestic organizations, community stakeholders, and university initiatives. This format demonstrates the link between on the one hand micro actors in the form of students and on the other meso and mega actors in the form of university teams and diverse community organizations. It is important to recognize how that link is symbiotic because the students in each instance were contributing to the goals of the relevant university teams and community organizations, but always precisely because they had been inspired in the first place by the call to action in response to the needs of those teams and organizations.

The projects conducted can be grouped into four broad categories: international projects, national projects, local and regional projects, and university or school-based projects. Each is discussed in turn below.

⁶¹ See Feby Arma Putra, Nafiz Annas & Ren Reni, *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Impact Evaluation and Best Practices*, 1 J. LIGUNDI CMTY. SERV. 82, 84 (2024).

1. *International Projects*

At the international level, students participated in projects that exposed them to transnational legal issues, comparative legal research, and access-to-justice work beyond the domestic legal system. One significant example was the partnership between one of the authors here, Kevin Sobel-Read, and the Cook Islands Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Tingika Elikana. This project allowed students to participate in a range of law-related activities together with Cook Islands government leaders, including policy research, submissions to the Cook Islands Parliament, and preliminary legislation drafting. It gave students the opportunity to contribute to work connected to economic development, consumer education, and human rights protections. In one recent project, students were involved in supporting the updating of the Cook Islands' corrections-related legislation to better reflect a range of changes since the laws were first enacted decades ago, including developments in technology that impact on prison safety, evolving local norms, and updated international human rights obligations in the treatment of prisoners.

Another international project involved collaboration with the Australia Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, which led to the publication of a report titled *Loss and Damage: Identifying the Funding Gap*.⁶² This report highlighted gaps in international policy responses to the lived experiences of Pacific Island nations and communities affected by climate change.⁶³ Students in the project had further opportunity to present their research in meetings which informed Pacific Island states in preparation for their meeting under the International Climate Governance Scheme.

Other international (from the Australian perspective) projects included student collaboration and publication of over 100 articles with JURIST,⁶⁴ a US-based non-profit and award-winning news organization housed at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. This opportunity provided students with experience in research and writing as a part of a team of over 50 law schools in 25 countries. University of Newcastle students wrote about topical legal issues in Australia such as the Royal Commission into the "Robodebt" Scheme, funding cuts for Legal Aid lawyers, and the Voice to Parliament referendum.⁶⁵ Furthermore,

⁶² MADELEINE HOWLE, LUCY BERT & ALEX GRAHAM, FINAL REPORT: LOSS AND DAMAGE: IDENTIFYING THE FUNDING GAP (June 28, 2023), <https://library.sprep.org/content/loss-and-damage-identifying-funding-gap>.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ JURISTNEWS, <https://www.jurist.org/> (last visited Sept. 7, 2026).

⁶⁵ Gwendolyn Devoy, *Australia Dispatch: Robodebt Scheme Royal Commission Hearings Confirm the Australian Government was Warned About Illegality*, JURISTNEWS (Feb. 16, 2023), <https://www.jurist.org/news/2023/02/australia-dispatch-robodebt-scheme-royal-commission-hearings-confirm-the-australian-government-was-warned-about-illegality/>;

during the COVID-19 restrictions, the course coordinator partnered with BABSEACLE, a not-for-profit legal education and justice organization based in Chiang Mai (Thailand), Yangon (Myanmar) and Hanoi (Vietnam). This enabled students to participate virtually in international access-to-justice education initiatives despite restrictions on physical mobility.

2. National Projects

At the national level, the Project Course connected students with projects involving law reform, policy development, climate justice, consumer protection, and First Nations economic sovereignty. Students worked with national organization Reconciliation Australia on a range of projects, including contributing to the development of strategies for unengaged city councils to identify best practices, gaps, and opportunities to promote their engagement with their Reconciliation Action Plans.

Other national projects included work with the National Anti-Scam Centre, which led to a submission concerning romance scams, and the Indigenous Business Project, which involved multiple sub-projects that contributed to economic empowerment for First Nations people in Australia. These projects demonstrate the capacity of the Project Course to connect student legal work with mega-level national policy conversations and issues of contemporary public significance.

