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Ryerson's LPP cultivates confidence, legal skills

By Kathy Rumleski, AdvocateDaily.com Contributor

The 2017-18 cohort of the <u>Ryerson University Law Practice Program</u> (LPP) was celebrated at a recent gathering, where many expressed gratitude for what they learned and experienced during the term, says LPP director <u>Gina Alexandris</u>.

"The program really had an impact on people and they wanted to tell us about it and about how confident they felt going into the workplace," she tells <u>AdvocateDaily.com</u>.

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

"We are not school — we are work. We are not a continuation of law school. We get people ready to move into the profession," she says.

Here are some of the candidate comments that were shared about the program following a survey of the program's fourth cohort:

- "I have never felt more capable and confident in my abilities. The entire LPP team is excellent and world class and I would recommend this program to any aspiring lawyer."

- "This idea of putting us in real situations is great! It really teaches students the skills a good lawyer needs to succeed in the profession. LPP is a success and I will surely recommend it."

- "I thought the LPP might be a bit of a 'soft option,' but I'm now convinced that it's a far stronger pedagogy than traditional articling. Having actors to play our clients was very beneficial, as was the rapidity and variety with which work came onto our dockets."

- "I liked the simulated experience of working in a firm and having challenging work to do within deadlines."

Alexandris says she, along with LPP managing director Chris Bentley, were platform guests at the recent calls to the bar in London, Ottawa and Toronto.

"It's so rewarding to see our candidates cross that stage and get called to the bar," she says.

The program thrives because it is always adapting, based on input from all sources, to provide the best experience for candidates, Alexandris says.

"We take the feedback and make changes to the program based on it. We look at what our mentors and candidates have said and we tweak it accordingly," she says.

For example, Alexandris says this year's cohort had the opportunity to work on a criminal file that incorporated both the defence and Crown counsel perspectives.

"It got folks having conversations across the table with each other in a more realistic way," she says.

Another powerful component this year was having Sheri Hirschberg, the program's family subject matter expert and a family lawyer, introduce the serious topic of intimate partner violence, Alexandris says.

"She did a video presentation and we asked candidates to reflect on it. We realized how much of an impact that it had on people," she says.

For the fifth cohort, further additions will continue, Alexandris says.

"We are expanding our programming around emotional intelligence, innovation, wellness and teamwork as we strongly believe these additional competencies are necessary for future lawyers to succeed," she says.

The LPP is also are looking at broader alumni programming in order to expand its past candidates' development — even as they continue to launch their careers, Alexandris says.

"We have more than 900 alumni and many want to participate and offer support to program candidates, and we are looking for opportunities for their development. They are strong ambassadors for the LPP and becoming successful colleagues within the profession," she says.

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