

Spotlight on Centre Board: Dr Justine Rogers

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I had the pleasure of interviewing Centre Board member, Dr Justine Rogers, UNSW Law & Justice nominee. Here is a sketch of our long (and fun and philosophical) chat over Zoom.

Justine is Senior Lecturer at UNSW Law & Justice, where she teaches and convenes the core legal ethics course and one of the legal philosophy courses, Theories of Law & Justice. Justine is also Deputy Director of the Future of Law and Innovation in the Profession (FLIP) research stream, a strategic collaboration with the NSW Law Society and a part of the Allens Hub for Technology, Law and Innovation. She holds a Master's and a DPhil from the University of Oxford. As an unexpected addition, she is also a stand-up comedian. Justine clarifies, "I should probably identify as a lapsed comedian or a comedian-in-hiatus because I haven't been doing that much stand-up for a while. I've just started some comedy writing again, but very, very slowly".

Justine feels she "can only manage two things, fairly well at any one time", which was being an academic and a stand-up, but when new parenthood entered the mix, it became too hard. "I couldn't do three things, especially when all three are pretty exposing, demanding pursuits". Now her daughter is five, Justine has started to get the itch to bring comedy back into her life. Justine is a twin and middle child of eight kids, of (medical) doctor-parents. In her family growing up, there was no conversation about doing anything in the arts as a career. So where did comedy come from? She thoughtfully reflects, "I think I've got this unfortunate and fortunate instinct for performing."

In thinking why stand up appealed, Justine recalls that after spending a number of years overseas working hard on her PhD, she just wanted to do something for herself. "Where I could express myself more freely and more directly and get feedback straightaway, rather than waiting for a peer review that could take a few months and then for the final



*Justine on stage
as a stand-up
comedian*

"There are some overlaps between law and the arts, Justine says. As an obvious example, when she conducted her DPhil, an ethnography of London barristers and their pupils, she watched certain advocates, mostly from the Criminal Bar, who could command the court in a highly performative way. She was struck by the different ways they used their voice and mannerisms, including artful pauses, to create appeal to the jury. But, she added, lawyers are creative and innovative in all sorts of ways in their work, and this is increasingly so as the profession changes."



“The truth is, it’s really about collaboration and connection. As a teacher, a researcher, writer and somewhat-performer, I am looking to understand and feel connected to others, and understand and talk about the systems we create and live in, or are subjected to. The best is where you are connected in such a way that it can feel quite transcendental, for want of a less cringy word.”

those 3000 people. I was the only person on stage, but I was looking around the room, feeling really genuinely connected to everyone. I have the same feeling in the classroom, when a learning activity is going really well, when the students and I are all relaxed and open, and genuinely putting energy into exploring the meanings and possibilities of something. It’s exciting!”

Turning to pro bono, Justine’s research has shown that, in addition to being intrinsically good, pro bono or any publicly-minded elements of practice correlates highly to lawyers’ well-being. Her research into the banking industry and its attempts to professionalise have made her more certain of how lucky lawyers are to have a rich professional identity that includes both commercialistic and altruistic, access to justice strands. “We are essentially relational beings and generally more content when we are relating well to others, including by helping them!”, she said.

As a Board member of the Centre, Justine’s concern is to help the Centre staff in their research projects, ensuring that its methods are rigorous, and in generally finding opportunities for collaboration or “knowledge-exchange” between the Centre, and the academy, the profession and law students.

Justine’s current research has three strands. The first supports the FLIP stream which is structured as a series of annual topics. In 2018, its first year, the topic was Artificial Intelligence and the Legal Profession. One of her outputs was a co-authored piece, *“The Ethical AI Lawyer”*, which steps through the ways in which AI challenges the motivations and values of lawyers, and what being ethical and adhering to their professional duties requires of them. She is right now starting on the 2022 FLIP topic, about how to cultivate trust in an increasingly online legal profession. (For ‘primer’

*Aerial shot of
Oxford University*

*Photo by Sidharth
Bhatia / Unsplash*

published article, which could take a year or two, and then it’s even longer until anyone cites it or lets you know they’ve read it. But the catalyst was someone daring me to enter a comedy competition.” Justine tells me she enjoys making people laugh, observing things, the pressure of responding in the moment, and ultimately the connection with the audience.