3. Local and Regional Projects

The Project Course also supported local and regional projects. These projects required students to consider how legal research and policy analysis could respond to specific regional and local concerns, including economic transition and refugee support. One example was Hunter Renewal's *Community Blueprint to Restore the Hunter*, which contained recommendations for the governance of the region's transition to a post-coal future for certain mining-affected communities.⁶⁶ Students also worked with a local not-for-profit organization called Refugee Hub to develop resources to support local refugee communities.

Sophia Richards and James Trevallion, *The Impact of Stagnant Legal Aid Rates on Access to Justice in Australia*, JURISTNEWS (May 8, 2023), <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2023/05/richards-trevallion-legal-aid-rates-australia/>; Sophia Richards, Chloe Menzies and Meg Abbot, *Australia's Voice to Parliament Referendum: Understanding No and Yes*, JURISTNEWS (Sept. 30, 2023), <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2023/09/richards-abbot-menzies-australia-voice-referendum/>.

⁶⁶ HUNTER RENEWAL, AFTER THE COAL RUSH, THE CLEAN UP: A COMMUNITY BLUEPRINT TO RESTORE THE HUNTER (Final Report, 2022), https://assets.pc.gov.au/392337/sub206-circular-economy-attachment.pdf?VersionId=pnajaB_66R5n2Qaky60NyvRSbsmokW8V (last visited Sept. 6, 2026).

4. *University and School-based Projects*

A final category of projects involved engagement with initiatives within the School of Law and Justice and the broader University community. Among others, the course coordinator partnered with the University's Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education to engage in projects addressing gender-based violence and providing refugee support. Other projects involved collaboration with the University's Digital Technology Solutions Team that contributed to internal institutional improvement.

The School of Law and Justice hosts a Justice Clinic, which is run by the School's Criminology discipline. The flexibility of the Project Course made it possible for Law students to contribute to that clinic in a cross-disciplinary space, engaging – often together with Criminology students – in projects involving research into miscarriages of justice and reforms around regulations and procedures for expert witnesses.

Faculty members in the School of Law and Justice supervised several School-based projects that used the Project Course to promote and implement projects of personal interest, some with a Street Law methodology. Through this Street Law methodology, students communicated legal information in accessible formats, including community resources and infographics. Some resulting outputs are featured on the webpage of the School's Centre for Law and Social Justice.⁶⁷

Taken together, these projects demonstrate the adaptability of the Project Course as a service-learning model. The course enabled students to contribute to work operating across several scales. Its significance lies not only in the variety of projects undertaken, but in the common pedagogical structure that linked them: supervised student engagement, legally informed project work, partnership collaboration and the production of outputs intended for use beyond the classroom.

D. Pedagogical Benefits of the Project Course to Students

Service-learning is an invaluable teaching model that makes possible a number of reciprocal benefits for the relevant students, institutions, and wider community. This article identifies five educational goals of service-learning for students: (1) academic and professional learning; (2) personal and professional formation; (3) intercultural competence and community awareness; (4) civic and social-justice outcomes; and (5) adaptability, creativity, and responsibility in the AI-era legal profession. These goals develop and particularize the broader conception of professional legal education reflected in the Carnegie Report. The Project

⁶⁷ CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE, RESEARCH PROJECTS, <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/research/centre/law-and-social-justice/research> (last visited Sept. 6, 2026).

Course provides a concrete example of how these goals can be pursued through a project-based structure.⁶⁸ The following subparts explore these goals in greater detail. The discussion will then circle back to clinical legal education to clarify the relationship between the two models and to identify the distinctive value of a course like the Project Course.

1. *Academic and Professional Learning*

Academic learning is one of the core benefits associated with service-learning. Students who participate in service-learning often demonstrate higher levels of engagement, which in turn contributes to a deeper understanding of the relevant content.⁶⁹ The Project Course required students to apply their legal knowledge to real scenarios, which encouraged precisely that kind of stronger engagement with their academic learning. Similarly, the course's applied methods enhanced students' understanding of theoretical concepts beyond classroom analysis.⁷⁰ Students are often more engaged in this learning because it has actual application and impacts which provide higher stakes than in in-class, problem-based learning.⁷¹ At the same time, through projects students gain insight into how their knowledge can be used in practice which better prepares them for their legal career and gives them insight into potential career options. This insight allows students to form an idea, at an earlier stage, about what their personal career as a lawyer might look like.⁷² This can be a considerable motivating factor for students pursuing a law degree. It provides career direction and the development of their professional identity.⁷³

Further, due to the practical nature of service-learning generally, students benefit from the building of cognitive skills such as increased critical thinking and intellectual development.⁷⁴ The Project Course is particularly valuable in this respect. As Anna Carpenter observes, project-based courses engage students in learning that complements and enhances the more traditional skills that are taught in clinical education.⁷⁵ The Project Course therefore strengthened students'

⁶⁸ Salam et al., *supra* note 15, at 576.

