

International Law Students' Society
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Michael Bula

Michael Bula Solicitors International Lawyers 213 Canning Street Carlton Vic 3053 Australia

Dear Mr. Michael Bula,

Re: International Careers Guidebook 2006

Please find enclosed two copies of the Melbourne University ILSS International Careers Guidebook for 2006 of which you were a contributor.

We would like to thank you for your kind support and encouragement of the International Law Students' Society. We hope you enjoy perusing the guide and contribute again in the future!

Yours Sincerely,

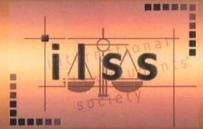
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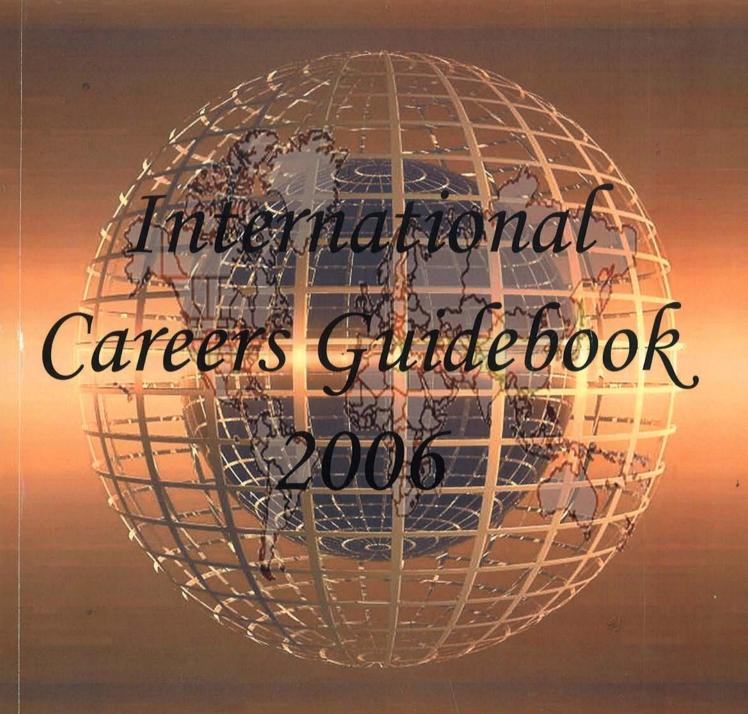
Careers Officer International Law Students' Society ilss-careers@unimelb.edu.au

Encl.

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The University of Melbourne International Law Students' Society





Allens Arthur Robinson

The Importance of Language Skills

Michael Leopold Bula

Barrister, Solicitor and Notary Public Michael Bula Solicitors, International Lawyers

Michael Bula B.A. (1980) (French & Italian) LL.B (1981) (Melb. Uni.) Grad. Dip. Notarial Practice (2004) (Vic. Uni.) is a Solicitor admitted to the Supreme Courts of Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Vanuatu and a Notary Public admitted in Victoria, Australian Capital Territory and Vanuatu practising in international law relating to France and French-speaking countries of Europe, West Africa and the South Pacific. He founded the firm Michael Bula Solicitors, International Lawyers in 1985, after working in a number of city and inner city law firms and identifying the need for a specialist practice in French and international legal matters. He has also written a number of articles and is a regular speaker at conferences in Australia and overseas. Mr. Bula writes on the key role language skills have played in his successful professional career:

I was born in Melbourne of Italian parentage. Both my parents spoke a range of European languages having lived in various European countries before migrating to Australia. Neither of my parents, however, spoke nor had studied French, the language that was to become a vital skill in my professional life.

