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# Faculty of Laws Newsletter

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## A Comment from the Dean

A few weeks ago, I received an email from a student which I would like to share with you (personal details of the Student have been removed, out of GDPR considerations). I invite you to consider the contents of this email and indeed encourage you to take the suggestions on board:

Thu, 9 Feb,  
15:07

to Ivan.mifsud

Dear Dr Mifsud,

*I hope this email finds you well.*

*Speaking for all of our class I would firstly like to thank you, all the lectures and staff involved in providing our class with a wonderful first term at university.*

*With a semester, and now a set of exams, under our belt, I personally put forward a vote in front of the class regarding a matter which I feel could really improve our lectures on a number of levels.*

*This motion, which passed the class vote unanimously, was on if students would prefer if lecturers could send short, relevant readings for a lecture prior to the lecture itself on a lecture to lecture basis.*

*Currently, the system is that each module has a total list of readings assigned to it. Students who wish to keep up with lecturers during their lectures are left with the rather herculean task of reading the entire reading list as quickly as possible in order to grasp what the lecturers are talking about.*

*Moreover, short lecture to lecture readings can allow for better time management by students. This is so as they are able to create their own short template notes prior to the lecture. These can be used later on as study material besides the notes taken during lectures.*

*It is my belief, one which seems to be shared by the class as seen through the passing of the vote, that the current system could be improved upon. Via short lecture to lecture readings, students would be able to prepare beforehand, and thus, better orient themselves as well as participate during lectures.*

*This system was present to a point in our Philosophy of Law module, and was seen to be quite helpful by students.*

*We kindly hope that you take this idea into consideration for implementation next semester.*

*I thank you for your continued effort in your role as Dean, and hope to receive a response on this matter at your earliest convenience.*

*[omissis]*

*Yours sincerely,  
[omissis]*

## **ChatGPT: Challenge or Opportunity?**

Recently the UM Deans had one of their periodical meetings with the Rector. On the agenda of said meeting was ChatGPT, that application which can answer essay questions and perhaps even do assignments. It seems that Turnitin will not detect its use and the replies given are well structured, if on the superficial side, hence the concern expressed by the Deans at said meeting with UM Rector, which concerns reflect those reported in the international media. Nor are academics alone in expressing concern over ChatGPT: from what I read in the media, it is not a tool specifically created to write students' essays, but it is a web search tool now backed by Microsoft and set to rival Google. It seems that students worldwide have realised that this tool can help them answer essay questions and write assignments, hence the concern in academic circles.



# ChatGPT

I have tried it, and can confirm that stylewise it is good, but answers tend to verge on the superficial, and can be inaccurate especially where Malta-related matters are concerned. Having said that, I have no doubt that ChatGPT will improve with time. It is also a useful tool, for example when one is looking for suggestions and inspiration. Indeed I recently used it for precisely this purpose: I was filling in an application for a research project, and pasted a particular question to Chat GPT to see how it would approach the matter. ChatGPT's response proved to be of great help.

It goes without saying that there is no point in even trying to resist technological advances, because this will be completely futile. We Academics must wisen up to the use of this and similar tools: we can keep an eye out for suspicious essays and assignments, if necessary we can change methods of assessment to reduce the opportunity to use such tools (e.g. pen and paper exam on campus instead of assignments), or if groups are small, perhaps the students can be assessed by means of a viva. Alternatively, maybe all we have to do is guide our students to list ChatGPT amongst the references.

At this stage, you might wish to try it out (if you have not already done so), by going to <https://chat.openai.com/chat> and giving it some actual essay / assignment questions. Or asking it a couple of silly questions and having a laugh at its expense.

## Faculty of Laws & Theology Library

We take the opportunity to welcome Ms Bertha Grixti, newly posted at the Faculty of Laws & Theology Library. She is hard at work reorganising it, and I think that we owe it to her to not only make her feel welcome, but also to lend her our support. We must make more use of this library, whether by paying regular visits and referring to the books to be found there, by promoting its use amongst our students, and by donating a few copies of our own publications.

When the UM finally finds the money for the long-promised refurbishment of our premises, this library is earmarked for a revamp which will make it more useable, allowing us to organise activities such as book launches or academic discussions; until then this may be less possible, but is not impossible either.

## New showcase

The Faculty of Laws has invested in a new and larger bookcase for our publications. In the meantime Mr Gordon Pisani of Kite Group has also very kindly donated a substantial number of books for this purpose.

This donation apart, at our last Head of Department meeting (24th February 2023) it was decided that:

- i. the bookcases in question will serve exclusively for Academics' published books, as a showcase of our research. This will include past academics (e.g. people who may have since retired, or for any other reason simply moved on. In view of this, any Academic or past Academic is welcome to provide us with a copy of their book or books, to include in this bookcase;
- ii. as a direct consequence of this, since he is not a present or past member of academic staff, Judge Philip Sciberras' *L-Alfabet tal-Kodiċi Ċivili* will be removed from the bookcase and placed in the UM Law Library. The Faculty of Laws owns the full set, which it bought at full price, and feels it would be more useful if placed at the disposal of researchers;
- iii. books are being arranged in alphabetical order, according to surname of the author or editor (depending on the case);
- iv. a second showcase is being organised on the ground floor, for articles or chapters in books, recently published by our academics. Any Academic wishing their article or chapter to be included in this display, is to communicate directly with Dr David Zammit.

## Lectures by Dr. John Stanton

Dr John Stanton from City University London delivered a series of lectures on constitutional and administrative law to first and second year students during his visit to Malta in mid-February.

The topics of his lectures were: *“The constitutional position of the Prime Minister; and Collective Ministerial Responsibility”* for LL.B I students; *“Legal standing in judicial review cases”*; and *“Abuse of Power as a ground of review in judicial review cases”* for LL.B II students.

He then gave a public lecture organized by the Malta Chapter of the International Society of Public Law (ICON-S) and the Chamber of Advocates on 15 th February at the Law Courts. The subject was : *“Is the British Constitution fit for purpose?”*

Dr Stanton has given the Faculty permission to publish these lectures. They will be published in the near future.