⁶⁹ Putra et al., *supra* note 61, at 83.

⁷⁰ Salam et al., *supra* note 15, at 574; Anna Copeland, *Clinical Legal Education within a Community Legal Centre Context*, 10 MURDOCH U. ELEC. J.L. 25, ¶ 21 (2003), <https://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MurdochUeJlLaw/2003/25.html> (last visited Sept. 6, 2026).

⁷¹ Carpenter, *supra* note 60, at 139.

⁷² Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 6.

⁷³ Anna Cody, *Developing Students' Sense of Autonomy, Competence and Purpose Through a Clinical Component in Ethics Teaching*, 29 LEGAL EDUC. REV. 1, 4 (2019); Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 31.

⁷⁴ Salam et al., *supra* note 15, at 574, 578.

⁷⁵ Anna Carpenter, *The Project Model of Clinical Education: Eight Principles to Maximize Student Learning and Social Justice Impact*, 20 CLIN. L. REV. 39, 41 (2013).

professional capability by giving students opportunities to practice multidimensional skills that are essential for future career pathways, including project management, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication – qualities that are increasingly valued in the contemporary legal profession.

2. *Personal and Professional Formation*

Project-based service-learning can also contribute to students' personal and professional formation. The benefits commonly associated with this dimension include self-awareness, self-efficacy, identity development, spirituality, leadership, and moral development.⁷⁶ In legal education, these outcomes are particularly important because students are not merely acquiring doctrinal legal knowledge; they are also expanding on their empathy and personal ethics.⁷⁷

By engaging with community-facing work, students are encouraged to consider law not only as a body of doctrine, but also as a profession connected to people, institutions, and social problems. Anna Cody suggests that through this identity development, students are able to reconnect with their reasons for studying law, especially if they have had a previous disillusionment arising from their experiences during their studies.⁷⁸ Through this exposure, students can identify areas of legal work that align with their interests, values, and career aspirations.⁷⁹

In contributing in these areas, the Project Course also supported self-efficacy and confidence. Because students were required to take responsibility for a sustained project, they needed to manage uncertainty, make decisions, respond to feedback, and see their work develop over time. Unlike many traditional law school assessments, which are completed for the purpose of grading alone, the Project Course required students to produce work directed toward an external, institutional, or community-facing purpose. This allowed students to see that their legal knowledge and labor could contribute to something beyond the classroom. This helped to achieve deeper learning and enhance the impact of these experiences on students' personal lives and professional development.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Giddings, *supra* note 24, at 261.

⁷⁷ SALLY BERMAN, SERVICE-LEARNING: A GUIDE TO PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND ASSESSING STUDENT PROJECTS, xxi (2d ed. 2006).

⁷⁸ Cody, *supra* note 73, at 5; Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 31.

⁷⁹ Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 29.

⁸⁰ Morin & Waysdorf, *supra* note 59, at 602-3.

3. *Intercultural Competence and Community Awareness*

Intercultural competence involves more than exposure to people from different backgrounds. It includes respect, curiosity, sociolinguistic awareness, listening, empathy, and ethnorelative perspectives.⁸¹ These capacities are critical because lawyers of course frequently work with clients, communities, and organizations whose experiences of law are shaped by different social, cultural, economic, and institutional contexts.⁸²

In the Project Course, students worked on projects connected to a range of community needs. They were required to consider the legal accuracy of their work, and the context in which that work would be received and used. For example, in undertaking Street Law-style projects, students were exposed to the inequalities inherent in legal expression and the strength of language in improving accessibility to legal knowledge which they could address in these projects.⁸³ Through engaging in these community-service projects, which by their nature provided culturally diverse contexts, the students could “become more aware of social issues and the importance of civic involvement.”⁸⁴

4. *Civic and Social-Justice Outcomes*

Civic outcomes highlight skills of communication, collaboration and public problem-solving, as well as knowledge of community history and organization.⁸⁵ Collaboration plays an essential role as it can further improve competency, confidence, and teamwork in law students.⁸⁶ Students in the Project Course worked with supervisors, with peers and, in different ways, with external stakeholders. This required them to communicate clearly, respond to feedback, and understand the needs and expectations of others, which enhanced their understanding of legal work as something that often occurs through relationships with communities, organizations, and institutions.