It was at secondary school at the age of eleven that I was first exposed to the French language and culture which I fell in love with instantly. My tertiary education at Melbourne University in law and arts, specialising in the French and Italian languages enabled me to pursue this interest. During my first year at university, a fellow student persuaded me over a one

and a half hour telephone conversation to participate in a French Department play in the French language. This was perhaps one of the most instrumental stages of my French language education that provided me with a stepping stone to developing my use of the French language in a professional capacity. It was here that I was introduced to a rigorous routine of memorising a text in France, practising articulation and gesture, as well as being exposed to a wide circle of francophones in Melbourne, all of which contributed to the perfecting of my French language skills. This led to me founding and becoming Manager of the Melbourne French Theatre in 1977.

It was not until I commenced my year of articles in a Melbourne law firm that I began to think about the possibilities of marrying my professional career in one way or another with the French language. But how?

As it turns out, the French theatre group was to provide the key connection, as my acquaintance with the French cultural circles of Melbourne opened the doors to the French commercial and diplomatic circles in both Melbourne and Canberra.

During the early eighties I gained experience in the legal profession working for several law firms. Towards the mid eighties I was ready to set up my own practice, having established a network of overseas legal correspondents and French clientele over the years. My aim was to create a firm that provided improved legal services for clients from French speaking territories and countries, and local clients with French matters.

I have since become well known to the French speaking community in Melbourne as a francophone lawyer and expanded this niche by receiving official recognition and nominations from various French consular, diplomatic and commercial offices in Melbourne and Canberra for the purposes of legal specialisation, legalisation, certification and authentication of French documentation for local and international notarial matters. From time to time other legal firms engage my services as a consultant in these areas of law when they are confronted with any French aspects to their files.

I use my knowledge of French as a practical tool in the everyday structure of my firm and its work structure. The spoken language of communication between my office staff is French. The created "ambiance française', builds a professional rapport with Frenchspeaking clients as often the mere ability to provide legal advice in the French language creates an environment of professional trust that fosters open communication and improved relations. Ultimately, this leads to business being conducted more efficiently. In addition to being able to correspond in the French language and understand the contents of documents in French, a certain knowledge of written French is required to draft various legal documents. For such activities, a profound appreciation of the style and principles of the composition of French legal documents and of certain legal rules is necessary.

Given that I write and read legal letters in French every day, I often have to translate legal documents, a task that requires a professional knowledge of both Australian and French legal systems. The French legal system is a civil law system and is quite distinct from ours in Australia, which is more closely linked with the British legal

or common law system as well as the additional complication of our Federation where legislative texts can vary from State to State according to historical conventions. The French legal system on the other hand is based on Roman law and the Napoleonic Code. If you think legal jargon in English is difficult to comprehend, French legal jargon is even more inaccessible. In order to certify translations for legal, government and official purposes, one must be recognised as an accredited translator by NAATI (The National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters), a qualification that I have obtained in both directions, ie. French to English and English to French.

Possessing a second language has opened several doors to me. One of my previous appointments, was that of Honorary Consul for the Republic of Vanuatu (from 1993 to 1998), a country which I have been honoured to represent in the jurisdictions of Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. The position came about as a result of a number of legal representations I had made on behalf of the Government of Vanuatu (a multilingual French and English speaking country). No doubt, I was an interesting proposition to them because of my language capabilities.

My current appointment of Honorary Consul General of Senegal (2003 to the present) (a French-speaking former French colony in West Africa) also draws from the language resource and made history as one of the rare examples where a person was appointed for a second country. The appointment was largely as a result of mining law practice in the francophone regions of Africa.

So that is a brief summary of how I came to be a lawyer who is able to practise and combine language skills in my profession. I have noticed that there has evolved a certain systematicapplicationofvocationallanguage

skills that could easily be transported into a legal course combining a second language. Management in Australia now understands that in order to succeed in overseas markets you need to speak the "right" language, and this can mean many things, ranging from basic survival to advanced language levels, knowledge of culture, legal systems and insight into the particular customs relating to the manner in which business is conducted. Linguistic and cultural awareness can give an enterprise the winning edge over the competition. Language learning as a vocational tool can enable one to achieve the productive cultural interaction one aims for in these times of globalisation.