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The value of mentorship in Ryerson's LPP

By Paula Kulig, AdvocateDaily.com Contributor



Mentorship is a key component of [Ryerson University's Law Practice Program](#) (LPP), providing candidates with tools that will help them succeed in their legal careers, says program director [Gina Alexandris](#).

"The impact of mentorship is to provide candidates with exposure to a professional network, and to the varied experience these people bring to the profession," she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

"Success for our candidates in the very short term means completing the program and then moving on to being called to the bar. But we always take a longer-term view. All of these interactions really are intended to help set our candidates up for success in their careers in the long run."

The LPP is an eight-month program that provides an innovative "additional pathway to licensing for lawyers in Ontario, through online training, experiential learning and a work placement," Alexandris says.

The first four months are focused on a training component that simulates a law firm environment, she says.

"It gives the candidates an opportunity to practise and develop skills and competencies that the Law Society of Ontario and the Federation of Law Societies of Canada have both said are required for entry into the profession," Alexandris says.

The roughly 220 candidates are divided among 60 virtual "law firms" headed by "senior partners" who provide candidates with feedback and assessment on their daily practice assignments, she says, noting these mentors are lawyers practising in Ontario.

"Each of the virtual law firms is paired with a lawyer from the profession. They have two mentors over the course of four months — one for the first two months and a different one for the second half," Alexandris explains, adding the program gives candidates the experience of working with lawyers who have different styles and backgrounds, in the same way they would at a real law firm.

"We think it's really critical to ensure that they be mentored by lawyers with a barrister's background and a solicitor's background, someone who may have 20 years' experience and a mentor who may have 10 years' experience, from Toronto and from outside Toronto. We really try and give two very different mentors to each of the virtual law firms."

The candidates have weekly web conferences with their mentor, where they review their practice files and then discuss a different theme that provides some context to the Rules of Professional Conduct, she says.

Those themes include the role of the lawyer, professionalism and ethics, confidential information, communication skills, the regulation of competence which includes professional development, money management, such as fees and disbursements, the business of law, wellness, the law society's policy on equity, diversity and inclusion, and withdrawing from the profession.

"The mentors often bring their own experiences and talk about how these various issues actually translate into the real practice of law. It shows how the Rules of Professional Conduct actually have an impact on how a lawyer performs and how it affects their clients. Having somebody talk that through on a weekly basis is really quite critical," Alexandris says.

In addition to the weekly web meetings, mentors are also available to provide one-on-one advice over the phone, she adds.

During the second half of the program, candidates participate in a work placement at law firms, legal clinics or in-house counsel departments around the province, Alexandris says.

"Supervising lawyers at the placements also play a mentorship role."

The program also holds three in-person weeks during the course of the eight months, where members of the bench and bar visit Ryerson to carry out assessments, as well as trial advocacy days and interactions with subject matter experts — all of which provide candidates with many opportunities to meet and interact with experienced members of the profession, Alexandris says.

The involvement of mentors in the LPP helps to build a professional network where candidates, once called to the bar, “have that many more people they can turn to, can seek advice from, and gain some additional information or knowledge,” she says.

“It also gives candidates role models. They see how excellent practitioners carry themselves, how they work and strategize, again helping to contribute to their success.”

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