⁸¹ Robert Bringle & Patti Clayton, *Integrating Service Learning and Digital Technologies: Examining the Challenge and the Promise*, 23 RIED (REVISTA IBEROAMERICANA DE EDUCACIÓN A DISTANCIA) 43, 44 (2020).

⁸² See generally JOHN M. CONLEY & WILLIAM M. O'BARR, *JUST WORDS: LAW, LANGUAGE AND POWER* (1998); Sally Engle Merry, *Rights Talk and the Experience of Law: Implementing Women's Human Rights to Protection from Violence*, 25 HUM. RTS. Q. 343 (2003); THOMAS BIOLSI, *DEADLIEST ENEMIES: LAW AND THE MAKING OF RACE RELATIONS ON AND OFF ROSEBUD RESERVATION* (2001).

⁸³ Joanna Kowalczyk, *Legal Communication: The Sociolinguistic Value of Plain Language Rules*, 45 J. PROF. & SCI. COMMUN 131, 131 (2023).

⁸⁴ Putra et al., *supra* note 61, at 83.

⁸⁵ Bringle & Clayton, *supra* note 81.

⁸⁶ Doris Bozin et al., *Thinking Outside the Disciplinary Box: Building Better Lawyers to Solve Wicked Problems*, 32 INT'L J. CLIN. LEGAL EDUC. 3, 8 (2025).

The direct supervision by experienced professionals and academics that was provided to students in the Project Course also played an important role because it gave students a different and more focused teaching method compared with traditional pedagogy. This type of supervision makes possible civic outcomes that deepen learning and interest in the project's area of law and allows students to continually utilize communication and collaboration skills with their supervisors. Supervisors' mentorship and guidance play a strong role in maximizing understanding and personal growth for students.⁸⁷ This form of sustained engagement is a distinctive civic benefit of project-based service-learning.

5. *Adaptability, Creativity, and the AI-Era Legal Profession*

The Project Course model also has particular significance in light of technological change, in particular the increasing use of artificial intelligence ("AI") in legal education and the practice of law. As legal information becomes more readily accessible through digital tools and generative AI, the value of legal education cannot rest solely on the transmission or reproduction of knowledge. As Patrick Dodd suggests, the focus of employers has now shifted to junior lawyers who can compensate the use of AI with skills that AI lacks in its current form.⁸⁸ The skills identified by Dodd include critical thinking, resilience and adaptability, emotional intelligence, accountability, teamwork, creativity, and reflection.⁸⁹ They speak directly to the importance of personal and professional formation and to the need for adaptability and creativity in preparing students for an AI-era legal profession.

These are precisely the kinds of capacities that the Project Course promoted. Rather than merely identifying legal rules or producing a conventional research essay, students defined problems, planned their work, evaluated sources, communicated with supervisors and stakeholders, revised their drafts in response to feedback, and produced outputs with practical or public-facing value. This process required adaptability and creativity. In some cases, students had to respond to unexpected challenges, such as gaps in the available literature or resources that necessitated adjustments to a project's direction or outcomes. In others, projects evolved over time. The Cook Islands project, for example, engaged multiple cohorts of students across several years and continuously adapted to the Cook Islands' changing policy needs.

⁸⁷ Putra et al., *supra* note 61, at 87.

⁸⁸ Patrick Dodd, *AI is Driving Down the Price of Knowledge – Universities Have to Rethink What They Offer*, THE CONVERSATION (July 9, 2025), <https://theconversation.com/ai-is-driving-down-the-price-of-knowledge-universities-have-to-rethink-what-they-offer-260493>.

