

Talking About Research
The Second Annual Autumn School on the Methodology of Research in Law

ENGLISH TRANSCRIPT

Peter Oliver:

[Peter Oliver and Cintia Quiroga walking through University of Ottawa campus, in conversation]

When you are a doctoral student and you leave the library to get a coffee and someone is kind enough to ask the question “What are you working on?”, all of a sudden, after 40 minutes, you’ve still not finished talking about your research—because often we really need to discuss it.

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The Second Annual Autumn School on the Methodology of Research in Law

Peter Oliver [Professor and Vice-Dean, Research, Common Law Section]:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage in his office and talking with a colleague]

One might think that at the university we get lots of time to talk about our research, but in fact we're busy with teaching and administration, and even when we talk about our research, we're as likely to be talking about what's in the news, or what was on Twitter, or possibly the research that is the most relevant to what's going on in the news; and that's a great thing—people expect us to be doing that sort of research, but we also often have research projects that are maybe the ones that don't get as much attention, the ones that—I don't want to call them not topical—but the ones that aren't so obviously topical—maybe issues where we have an instinct that what we're working on is going to be relevant in five or ten years' time. And sometimes we don't talk about those enough.

On October 23 and 24, 2018,

**the Faculty of Law convened the Second Annual
Autumn School on the Methodology of Research in Law.**

**Led by
Professor Peter Oliver
Vice-Dean of Research for the Common Law Section**

and

**Cintia Quiroga
Assistant Dean of Research for the Faculty of Law**

this school was an occasion to talk about the hows and whys of research in law.

Researchers gathered to talk about their work and raised important questions about research in law:

What is the role of dialogue in research?

How can we create a context in which researchers can experiment with their ideas?

What role do new ideas play in legal research today?

How do we position ourselves in relation to the object of our research?

How do we support the development of a research culture?

Cintia Quiroga [Assistant Dean, Research and Professor, Faculty of Law]:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

I think that in some ways doing research in law is also a way of engaging in a form of social innovation where we stop and think about the justice system, where we think about the law, where we place it in a certain context, and then we try to develop certain solutions or certain changes, or we aim to transform the system in one way or another.

Margarida Garcia [Professor and Vice-Dean, Research and Communications, Civil Law Section]:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

Research in law can be seen as a kind of dance—a choreography where all the dimensions must be in coordination with one another. For example, the object has an effect on the choice of theoretical framework; the analysis has an effect on the method of data collection. So it's very important to see this choreography as its moving so that we can produce results and knowledge that are relevant.

Peter Oliver:

[footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

So one of the ideas behind this was to get back in touch with some of those big ideas and big issues that we care about but don't often get the chance to talk to our colleagues about.

**Both established researchers and emerging doctoral students
took part in the school, discovering in the process a sense
of kinship and shared experience as researchers.**

Cintia Quiroga:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

These are opportunities to experiment with our ideas, in fact. To test our ideas with others, with our mentors, and in fact, we can see that in the context of the Autumn School, this is really what happened: even as young researchers came to us with questions, the more established researchers also benefitted from the experience of others.

Constance Backhouse [Distinguished University Professor, Common Law Section]:

[in front of camera]

So, as you try to explain yourself to the group, you learn, a lot.

João Velloso [Professor, Faculty of Law]:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

Because ordinarily we are not necessarily going to speak about the things that already come naturally to us, about the things we do without thinking about how we do them. Here we're trying to say: okay, how do we do this? How can we share our best strategies for doing research, our methodological reflections?

Shauna Van Praagh [Autumn School Rapporteur and Professor, Faculty of Law, McGill University]:

[speaking at the workshop]

I think it's also crucial to feel like you're part of a team, like you're part of a community, and that the imagination that you're bringing is infectious, that you're building something together.

Cintia Quiroga:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop and footage of the University of Ottawa campus]

I think it's in these moments of exchange where we stop, where we take the time to think about research, about the issues that have preoccupied us for a long time, that we really create a research culture—that we create spaces where everyone can discuss these issues.

The workshop was a chance for researchers to take the time and find the space to present their research to others, to discuss issues, challenges and preoccupations, and to rediscover the value of talking about their work.

Yawo Alou [Doctoral candidate, Faculty of Law]:

[in front of camera]

We are researchers, we are students, we've been studying for a long time, but we have never really taken the time to discuss research itself.

Constance Backhouse:

[time-lapse footage of University of Ottawa campus, followed by Constance Backhouse in front of camera]

You know, you're in a little rat race and you're going around the cage, and you're going so fast so fast so fast, just trying to stay on the merry-go-round here, that you don't have time to step back and realize how much you're enjoying what you're doing.

Peter Oliver:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

There was a lot of talk about difficulties we have in research from writer's block to—we talked pretty openly about mental health issues. Sometimes research is a fairly isolated, or isolating process, and as much as we have great moments in research when we think we've just written the best thing ever, sometimes we despair about ever completing [it], and when it's our job, that sometimes can get us down. And so, all the more reason to want to talk about it.

