

A DANGEROUS CULT: RESPONSE TO ‘THE EFFECT OF THE MARKET ON LEGAL EDUCATION’

MARGARET THORNTON¹ AND LUCINDA SHANNON²

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of law schools, partial deregulation of higher education and the introduction of a user-pays system have compelled law schools to enter the market and compete with one another to attract and keep students. The new marketised framework positions students as customers who choose the most attractive educational ‘product’. With particular regard to law school websites, this paper considers the way choice is constructed with the aid of ‘branding’. While sameness could be said to be a characteristic of legal education, choice requires an element of difference. In presenting themselves to fickle customers as the means of realising a bright future filled with excitement and glamour, law schools play down the civic role of legal education. Rather than promoting a commitment to critical thinking and social justice, law school marketing encourages consumerism as the ultimate realisation of the good life.

¹ Professor of Law & ANU Public Policy Fellow, ANU College of Law, Australian National University.

² Former Research Assistant, ANU College of Law, Australian National University.