⁸⁹ *Id.*

Such student-directed projects can help students build resilience from failing and then having to adapt, as well as engaging with skills of project-management practice such as planning and execution.⁹⁰

Indeed, there is strong evidence that in spite of new demands for lawyers to possess AI skills, legal practitioners simultaneously value specifically human skills.⁹¹ To this end, the experiences of Project Course students illustrate how one of the most important educational responses to AI may be to increase opportunities for authentic engagement with real-world problems. Many projects required students to work with community groups, government agencies, non-government organizations, and other external stakeholders. Success in these contexts depended not simply on gathering information – which is a core AI competence – but on understanding the needs of particular audiences, exercising judgment about competing priorities, and translating legal knowledge into practical outcomes. These tasks relied upon the kinds of contextual awareness, interpersonal engagement, and professional responsibility that remain fundamentally human. The Project Course therefore suggests that experiential, project-based learning may be particularly valuable in preparing graduates for a profession in which information is increasingly abundant but the capacity to apply it meaningfully remains at a premium.

The Project Course model can also be valuable in addressing the need to respond to emerging challenges in the specific area of testing and assessment.⁹² With the increasing use of AI, approaches to testing and assessment have needed to shift in design to ensure active learning and meaningful interaction.⁹³ The Project Course assessed learning over time rather than through a single static product. Students were required to participate in supervision meetings, respond to formative feedback, and demonstrate progress through the development of their project. The constant collaboration with supervisors in the Project Course allowed students to engage in a type of formative assessment⁹⁴ where they

⁹⁰ Carpenter, *supra* note 60, at 142.

⁹¹ See Tania Sourdin, *Judge v Robot? Artificial Intelligence and Judicial Decision-Making* 41 U.N.S.W.L.J. 1114 (2018); SIMMONS & SIMMONS, LEGAL HEADS PREDICT SWEEPING CHANGES TO PROFESSION IN GLOBAL SURVEY (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.simmons-simmons.com/en/about-us/news/legal-heads-predict-sweeping-changes-to-profession-in-global-survey> (last visited Aug. 1, 2026); Julian Taylor, *Lawyers Must Reskill in This Era of Tech—but We Should Focus on Human Traits Too*, L. SOC'Y GAZETTE (Feb. 20, 2025), <https://www.law-gazette.co.uk/practice/lawyers-must-reskill-in-this-era-of-tech-but-we-should-focus-on-human-traits-too/5122383.article> (last visited Aug. 1, 2026).

⁹² Craig Hansen, *Assessment Approaches, Pedagogies, and Practices: A Comprehensive Research Summary* (Jan. 17, 2025), 5, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394072521_Assessment_Approaches_Pedagogies_and_Practices_A_Research_Summary.

⁹³ *Id.* at 6.

⁹⁴ Randy Elliott Bennett, *Formative Assessment: A Critical Review*, 18 ASSESSMENT IN EDUC.: PRINCIPLES, POL'Y & PRAC. 5, 6 (2011).

were frequently involved in a cyclical planning-and-feedback process with their supervisors in order to achieve the end product of the project.

Students were also, as noted, required to draft a final reflection. Reflection tends to be a form of assessment that students cannot fully create with AI because they are required to critically engage with how their personal experiences have reached the learning outcomes.⁹⁵ While AI may assist with drafting, it cannot substitute for the student's actual participation in the project or the personal and professional judgment developed through that experience. As such, reflection increases authenticity and deeper understanding.⁹⁶ The Project Course overall helped students in developing capacities that remain distinctively human and increasingly important to the future of legal practice.

E. Community Benefits and Reciprocal Value

Community engagement is a key aspect of service-learning. In all forms of service-learning, the community is an intended beneficiary of the work that the students do, whether this is in the form of legal advice to help resolve immediate issues as in clinical legal education, or in regard to resources to increase the legal education of the community as in the Project Course.⁹⁷ Service-learning provides the flexibility to adapt to emerging community needs which is particularly prevalent in Street Law projects, allowing for prominent legal issues to be readily addressed and disseminated to the public.⁹⁸

The community-service element of the Project Course helped students to recognize the importance of thinking outside the law itself and of continuing throughout their career to contribute their services to the community. In this way, the Project Course not only contributed to community development in real time, but also gave to the community by cultivating ongoing student habits of community involvement, potentially inspiring more longstanding benefit.⁹⁹ Indeed, student reflections in the Project Course repeatedly showed that many participants left the course with a greater awareness of the role of pro bono and public-interest contributions in legal practice, as well as a strengthened commitment to social-justice-oriented work into the future.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Timothy Casey, *Reflective Practices in Legal Education: The Stages of Reflection*, 20 CLIN. L. REV. 317, 350 (2014).