Margarida Garcia:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

This morning's discussion really showed us the degree to which research in law aims to transform the world; but it also has an effect of self-transformation, which is very important, but which is rarely discussed: the place of emotion, of feelings in research, of personal trajectories.

Constance Backhouse:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop and footage of the University of Ottawa campus]

The beautiful thing about a larger collection and a whole day devoted, is that the richness of different people's tasks and their work and their way of seeing it and thinking about it and the problems they have, it runs deeper than just a one-off with a couple of people.

Margarida Garcia:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

We become very familiar with knowledge transfer processes, whether as students or as professors, but we have very little social space dedicated to research. And so this type of meeting makes it possible to elaborate on the questions that haunt us, that cross our minds. It allows us to talk about the challenges, the dilemmas, the problems, and since research in law is an extremely artisanal process, we never find the answers to these questions in textbooks, and it's really by having this type of conversation with colleagues that we can go through the process in a way that is interesting, relevant and rewarding.

**Talking about their research allowed participants
to explore the depths and the limits of the research process.**

João Velloso:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

Usually, the design of academic work is that, well, you talk about research when it's ready, you know? You have a publication and you publish; you go to a conference and you have, like, ten minutes to talk about your results. In a context like this, such as the methodological school, you're there to talk about how you do your research.

Constance Backhouse:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop and footage of the University of Ottawa campus]

How do you speak to an audience that knows very little about your piece of research? How do you get them up to speed? How do you make sense of what you do in a less complex, more interesting way? So, talking about it with a colleague really intensifies that process, and that's all to the good for me.

João Velloso:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

Even if we do not necessarily hear an approach that complements our own, it makes us question the steps we have taken in our own research process. So, quite often we had colleagues making certain proposals which had nothing to do with my research, but it made me reflect on how I could do things in another way.

Amira Maameri-Ulisse [Doctoral candidate, Faculty of Law]:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

It is indeed very important to have discussions with other student-researchers as well as professors, who are also researchers; to be able to organize a dialogue which allows us to develop our ideas, our reflections that are in the process of evolving; to expose ourselves to the knowledge of others; and, in particular, to have discussions with people from other disciplines. This effectively brings to life new ideas that we would never have had if this space for discussion had not been created.

Peter Oliver:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage of the University of Ottawa campus]

And some of those more difficult ideas are ideas that see us in dialogue with previous generations. Sometimes, we're talking about big ideas that were wrestled with by people a generation ago, and if we're ambitious, which we're supposed to be, it's hopefully—well, hopefully the ideas that we're writing about will be things that are of interest to a generation forward.

As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them. But you don't learn only from writers — you can learn from ancestors in all their forms.

- **Margaret Atwood**

The autumn school ultimately helped to bring our law researchers together, providing a space for mentorship and renewed collegiality.

Cintia Quiroga:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop and footage of the University of Ottawa campus]

One of the wonderful things about the research methodology school is it's the opportunity to bring together younger researchers with more experienced ones—so basically, PhD candidates with professors.

Yawo Alou:

[in front of camera]

Can we obtain, from other people, tools that are, for the most part, better suited to address our subject?

Amira Maameri-Ulisse:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage of Peter Oliver in conversation with a colleague]

We have the student perspective, but to have access to the perspectives of professors, who have more experience in life, in the field and academically—the exchanges we had were invaluable.

Shauna Van Praagh:

[speaking at the workshop, interspersed with footage of Peter Oliver and Cintia Quiroga walking through University of Ottawa campus, in conversation]

I think often mentors can help us with, even if they are just in our head, people we've met in the past—not necessarily in our legal research mode—but kind of help us believe in our projects, be more creative and a little less critical.

The success of the second Autumn School on the Methodology of Research in Law has inspired participants to continue their conversations and to start new ones.

The experience has proven to be a valuable part of our efforts to create a thriving research culture.

Constance Backhouse:

[in front of camera]

And I would like for everyone to really be energized and excited about their research and able to share that sense of energy and excitement.

Peter Oliver:

[in front of camera, interspersed with footage from the workshop of a group of researchers in conversation]

The interesting thing was talking about research ended up being talking about much more than research, and that didn't really surprise me. It was about ideas, of course—you'd expect us to be talking about ideas—but it was also talking about the sort of intellectual community that helps us to generate those ideas.

Cintia Quiroga:

[in front of camera]

The exchange that happens in those situations is what nourishes, what nurtures, a research culture.

I was aware from the outset that my task involved not simply telling the truth of this world, as can be uncovered by objectivist methods of observation, but also showing that this world is the site of an ongoing struggle to tell the truth of this world.

- Pierre Bourdieu

[University of Ottawa logo]

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Quotations

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Wacquant, Loïc J.D., "Towards a Reflexive Sociology: A Workshop with Pierre Bourdieu" (1989) 7:1 *Sociological Theory*, p. 35

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Second Annual Autumn School on the Methodology of Research in Law – Talking About Research

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