



The gender of authority in the legal academy

Wednesday 4 October, 12.30–2 pm

Speaker

**Professor Mary Jane
Mossman**

Osgoode Hall Law School, Toronto

Discussant

Professor Margaret Thornton

ANU College of Law

Chair

Professor Kim Rubenstein

ANU College of Law

Location

Phillipa Weeks Staff Library

ANU College of Law, 5 Fellows Road,
The Australian National University, Canberra

Meet our guest speaker over lunch
from 12–12.30 pm

Registration required

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'Herculean Obstacles and Intrepid Complainants': The Sex Discrimination Complaint at Osgoode Hall Law School, 1987–94

This paper examines a legal challenge about systemic sex discrimination in an Ontario law school in the late 1980s in relation to the appointment of a new Dean. Arguably, the decision reflected Margaret Thornton's view about the 'hegemonic masculinity' of many academic institutions towards the end of the 20th century – perhaps especially in Ontario where women began to enter the legal profession in large numbers (and the legal academy in small numbers) only in the 1970s. The paper describes the context of the human rights complaint and its impact at Osgoode and beyond, as well as my personal reflections in the 'eye of the storm' (with apologies to Patrick White).

Professor Mary Jane Mossman has been a member of the faculty at Osgoode Hall Law School since 1977, after beginning her academic career at the University of New South Wales in 1972. She has taught courses in the areas of Property Law, Family Law, and Gender Equality, and has published journal articles and books on these topics. In 2006, she published *The First Women Lawyers: A Comparative Study of Gender, Law and the Legal Professions*; and her current projects include a historical study of gender and the reform of 'family property law,' and a book project on the small groups of women who entered the legal profession in Ontario, 1890s to 1960s.

Discussion

Although legal academic cultures are generally accorded scant attention in the Anglo-Australian legal tradition, feminist legal scholars have been

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particularly interested in the reflexive project. In discussing Mary Jane's paper, this comment interrogates the gender of authority in the contemporary legal academy. How have things changed for women? Reference will be made to interviews recently conducted with Australian women law professors.

Professor Margaret Thornton (FASSA FAAL) is a sociolegal and feminist scholar in the ANU College of Law with a particular interest in legal cultures. Her publications include *Privatising the Public University: The Case of Law* (Routledge, 2012).