⁹⁶ Chloe Sheppick, *Unveiling the Benefits of Reflective Learning in Professional Legal Practice*, 31 INT'L J. LEGAL PROF. 207, 219 (2024).

⁹⁷ Ka Hing Lau, Maureen Yin Lee Chan, Cynthia Lok Sum Yeung & Robin Stanley Snell, *An Exploratory Study of the Community Impacts of Service-Learning*, 32 METRO. UNIV. 106, 116 (2021).

⁹⁸ Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 39.

⁹⁹ Bringle, *supra* note 21, at 168, 182.

¹⁰⁰ Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 27.

F. Comparison with Clinical Legal Education

Project-based courses and clinical legal education pursue overlapping service-learning objectives. They both connect legal learning with practical engagement, supervision, reflection, and community benefit. Both likewise “provide students with the requisite skills they need in the graduate job market, thus boosting their employment prospects, while also enhancing their experience at university.”¹⁰¹ But they operate differently in terms of the form of legal work, community benefit, and the impact on future career projection, student responsibility, and reflection.

1. Cost and Administrative Burden

The Project Course and law clinics both provide value in relation to student skills and community development. It is necessary, however, to recognize that the financial and administrative sustainability of any such initiative is always going to be a precondition to operation and success.

In this regard, there is no question that legal clinics can be expensive.¹⁰²

The financial health of universities is significant in relation to clinical legal education, with a reported 60 per cent of law clinic budgets drawn from university funds, as the higher running costs expose them as an area where efficiency savings could potentially be made. Thus, in relation to funding, there is a trickle-down effect from the mega to the micro level where political decisions on the funding of higher education and immigration, as well as the overall health of the economy, potentially have an adverse impact on the development of clinical programmes.¹⁰³

At the same time, at both the macro and mega levels, McKeown discusses how funding restrictions have impeded the spread and sustainability of legal clinics in Europe.

A course like the Project Course offers a low-cost and low-burden alternative. It is, certainly, not a replacement for clinical legal education. A project course is likely to be smaller in scope than a legal clinic,

¹⁰¹ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 16.

¹⁰² See Robert R. Kuehn, David Santacroce, & Margaret Reuter, June Tai & Gautam Hans, 2022-23 SURVEY OF APPLIED LEGAL EDUCATION at tbl. 5 (2023), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4568376> [<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4568376>].

¹⁰³ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 21.

perhaps able to service fewer students per year. At the same time, by drawing on existing faculty members and external organizations for supervision, no dedicated staff are necessary. Instead, the only cost, if one calls it that, is the allocation of a course-worth of teaching load to an academic, who, within that load, can manage the administrative and oversight roles in relation to the projects. As such, a project course can be less cost-dependent and therefore more nimble in precarious times than clinical offerings.

2. The Form of Legal Work, Community Benefit, and Impact on Future Career Projection

Clinical legal education is conventionally structured around individual client matters. The Project Course, by contrast, was organized around sustained project development and the production of tangible outputs directed toward identified community needs. This distinction carries conceptual significance: legal service-learning should not be confined to direct client-facing work. The Project Course was able to broaden access to service-learning opportunities within the curriculum because it was not dependent on live client matters or in-person client interaction. This flexibility is particularly valuable where traditional clinical opportunities are unavailable, limited, or difficult to sustain.

In conventional clinical models, community benefit is typically delivered through legal advice or assistance to individual clients. In the Project Course, community benefit was generated through research, policy analysis, public legal education, submissions, and other outputs directed toward broader community or institutional purposes. The Project Course thus offered a flexible mechanism for engaging with legal and social issues where the most valuable contribution went beyond advice to a specific client and included the production of materials or analysis capable of informing organizations, communities, or decision-makers.

Relatedly, the Project Course was able to help students envision and plan for legal practice in more expansive terms that go beyond client-based matters. Through their projects, students encountered possible career pathways in law reform, policy work, public legal education, community organizations, international development, and institutional reform. This wide exposure can assist students in clarifying their professional interests and developing a stronger sense of the kind of legal work they may wish to pursue.

