**Early career researchers debate law, economy and environment**

For three days at the end of September 2015, the UNSW Law staff common room came alive with the thoughts, ideas and debates of the [Interdisciplinary Early Career Workshop on Rethinking Law, Economy and the Environment](http://activismandenterprise.weebly.com/law-economy-environment-workshop.html). Organised by Professor Bronwen Morgan as a wider capacity-building activity proposed as part of her Future Fellowship [research on climate activism and social enterprise](http://activismandenterprise.weebly.com/law-economy-environment-workshop.html), the workshop brought together early career researchers from all over Australia with paired senior academics, one from a primarily legal academic background and the other from primarily social science.

The primary purpose of the workshop was to build networks for interdisciplinary research collaboration between lawyers and social scientists within Australia. The secondary purpose was to encourage the development of debate and new practices in relation to training and supervision of postgraduate students. The workshop followed a stimulating format in which the papers by ECR researchers, read by all beforehand, were not directly delivered by their authors. Instead, a peer ECR summarised an author’s paper in five minutes followed structured questions used by all, after which there were two extended responses to the paper from a ‘law-social science’ pair of senior academics, and then open discussion by the group. This format supported a highly immersive and interactive – and often constructively challenging – experience for the ECRs. As one said in their feedback, ‘The sharing of experiences and difficulties was supportive and made networking meaningful and ‘real’, while others described the opportunity for feedback fostered by this format as ‘extraordinary’, ‘terrific’,‘invaluable’ and ‘enormously rewarding’.

In the introductory and closing sessions, the workshop participants also discussed questions of training around methodology and methods for postgraduate students – many of the ECRs were also simultaneously undertaking a PhD, and had a direct stake in this. These discussions were also based on a short simple [survey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/create/survey/preview?sm=b_2BFBvBhdTvCUna6WCQqiKJSRqyH9dp4vdPR5eG2_2BGPs_3D) about existing practices in relation to such training, which can be extended beyond the workshop. Some very interesting discussions ensued regarding the challenges of developing the skills needed for interdisciplinary work, particularly within the compass of a three year PhD. These issues were opened up to a final public forum on the third day, where theoretical articles about studying law and social science were also debated. Along with the [keynote lecture by Distinguished Visiting Professor Susan Silbey](http://www.law.unsw.edu.au/events/public-lecture-struggle-accountability-systems-science-surveillance), the workshop was a very productive experience which can be followed up with further networking and publishing at the 2nd Annual Colloquium on Frontiers of Environmental Law that will take place in February 2016 at UNSW.

*Image: Some of the participants in Rethinking Law, Economy and the Environment Workshop*