I asked Justine to compare her experiences of the PhD and comedy. “Both require tenacity and emotional self-regulation,” she said. “Whilst a PhD has a higher barrier to entry, comedy is perhaps more challenging because there are no fixed milestones, let alone a cut-off point or end date. In comedy, you just have to keep going; it is a lifelong commitment if it’s real for you.”

When asked to tie her interests together, she said, “The truth is, it’s really about collaboration and connection. As a teacher, a researcher, writer and somewhat-performer, I am looking to understand and feel connected to others, and understand and talk about the systems we create and live in, or are subjected to. The best is where you are connected in such a way that it can feel quite transcendental, for want of a less cringy word.” Performing in front of 3000 people at the Opera House was an obvious career highlight. “But”, she adds, “that was more about being present with

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Four Inns of Court, Middle Temple Hall

documents to introduce lawyers to the issues of and practical frameworks for: Artificial Intelligence, Change Leadership, Sustainability of Law and Legal Practice, and the Future of Legal Service Delivery, and for other resources, [click here](#), and look out for the 2022 primer on Trust).

Her second strand of research is legal education, including published work on legal ethics education; group-based or collaborative learning; and, recently, a comprehensive review and framework for lawyers’ soft skills. “Though”, she says, “I don’t really like that term, they’re critical professional skills”.

Her third research strand, the newest, looks at what practices from family therapy and related disciplines might be useful for lawyers in their practices with clients.

Lastly, I asked Justine what a piece of advice she would give to her past, law student self. She said without hesitation, “to forge a better connection with people in her university years.” “I have great friends from my postgraduate studies, but in my undergraduate years, I was very focused and didn’t get

involved much outside the classroom. I would not say I had a transactional mindset or anything too awful - I had a few buddies - but I just didn’t see the value in a really colourful and active campus life. I wish I had been much more open to what university offers, especially when it was more straightforward than it is now, when we’re online. I was so lucky in my postgraduate years to have another chance at interacting with a wide range of people - or a fairly wide range.”

Justine finished off: “It’s reality TV talk but it’s true: life really is about the journey and the things going on around you at any one time. My day of PhD completion at Oxford, for example, was not in any way grand. It was this time of year, mid-November, and winter was closing in. I rode my bike in the dark, though it was only 3:30pm. My thesis, two copies for the two examiners, was double-bagged, which was smart of me because it also began to rain. I approach the desk of the Exam Schools and handed them over, waiting for the gargoyles to snap open like a bunch of Pez and spray confetti over me; for the ghosts of scholars past to whisk me off to a special banquet. Nothing

happened. The administrator, an English woman, took the copies from me, gave me a form to fill out as a receipt, and looked over me to the next person in the queue, though there wasn’t anyone in fact there. I looked behind me and back at her before realising and actually accepting we weren’t going to have any eye contact let alone a smile during the entire interaction. It would have been terrible if my driving goal in doing the thesis had been a glorious threshold moment and I hadn’t been thoroughly enjoying myself in the process!” ■

Dr Justine Rogers was appointed to the Board on 12 November 2018. She is Deputy Director of the Law Society of NSW Future of Law and Innovation in the Profession (FLIP) research stream as part of the Allens Hub for Technology, Law and Innovation at UNSW Law. Her current research project is on lawyers and change. Justine is also a Senior Lecturer at UNSW Law. She teaches Lawyers, Ethics & Justice, the core legal ethics course, and Theories of Law and Justice, one of the strands of jurisprudence. Justine completed her DPhil at the University of Oxford, which was an ethnographic study of London barristers and pupillage.



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