UFS Faculty of Law brings family law academics together to advance scholarly dialogue

Story: Angelo Arendse | UFS Faculty of Law

The University of the Free State (UFS) Faculty of Law reaffirmed its commitment to advancing legal scholarship and academic collaboration when its Department of Private Law hosted the Family Law Teachers' Colloquium on 1 and 2 October 2026 at the Bloemfontein Campus.

Returning to the UFS for the first time since 2013, the two-day colloquium brought together family law academics from different universities to exchange research, reflect on developments in South African family law and explore opportunities for continued academic engagement.

For Dr Caroline Muller, who coordinated the colloquium, the gathering represented an important opportunity to reconnect a community of scholars working in an area of law that continues to evolve alongside society.

> *"My hope was to create a platform for meaningful and stimulating discussions on current developments in family law, while providing colleagues with an opportunity to exchange ideas, share their research and strengthen connections within the family law academic community," she explained.*

Engaging with the changing landscape of family law

As South African family structures and legal frameworks continue to evolve, family law academics face increasingly complex questions about how the law recognises, protects and responds to different family relationships.

Discussions during the colloquium explored contemporary issues including life partnerships, polygamous marriages, children's rights and the legal recognition of diverse family relationships.

Against the backdrop of proposed legislative reforms, including developments surrounding a new Marriage Act, the gathering provided an opportunity for academics to consider how changes in the law may influence both legal education and research.



One discussion that particularly resonated with Dr Muller concerned the rights of children in the context of surrogacy agreements.

The conversation highlighted the importance of examining legal principles alongside their practical implications, particularly where the rights and interests of vulnerable individuals are concerned.

Such engagements reinforce the need for legal education to remain responsive to societal developments while preparing future legal professionals to navigate increasingly complex legal questions.

Strengthening academic connections and collaboration

Beyond the exchange of research and ideas, the colloquium highlighted the value of bringing academics from different institutions into a shared scholarly space.

By engaging with colleagues whose teaching and research approaches are informed by different institutional experiences, participants were able to broaden their perspectives, identify common interests and establish connections that may support future collaboration.

For Dr Muller, one of the most rewarding aspects of hosting the event was witnessing the enthusiasm with which colleagues engaged in discussions and exchanged ideas.

> *“It was encouraging to see how the colloquium created a space for open dialogue, the exchange of ideas and the development of new connections,” she reflected.*

These interactions have already opened possibilities for further academic engagement, including potential research collaborations and the identification of future external examiners.

Building relationships beyond the colloquium

While the colloquium concluded after two days, its longer-term value lies in the relationships established and the conversations it has encouraged.

Dr Muller hopes participants will carry forward renewed enthusiasm for teaching and research, alongside a stronger sense of connection within the broader family law academic community.

She also expressed the importance of positioning the UFS Faculty of Law, particularly its Department of Private Law, as a welcoming environment for scholarly exchange and a contributor to developments in South African family law.

Through initiatives such as the Family Law Teachers’ Colloquium, the Faculty continues to create opportunities for meaningful academic engagement, strengthen connections across institutions and contribute to the development of legal scholarship that remains relevant to the changing needs of society.

