



Legal Supplier

Ryerson's Law Practice Program helps candidates 'hit the ground running'

By AdvocateDaily.com Staff



[Ryerson University's Law Practice Program](#) (LPP) helps creative thinkers and broad-minded lawyers-to-be thrive, says program director [Gina Alexandris](#).

"I often advise candidates to 'get comfortable with the uncomfortable,'" she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

Founded four years ago, the LPP is an interactive and innovative program for licensing stream candidates for whom traditional articling may not be the best fit.

"We are an option for those who want something quite different," Alexandris says.

It combines a dynamic simulated work experience in its first half with a work term in the second.

"We get people ready to hit the ground running," Alexandris says. She quotes [Chris Bentley](#), LPP's managing director and a former Ontario attorney general, in describing it as a "17-week play that unfolds day-by-day."

That's because in its first four months, the program simulates actual experience of working in law, followed by four months of an actual work placement.

The first part centres around a virtual law firm where candidates do research, exchange messages and submit work to mentors.

"The technology is the tool, but that's not what drives it," Alexandris says.

Key to the LPP's success is how it mimics the professional environment.

"We are more like work than school," she says. "It's a licensing program, and it's geared towards getting people ready to practise, to move from school to work."

The language it uses reflects that shift: participants are candidates, not students; video sessions with legal experts aren't lectures, they're online meetings with senior partners; and the work groups are firms.

Candidates must be available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday to Friday, at a minimum, but unexpected requests or deadlines may keep them past office hours. They work on files developed by senior lawyers practising in a range of areas. Assignments come at them as they would in an actual law firm, memos and emails arrive throughout the day, and tasks layer on just like in a work setting.

"They aren't getting one file at a time," Alexandris says, so they must hone their time-management skills, which are so important to success in the workplace.

While candidates don't know what each day will bring, the goal is not to ambush them.

"This isn't meant to be a 'gotcha!' kind of program," Alexandris says. "We're not looking to trick people."

Adding even more authenticity to the experience are actors from Ryerson's Interpersonal Skills Teaching Centre, who play clients. One will have family law issues and cry in a meeting with a candidate. Another complains about a bill. And one will make an irate call from the jailhouse.

"Those are exceptional things, but they do happen," Alexandris says.

"I've had candidates say to me, 'I know that these are actors, but they play their roles so well I forget that. It feels real.'"

The LPP also provides insights around the administrative aspects of running a firm by creating a business plan through "committee work."

“We want them to think about what they would need if they were to hang out a shingle or talk to a bank,” Alexandris says.

Candidates have access to [Clio](#), a popular practice-management tool, where they can access client files, record time, review bills and more.

“So, they’re actually employing the tools practising lawyers use,” Alexandris says.

Each “firm” works with a mentor, who acts as a senior partner for weekly meetings. This is a chance to review files and discuss a professionalism theme, such as confidentiality.

Along with the remote online work through the virtual law firm, are three in-person weeks dispersed throughout the first half of the program where candidates perform mock trials, devise an access-to-justice innovation plan and study trial advocacy with renowned trainers.

“It’s quite robust,” Alexandris says of the LPP. “And it’s consistent.”

While articling experiences vary greatly, depending on the placement, all LPP candidates meet the same challenges and develop a similar portfolio of files and skills.

From January to April, candidates take part in a work placement in government, private practice, legal clinics or in-house legal departments, an area that’s growing.

“I joke that in the virtual law firm, we’re the only employer that actually encourages people to look for other jobs,” Alexandris says.

Once the work placement begins, the program maintains contact and support with its candidates.

Alexandris often hears from employers about how well-prepared LPP candidates are when they join the workforce.

“That’s one of the big selling features for us,” she says. “They’ve seen it, they’ve done it.”

From candidates, she hears how much they rely on their LPP training when in the work placement and well beyond.

“They tell me, ‘I don’t know how many times I’ve gone back through my templates or my training,’” she says. “They’ve got the confidence, the comfort and the competence to excel.”

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