

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person

**Entry ID:** AWE5716

## Hiscock, Mary Elizabeth

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**Occupation** Academic, Chairperson, Lawyer, Solicitor

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### Summary

Emeritus Professor Mary Hiscock was the first full-time female academic appointed to the Faculty of Law at the University of Melbourne. In 1972 Hiscock again made history when she became the Faculty's first female reader. She was a pioneer of the study of comparative Asian Law, introducing Asian legal systems to students at the University of Melbourne for the very first time. Hiscock was later Chair of Law at Queensland's Bond University, where she taught Contract and International Trade Law and was also Associate Dean (Research and Graduate Studies) from 1994 to 1997. She has been an expert adviser to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and a consultant to the Asian Development Bank; in addition, she has been a delegate to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). A member of the Australian Academy of Law, Hiscock is currently Emeritus Professor of Law at Bond University.

Mary Hiscock was interviewed by Kim Rubenstein for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Oral History Project. For details of the interview see the National Library of Australia [CATALOGUE RECORD](#).

## Details

Emeritus Professor Mary Hiscock's early years were spent in Melbourne, where she attended Genazzano FCJ College in Kew before graduating from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) degree in 1961. At university, Hiscock was involved with the 'Melbourne University Law Review'. She was awarded the Julia Flynn Memorial Prize in 1956.

After graduating, Hiscock tutored briefly at Melbourne's Faculty of Law before embarking on a Doctor of Laws at the University of Chicago, supported by Ford and Fulbright fellowships. Hiscock was one of the first women at the University of Melbourne to undertake post-graduate study at a university in the United States.

After declining an offer to practise law with a New York Wall Street firm, Hiscock returned to Melbourne and in 1963 accepted a position as a full-time academic in the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Law, thus becoming the first woman to be appointed to such a position there. Although contentious, and condemned by some male colleagues, the appointment had the support of such highly regarded scholars as Sir Zelman Cowen and Frank Maher [Farrar].

In the mid-1960s Hiscock joined forces with David Allan (later Professor David Allan AM) to conduct research into Asian contract and securities law. Hiscock and Allan went on to marry in 1980; in 1987 the couple were co-authors of *Law of Contract in Australia*. By now an authority on Asian law, Hiscock pioneered comparative law courses; for the first time the Melbourne Faculty of Law's curriculum gave students the opportunity to study the laws of Asia as well as traditional European legal systems.

In 1969, Hiscock was elected chair of the Women Lawyers' Association in Victoria. In this capacity, she was involved in the preparation of the National Council of Women Case in the historic first national Equal Pay Case with the Australian Trades Council Union [Farrar].

In 1972, at the young age of 33, Hiscock again made history when she became the first woman reader at the Faculty of Law, University of Melbourne [Campbell]. There were no professorial appointments at the time and it would not be until 1989 that Cheryl Saunders became the first female professor at the Law School [Timeline].

Hiscock left academia in the late 1980s to practise commercial law. She undertook articles of clerkship at Mallesons Stephen Jaques, an experience she found "challenging and invigorating" [Farrar]. Returning to academia, in 1993 Hiscock was appointed Chair of Law at Queensland's Bond University, where she taught Contract and International Trade Law. She also served on various committees at the University including as chair of the Research Committee. She was Associate Dean (Research and Graduate Studies) from 1994 to 1997 [Farrar].

In 1994 Hiscock was a Fellow of the University of Melbourne residential college Janet Clarke Hall. Between 1995 and 2002, Hiscock was chair of the International Law Section, Law Council Australia and chair of the International Academy Commercial and Consumer Law [Pearce]. Hiscock was also an expert adviser to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; consultant to the Asian Development Bank; and a delegate to the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Hiscock is currently Emeritus Professor of Law at Bond University [Farrar]. She is also a member of the editorial boards of the *Australian Journal of Asian Law*, *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, and the *Asia-Pacific Law Review*. In addition, she is a member of the Australian Academy of Law.

Hiscock has inspired with the senior academic positions she has held, and as one of the first women to obtain post-graduate legal qualifications from a university in the United States. Her pioneering of the study of comparative Asian law saw a generation of law students benefit from the opportunity to consider legal systems other than their own. Hiscock's expertise in international trade and investment, with an emphasis on international contracts and comparative law, has been influential within academic institutions and significant international institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations.

## Published resources

### Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

## Archival resources

### National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Mary Hiscock interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing women and the law pilot oral history project \[sound recording\]](#)

## Author Details

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