Legal Supplier

Ryerson's Law Practice Program a recipe for success

By Paul Russell, AdvocateDaily.com Contributor

Hands-on experience is the main reason law school graduates are drawn to Ryerson University's Law Practice Program (LPP), says André Bacchus, assistant director of the LPP's work placement program.

"When interviewing candidates, we ask why they are interested in our offering, and the answer we hear repeatedly is, 'I want to be able to experience what it's like to be a lawyer, and to work in different areas of law because I'm not sure what type of law I'd like to practice,'" he tells AdvocateDaily.com.

"They are also looking for feedback as they progress and to develop skills, and they realize the LPP offers that," Bacchus says.

"Our program ensures that candidates are exposed to seven different areas of law, plus they will be working on more than 100 different tasks to develop core competencies and skills," he says. "After eight months, they are ready to hit the ground running."

More than 1,100 licensees have completed the program in the last five years, with 230 more enrolled this year, Bacchus says.

"When we look at our candidate pool in general over that time, we've seen a very clear trend that half are graduates from all Canadian law schools, except Lakehead University," he says. "Twenty-five per cent of the other half typically started their undergrad in Canada but then completed a law degree in the U.K., Australia or the U.S., and are coming back to Ontario to get their licence so they can practise here."

The candidates are quite diverse, Bacchus says.

"The group is very reflective of the country, province and city that we are a part of," he says. "They look like Canada, and that's wonderful."

Candidates over the last five years have spoken close to 70 different languages, with some having newly arrived in Canada and eager to create a new life for themselves, Bacchus says.

"We've been able to place a tremendously diverse pool of candidates into law offices across Ontario," he says. "That benefits not only the profession but also the people of the province as well."

While many candidates are in their late 20s, Bacchus says others are decades older.

"That age demographic is great to see," he says, noting employers welcome a varied candidate pool.

"Thanks to the diversity of our candidates, we've been able to attract a number of different employers that have not historically participated in the licensing process," Bacchus says. "In fact, 30 per cent of our placements each year are with in-house legal departments that traditionally haven't taken on new lawyers, as they don't have the resources to train them and they're really not sure what they're going to bring to the table."

He explains the LPP training includes an in-house counsel intensive training component, which gives candidates an appreciation of what that position entails.

Small and sole-practice law firms are also hiring candidates, Bacchus says, as "They are confident they're getting someone who can work independently and has already been exposed to the demands of the profession."

Employers benefit from the technology skills candidates can bring, he says, giving the example of a candidate hired to work in a law office in northern Ontario, who introduced the concept of doing online meetings with clients, which saves time and travel expenses.

"The employer has now implemented that as part of their practice, thanks to the skill set the candidate developed in the LPP, which is something we are quite proud of," Bacchus says.

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