3. The Form of Student Responsibility

The Project Course also developed student responsibility differently from clinical legal education. In clinical settings, supervision and

professional responsibility requirements shape the scope of student autonomy. Supervisors retain ultimate responsibility for client matters and students work within structures designed to protect clients, ensure professional accountability, and maintain the quality of legal service. This is a strength of clinical legal education, because it exposes students to the ethical and professional constraints of practice.

The Project Course occupied a different pedagogical space. Students worked with supervisory guidance but were expected to take substantial initiative and responsibility for planning, managing, and completing their projects. This structure allowed students to practice self-direction, time management, project ownership, responsiveness, and legal communication over an extended period. This did not make the Project Course superior to clinical legal education. Rather, it gave students a different form of experiential learning that centered on project development, public-facing outputs, and sustained ownership of a project task.

4. The Form of Reflection

In clinical legal education, reflection is often required to assist students to process client responsibility, professional ethics, legal advice-giving, and the realities of legal practice. In the Project Course, reflection was directed toward a different form of professional learning. The reflective process also corresponded with the progression captured by the 4M framework, moving from the student's internal experience to wider meta-level considerations. Students reflected on their own role in the project, the challenges of self-directed work, the skills they developed, and the effectiveness of their collaboration. They were also encouraged to consider the broader purpose and impact of their work, including its contribution to a community or institutional objective. Reflection therefore connected project ownership with professional formation by prompting students to consider not only what they had produced, but also how the process of producing it helped shape their understanding of law, legal practice, and social responsibility.

5. Insight from the 4M Framework

The 4M framework provides a helpful lens for comparing clinical legal education with the Project Course. This article has presented the Project Course as complementary to clinical legal pedagogies. The analysis has suggested that a project-course model can supplement clinical legal education rather than compete with it, and that as such, the two models align. The 4M framework confirms that approach.

The 4M framework reveals that several of the goals, along with many (though not all) of the pressure points, are shared by the two

models. At the micro level, teachers globally are increasingly looking for pathways for providing skills and knowledge beyond the core, historical legal doctrinal tenets; students, in turn, frequently find themselves facing competitive job markets after graduation and so are actively seeking “career-ready” components to contribute to their core curriculum. With both clinical legal education and the Project Course, those goals go neatly hand in hand.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is also some alignment at the mega level. Both clinical legal education and the Project Course, as noted above, involve goals that by their nature support the United Nations SDGs. Both models address SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).¹⁰⁴ One difference at this level, however, is that clinical efforts tend to focus on local client matters, whereas the Project Course contained scope for projects that themselves connected with international partners and therefore involved actual cross-border mega impact.

The meso and macro levels likewise impact clinical legal education and a project-course model in similar ways, although here is where the greatest variation can be seen. The most significant distinction is in relation to cost and administrative burden, discussed above. That said, the benefits that clinical legal education and a project course can provide are largely the same for both schools and universities and include improved curriculum and positive publicity and reputation-building that in turn can enhance student recruitment and boost survey rankings and other metrics.¹⁰⁵

As noted below, there can also at times be tension between the meso and macro levels, that is, different interests between a school and a university that impact the success of an initiative. In this space, as we learned the hard way, internal politics can influence outcomes even where there is other alignment.

Overall, however, the 4M framework shows clinical legal education and the Project Course to share consistent goals, suggesting that they fit well together. This is especially true in relation to the goals and benefits of the two models. It is, then, precisely in relation to the differences in constraints between the models that the true value of the Project-Course model as complementary to clinical legal education becomes evident.

¹⁰⁴ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 29.

¹⁰⁵ McKeown, *supra* note 3, at 19-20.

III. IMPLEMENTING PROJECT-BASED SERVICE-LEARNING: SUSTAINABILITY AND DESIGN CHALLENGES

The Project Course demonstrates the pedagogical value of project-based service-learning, but its successful implementation depends on various key conditions, some of which the 4M framework helps to isolate. For law schools seeking to implement similar courses, several design conditions should be considered.

One practical challenge concerns supervision. The course should include a realistic supervision model that accounts for staff workload. One strength of the Project Course was that students could apply for available projects or propose projects of their own. This promoted motivation, ownership, and alignment between student interests and project objectives. However, student-generated projects also increase supervisory demand. If there are insufficient supervisors or external partners, students may be unable to pursue projects that align with their interests. Conversely, if too many projects are offered without adequate oversight, the quality of supervision, feedback, and outputs may suffer.

