

Ground-breaking Programme for Ontario's Law School Graduates - Virtual Law Firms

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“Society is changing rapidly. The challenges lawyers face, and the opportunities they encounter are changing too. Lawyers must be prepared to innovate and adapt in order to successfully use their knowledge and experience to serve societal needs effectively. Ryerson prepares students to innovate and adapt. Ryerson's LPP will bring together the best professional knowledge and experience with our experience in delivering career-focused education and training.”¹

Introduction:

The Law Society of Upper Canada (LSUC) regulates entry of lawyers and paralegals into the profession in Ontario, with a mandate of protecting the public interest. There are over 40,000 lawyers licensed in the province, with over 1,700 new lawyers called to the Bar in the summer 2015.² To meet the changing demands of both the profession and the public, in 2013 the LSUC introduced changes to its licensing process, including the introduction of a new “transition to practice” training focusing on skills development and training. This shift in focus was influenced by a national committee's development and implementation of consistent and high standards through the National Entry-Level Competency Profile for lawyers.³ In 2013, the LSUC selected Ryerson University to develop and deliver the English LPP.⁴

The Ryerson Law Practice Program (LPP): *Entrepreneurial, Innovative and Experiential*

Highlighting key strengths of Ryerson University, the dynamic program is designed to offer law graduates an innovative, modern additional pathway to entering the legal profession. This forward thinking, 8-month rigorous program is an alternative to traditional articling that combines online experiential learning with communication and professional practices that replicate the workplace demands and culture of a legal environment. It is 21st Century legal training for 21st Century lawyers.

The focus of the LPP is to develop the requisite entry-level skills of candidates for the legal profession: Professionalism and Ethics, Analytical Skills, Research, Oral and Written Communication, Client Management and Practice Management. These skills are developed through work on simulated client files in seven different practice areas, some with live “clients”.

The LPP is work, not school.

To ensure relevance and quality, the development of the LPP training component involves strong and ongoing collaboration with partners both internal and external to the university. The key **internal** partners supporting the LPP are the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education, which provides award-winning experience using digital education strategies and tools and the Interpersonal Skills Teaching Centre, which offers simulated learning and teaching of interpersonal communication skills.⁵

¹ Ryerson President Sheldon Levy, 2013 Proposal to the Law Society of Upper Canada

² Law Society of Upper Canada, Gazette, posted 06/12/2015
<http://www.lawsocietygazette.ca/news/call-to-the-bar-2015>

³ *National Admissions Standards Project: National Entry to Practice Competency Profile for Lawyers and Quebec Notaries*, September 2012, Federation of Law Societies of Canada, at
<http://flsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/admission4.pdf>

⁴ *Pathways to the Profession: A Roadmap for the Reform of Lawyer Licensing in Ontario*, Articling Task Force Final Report, October 2015 <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147489848>

⁵ <http://ce-online.ryerson.ca/ce> and <http://www.ryerson.ca/istc>

Externally, in addition to the LSUC, the LPP forged a strategic partnership with the Ontario Bar Association (OBA), which represents lawyers across the province⁶. The LPP engages over 300 lawyers across the province as case writers, mentors, assessors and presenters, and over 240 legal organizations as work placement employers. In addition, the LPP integrates online applications that are employed by lawyers in practice across the province, for tasks such as practice management (Clio, Webex), real estate conveyancing (Teranet and Lawyer Done Deal) and legal research (LexisNexis; Thomson Reuters).⁷



Why Ryerson's Law Practice Program? <https://youtu.be/NWnPZhe3y5Q>

How Does it Work?

4 Month Practical Training

(August - December)

- Candidates work both individually and in “law firms” of 4 - supported by practising lawyers
- Interactive and experiential - learn by doing: 14 weeks virtually; 3 weeks in-person
- Practical - simulated files developed by practicing lawyers
- Relevant - interview clients, conduct research, draft documents, letters and agreements, develop an approach, conduct negotiations, prepare the client, argue motions, conduct examinations and cross-examinations, and manage the client and the practice

⁶ <https://www.oba.org/Home>

⁷ www.goclio.com; www.webex.com; www.teranet.ca; www.lawyerdone.com; www.lexisnexis.ca/en-ca/home.page; <http://thomsonreuters.com/en/products-services/legal.html>

4 Month Work Placement (January - April)

- Candidates are trained to hit the ground running
- Employers include major institutions, large and small firms, specialty boutiques, governments, clinics and sole practitioners throughout Ontario
- Practical - actual files developed by practicing lawyers
- Work placement employers join in the leading edge of practical legal training



Strategies Developed and Utilized in Meeting the Demands

The Ryerson LPP must be available to Candidates, Mentors and Work Placement Employers across the province of Ontario. In each of the past two years, over 220 Candidates per year have participated in the LPP, with 60 virtual firms, each supported by a practising lawyer as Mentor. The Ryerson LPP and the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University have strived to be responsive to the issues and needs of candidates, the university, as well as the legal profession and the regulator. The LPP receives feedback and assessment on its success from all stakeholders (including lawyer mentors and work placement employers), thereby offering constant opportunities for improvement.

Within the presentation some of the strategies that have been developed and are being utilized within the training component of the LPP are provided below.

