



Legal Supplier

In-person sessions a critical component of Ryerson's Law Practice Program

By Kate Wallace, AdvocateDaily.com Contributor



[Ryerson University's Law Practice Program](#) (LPP) will soon hold the final of three in-person weeks, an important component of the innovative program for licensing candidates, says program director [Gina Alexandris](#).

"Because we are a virtual program, for the most part, we really wanted to have a place where the candidates can gather together face-to-face," she tells [AdvocateDaily.com](#).

This cohort's third and final in-person week, slated for Dec. 11-14, includes sessions and workshops on construction mediation, professional development and a trial advocacy intensive, as well as assessments in real estate administration, immigration hearing submissions and criminal and civil trials. And that's just in the first three days.

"They're intense weeks," Alexandris says, with some days running morning till night.

These sessions reflect the immersive, demanding and multifaceted nature of the LPP. Now in its fourth year, the eight-month program is split into two phases, beginning with a practical training component where candidates run their own simulated virtual law firm, followed, in the second half, by a four-month work placement.

The first in-person session, in August, kicked off the program, acting, in part, as an orientation.

"They dive right in," Alexandris says. "In August, they're creating their bonds, forming their collegial and professional relationships with our colleagues and their firms. There's the chance for that in-person experience with each other."

Each in-person week spans a variety of subjects, just as the LPP gives candidates a broad grounding in many areas of law.

The August session, for instance, included presentations around emotional intelligence, innovation, creativity and design thinking.

"They're starting a program where their professional lives are about to start, but we also want them thinking about what that might look like down the road," Alexandris says. "Not just for the next 17 weeks, but out in their careers."

October's lineup included a well-received wellness panel exploring challenges and resources in the profession. Along with sessions on professionalism and ethics is a corporate counsel intensive, which will continue in December. There's also a trial advocacy program that's part of each in-person week that is offered by Sheila Block, a partner with Torys LLP, and her husband, Jim Seckinger, a professor of law at the University of Notre-Dame.

"The hands-on exposure of being able to work on a file that Jim and Sheila have given them is astounding," Alexandris says. "Whether you want to be a litigator or not, those skills of speaking concisely and asking the right types of questions, are critical."

With the first half of the program almost behind them, and work terms looming in the new year, the December in-person session is specifically geared towards getting candidates ready for January.

"This one is all about, 'You're almost there, what do you have to do to get ready for it?'" Alexandris says.

While much of the LPP's first half centres around a virtual law firm, where candidates do research, exchange messages, draft pleadings and contracts and submit work to mentors, the in-person weeks give them a chance for interactions with their clients, as well as rubbing elbows with established members of the profession, including the more than 50 members of the bar who act as advisors as part of the trial advocacy workshop.

"Many aspects of law are about relationships, whether it's with peers, clients, supervisors or colleagues," Alexandris says. "Communication — oral and written — is critical."

These weeks give candidates a further chance to practice both client- and practice-management skills.

“Skills such as knowing who to go to when you have a question, and understanding that network,” Alexandris says.

The in-person weeks also provide an opportunity for assessments, where candidates receive feedback on their performance.

It’s also the time when the program’s virtual firms compete in the LPP’s access-to-justice innovation contest, in which a select shortlist of firms will get to pitch *Dragon’s Den*-style to a panel of judges. Along with the judges’ pick, there’s also a people’s choice award selected by the candidates.

But the pinnacle for many candidates in the December in-person week is the chance to take the civil and criminal cases they’ve been working on since August to the courthouse at [361 University Ave.](#), where they will get to make their arguments.

“That’s usually the highlight,” Alexandris says. “It brings the file to a nice conclusion. It’s a milestone, and there’s a sense of completion.”

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