

## **Rachel Lee, Class of 2008**

### JTC Testimonial

#### **The benefits of a co-educational environment at school**

A co-educational environment developed my people skills in a gender-balanced environment from a young age. There is some research that suggests females perform better in all-girls schools and boys in co-ed schools (much of it anecdotal and inconclusive). I have also seen research that finds it makes no difference. I have never been to an all-girls school, but I can confirm that the people skills, and enriched learning experience from having more diverse perspectives in the classroom, that I developed from a co-ed education are invaluable. Co-ed schools reinforce an important view of society; that males and females study well together and complement each other when working in the same environment. Where differences emerge they can be understood and worked through by compromise.

The school environment is a microcosm of the wider workplace where men and women, without placing people into strict 'boxes' in reality do often bring different skills, perspectives and styles of understanding to the table that must be embraced. Studying and socializing with males in a co-educational school definitely made the transition to university much easier than if I had gone to a single sex school. Knowing I can succeed in an environment with males and females has had a positive impact on my endeavours after high school and my self esteem.

#### **What I am doing now**

I am currently in my 4<sup>th</sup> year of studying Law/Arts (international relations) at the University of Western Australia as a Fogarty scholar. At UWA I am the Equity and Social Justice Vice President of the Blackstone Law Society. I co-ordinate a "Women in Law Mentoring Scheme" that partners female lawyers and female law students and have assisted the establishment of "Blackstone Volunteering", a program that facilitates community legal and non-legal volunteering for students such as re-writing legal advice pamphlets for CASE for Refugees. We also run workshops with high school students from low SES backgrounds to encourage them to aspire to attend university. I have been actively involved in the movement to end extreme poverty as a volunteer for four years with the Oaktree Foundation. At Oaktree I co-ordinated a national "Schools4Schools" program that runs global education workshops with school students and fundraises to refurbish and capacity-build schools in Cambodia. I was also given the opportunity do some work on an Oaktree teacher training project in remote Papua New Guinea. The exposure and support I was given to engage with social justice issues to pursue opportunities to lead social change was nurtured by my education at John XXIII College.