
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Summer Clerk 2023

Keeley Hughes

I am a proud Turrabul and Yuggera woman, living near the Glass House Mountains. My parents have a few acres there, which I was fortunate enough to grow up on.

My parents always remind me that ever since I was a young girl, I wanted to become Lawyer. I always had a passion for the law and helping others in the legal field. This is why in High School I studied legal studies. Upon graduating from St Columban's College in 2018, I began studying a Bachelor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University.

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In 2020, after one year of studying, I added a Bachelor of Laws. As I was the first person in my family to go to University, I was advised to ease into my degree as I would be paving the way for myself.

Why did you apply for the clerkship?

I applied for the summer clerkship at Gilshenan and Luton because I wanted to gain experience in a criminal law firm. I always had dreams of becoming a criminal lawyer, so I thought it would be beneficial to gain exposure to a criminal firm before finishing my degree. Another reason I applied was because I had heard many great things about G&L, including the work they do and staff they have. I knew G&L were leaders in criminal law, and I wanted to have the opportunity to learn from the best.

What did you do during your clerkship?

The question should be what I didn't do during my clerkship. During my four weeks at G&L I participated in a wide range of legal tasks. Many of which only admitted solicitors get exposure to.

Some of the opportunities I was part of included observing District Court sentences, participating in a week-long trial in the District Court, assisting two senior associates in a joint coronial inquest, going to the cells under the Supreme Court, observing client conferences, writing statements and so much more. During these various tasks, I gained a better understanding of how the different court systems work, the different approaches to advocacy, and the importance of ethics during everything you do as a lawyer.

I also participated in numerous legal workshop sessions. These one-on-one sessions provided me with a deeper understanding of the legal industry, how to write and prepare briefs for counsel, how to effectively research, and the ethical obligations placed on lawyers.

What was your most memorable day?

This is hard because over the course of my clerkship I have done many memorable things. However, if I were to only pick one day it would have to be the last day of a week-long trial that I assisted Craig Pratt in.

I was lucky enough to sit with him at the bar table for the entire duration of the trial. Although the jury verdict was unfavourable, I learnt the importance of having all your material prepared and having the skillset of being able to think on your feet. This is because right after the jury delivered the guilty verdict, we went straight into sentencing.

This is memorable as I truly felt a part of the G&L team. I was appreciated by colleagues and the clients. This whole experience showed me how to effectively communicate with your clients, including having the skills to inform them of possible bad news.

What will you take away from the clerkship?

From my clerkship at G&L I will take away an extensive range of transferrable skills. This includes knowing the importance of being surrounded by a supportive team, the significance of quick thinking, and not only knowing the law but also how it applies in a range of practicable circumstances.

My clerkship at G&L has solidified that criminal law is the area of law I would like to practice in.