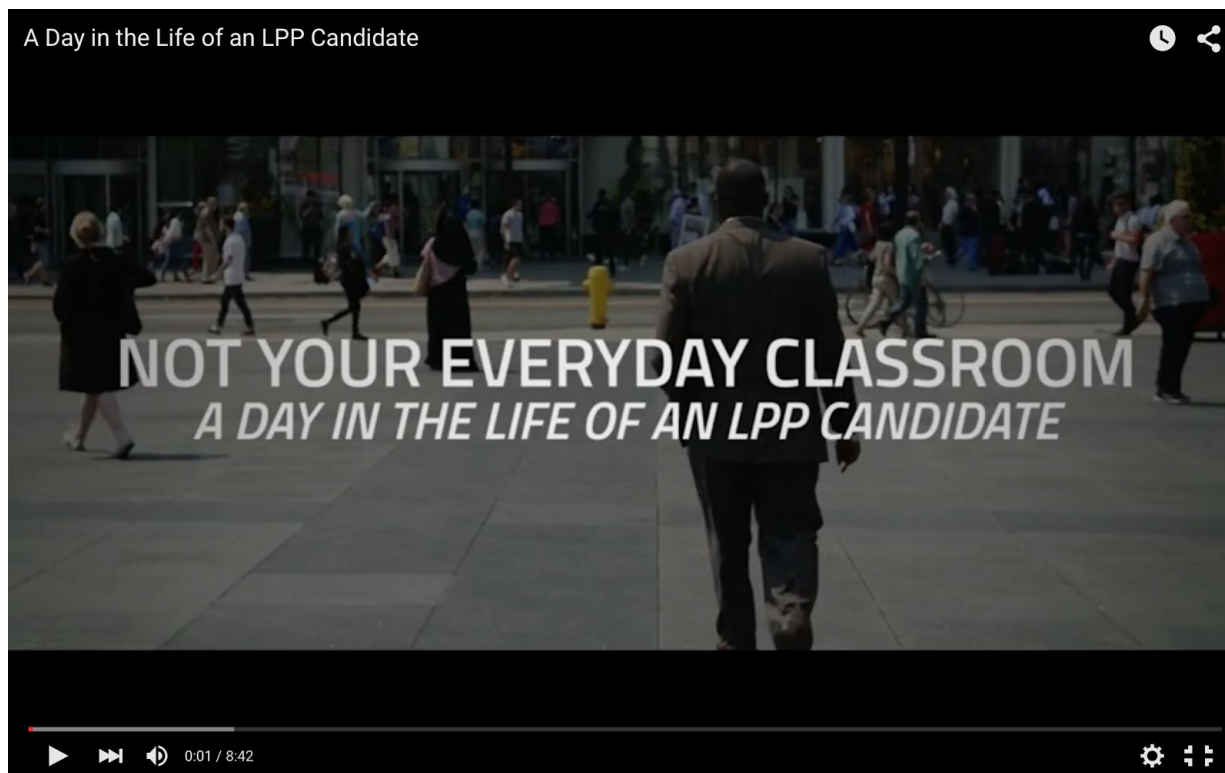
To support the virtual firms, we developed an “intranet” platform for the LPP Virtual Law Firm using the University’s Learning Management System (Blackboard in 2014, and then Desire 2 Learn in 2015, when the entire University switched programs). Much like a legal organization, this Virtual Firm includes general and legal content (comprised of both digital print and video content) within a “General Resources”, “Firm Resources”. The site also includes a “Messages” area, through which legal work assignments and messages are delivered by “Senior Partners”, “Law Clerks”, “Clients” and others in a real-time basis. Mentors then have the opportunity within the site to download and provide direct and timely feedback online on completed work – over 80 assignments last year in 4 months.

The Digital Education Strategy team at The Chang School, Ryerson University has developed a number of unique tools and approaches to support the program including a change in the standard online course development process and instructional design strategies to bring a variety of perspectives in order to provide the best user experience for the candidates. There were forty plus custom videos, twenty plus online learning modules, over seventy pieces of simulated legal correspondence developed to support the unique course delivery. Moving from an academic content delivery to a world experiential learning.

With the support of the Interpersonal Skills Teaching Centre, the law firms have “clients” in at least four files, with actors simulating the role of specific clients for the four months of the program. While some of the client meetings occur during the three in-person weeks of the program, most of the client interviews and preparation meetings take place virtually through Webex web conference meetings.⁸

⁸ *A new legal ecosystem*, Will Sloan, June 19, 2015:
http://www.ryerson.ca/news/news/General_Public/20150619-a-new-legal-ecosystem.html

The Learners' Experience



A Day in the Life of an LPP Candidate. <https://youtu.be/H2Y4Ct7Qknc>

Here are comments from learners that sum up their experience with the program:

“I thought that the program was fabulous. There was a very heavy workload, opportunity to collaborate with our virtual teams, problem solving and the opportunity to practice on our feet during the university sessions. I think that this combination is a really good reflection of a busy law practice.”

“Working on clients' files was the aspect of the program that I loved and enjoyed the most. I felt like I was learning valuable skills to be successful in the practice of law. The client-file experience moved me from "textbooks" to "real life". Through it, I learned the importance of knowing the client's case and the true meaning of advocacy...”

“Having taken a lot of courses online in the past, I thought LPP was going to be one of those "online" experiences. Wrong! It was nothing like I have experienced before. The guidance provided by the lawyers that presented on Blackboard was priceless. So also were the precedents, documents and other resources. The materials made for a very rich training experience.”

“I felt like I was at the cutting edge of the practice of law. “

Contact Information

Should you wish any further information on any part of the presentation or you are interested in knowing more about what we are doing please visit us at www.lpp.ryerson.ca or contact us directly at:

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