Project-based learning requires students to receive and respond to effective feedback throughout the life of a project. Feedback is central to project-based learning, but sustained feedback can be time-consuming for supervisors who may already carry teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities.¹⁰⁶ This supervisory challenge is especially important where students are given a high degree of autonomy. Students normally require clear support where project-based learning gives them significant responsibility for directing their own work. Without adequate guidance, particularly in the early stages, students may experience uncertainty about the scope, purpose, methodology, or expected output of the project.¹⁰⁷

Another significant condition is sustainability. Project-based service-learning requires project generation, student matching, supervision, relationship management, progress monitoring, and quality assurance of final outputs. Where external partners are involved, the Course Coordinator and law school must also manage expectations about student capacity, project timelines, deliverables, and the limits of student responsibility. Project-based courses thus depend greatly on relationships among students, academic supervisors, community partners, and institutional decision-makers. These relationships take time to establish and maintain, and institutional commitment is essential.¹⁰⁸ Institutions should consider long-term sustainability before cultivating

¹⁰⁶ Roma Forbes, *Descriptions of Learning and Teaching Innovations Using Project-Based Learning to Support Clinical Education*, 9 AUSTL. J. CLIN. LEGAL EDUC. 29, 35 (2021).

¹⁰⁷ Ruinard et al., *supra* note 39, at 31.

¹⁰⁸ Giddings, *supra* note 24, at 263.

external partnerships that may be difficult to maintain if priorities or resources change.

The Project Course at the University of Newcastle presents a case in point. After five and a half years of successful operation and completion of more than 200 student projects, changes in School priorities led to a restructuring of the course that reduced its scope and benefit. The experience demonstrates a broader vulnerability of project-based service-learning. Once a course becomes embedded in external partnerships, substantial restructuring can affect not only students and staff, but also community partners who have invested time, trust and resources in the relationship. Sustainability planning is therefore not merely an internal curriculum question but also a matter of responsible partnership management.

CONCLUSION

Service-learning has become an important framework within legal education because it connects doctrinal legal knowledge with practical experience, community engagement, and reflection. Clinical legal education has been the most prominent form through which service-learning has been implemented in law schools globally. Legal clinics provide students with supervised exposure to legal practice, client responsibility, professional ethics and access-to-justice work. As important as such initiatives are, this article argues that the understanding and implementation of legal service-learning should be conducted beyond clinical legal education alone.

Due to inherent shortcomings in clinical legal education, a well-designed project-based course can offer a distinct and complementary model through which law schools can overcome some of the gaps of clinical legal education and thereby expand overall service-learning objectives. As analysis through the 4M framework helped to confirm, a project-based course shares the service-learning-related goals of clinical legal education but is subject to different constraints in key ways and so can serve as an ideal complement.

Unlike clinical legal education models, project-based service-learning is not primarily structured around individual client advice or representation. Instead, it creates a flexible course-based structure through which students can undertake sustained, community-facing legal work while developing autonomy, collaboration, communication, project-management skills, and reflective professional identity. These capacities are increasingly important in a legal profession shaped by technological change and evolving expectations of graduate capability.

The Project Course at the University of Newcastle School of Law and Justice provides a useful case study of a project-based service-learning

model. Over five and a half years, the course enabled students to work on supervised projects involving community organizations, university initiatives, and public bodies, and with local, national, and international partners. These projects produced outputs including legal research reports, submissions, educational resources, and policy materials. In doing so, the course allowed students to apply legal knowledge, develop professional skills, engage with social-justice concerns, and contribute to work of practical value beyond the classroom. Moreover, this project-based service-learning expanded students' understanding of possible legal careers and prepared graduates not only for practice as lawyers, but also for careers that draw on legal knowledge in broader public, organizational, and interdisciplinary contexts.

Yet project-based service-learning is not without challenges. Its successful operation requires dedicated supervision, strong partnerships, realistic expectations, and sustainable institutional support. Where law schools cultivate external partnerships through project-based courses, they also assume responsibility for maintaining those relationships in a considered and durable way. If poorly supported, project courses risk over-reliance on individual academics, uneven student experiences, and disruption to valuable community partnerships. Properly designed and resourced, however, project courses can expand the repertoire of experiential legal education by creating additional pathways for students to connect legal knowledge with public purpose. Through this, law schools can reconceptualize service-learning to better serve students, institutions, and the wider community.

