

# Τι είπες; **You want to be a lawyer?**

Our Student Guide to Law School



Written by the  
Hellenic Canadian Lawyers' Association  
and its law student members

## Preface

This Student Guide was inspired by my experiences mentoring undergraduate students, particularly those who were the first in their families to obtain a post-secondary education. Many of these students expressed a deep interest in pursuing a law school education but with limited resources and mentors to guide them, they were unprepared for all that was involved.

This guide was written with our HCLA law student members and is intended to provide Hellenic high school and undergraduate students with basic information about a law school education and to candidly share the personal and academic experiences of our HCLA law student members. By doing so, we hope to reduce the barriers to legal education by allowing students to see themselves in others who may have similar personal histories and experiences. We hope to inspire and encourage the next generation of Hellenic students to pursue a degree in law.

As you will see throughout the guide, our student authors, Gabriella Panayotidis, Philip Paschali, Thalia Petsis, Sotiri Katsuras and Christina Papageorgakopoulos each took different paths to law school. As supervisor to this project, I cannot express how impressed I am by each of these students who through their hard work, perseverance and positive attitudes have excelled personally and academically.

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to the students as they kindly and enthusiastically worked with me to author this guide and candidly share their experiences. A special thank you to project leads, Gabriella and Phillip. I also wish to thank Gina Alexandris, HCLA Honourary Director and former President, for reviewing our guide and for sharing her invaluable experiences working with students and in law school recruitment. On behalf of the HCLA, we wish all our students tremendous success and we look forward to all they will accomplish.

Christine Arruda  
President, Hellenic Canadian Lawyers' Association

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# **I. Who We Are and Why We Wrote This Guide**

## **HCLA**

The Hellenic Canadian Lawyers' Association ("HCLA") is an association of lawyers, judges and law students of Hellenic origin. The HCLA's objective includes strengthening bonds within the Hellenic Canadian legal community, promoting and advancing the well-being and education of the Hellenic Canadian legal community, increasing public understanding of the legal profession and bringing awareness to matters material to the Hellenic Canadian community at large.

Since its inception, the HCLA has been dedicated to networking, educating and advocating. The HCLA has developed and maintained a number of annual social and educational events and programs, including continuing professional development (CPD) seminars. To further our commitment to supporting lawyers of Hellenic descent in Canada, the HCLA awards scholarships to law students and provides support through the Mentorship Program and student events (including our student resume and interview workshops). The HCLA is an active participant in various industry associations including the Roundtable of Diversity Associations and the Ontario Bar Association's Diversity Council where the association is involved in fostering dialogue and promoting initiatives relating to the advancement of diversity, equality and inclusion in the legal profession, the judiciary and the broader legal community. The HCLA is committed to advancing and strengthening the Hellenic Canadian legal community so its members may continue to attain new heights of professional success and achievement.

## **HCLA Law Student Members**

As law students, we have been in your shoes and know the fears and uncertainties of wanting to pursue a law school education. Our team agreed that there was no uniform guide that details true and unedited experiences. We created this guide to share our knowledge and experiences in applying and attending law school and in preparing for a career in law. This guide is geared to anyone who is thinking of becoming a lawyer who is currently in high school, university or who has recently graduated and is seeking a career in law.

We hope you enjoy the guide and gain an understanding of what is involved in applying to law school! As always, if you have any questions beyond what is written, please do not hesitate to contact us.



## II. Why Law School?

There are numerous reasons why students attend law school. Students attend because of family and parental pressure; the perception of high salaries and prestige; the opportunity to give back to the community and for a curiosity about the law. We encourage you to think deeply about why you want to attend law school and what you expect to gain from a law degree. The journey to becoming a lawyer is long, tough and expensive and should be well thought out before the process begins. Meeting with lawyers, attending seminars or webinars hosted by Hellenic undergraduate clubs, and participating in programs introducing students to law such as the [University of Toronto Youth Summer Program](#), are all helpful to provide some insight into a career in law. It is important to note that there are other career options within the legal field that do not require a law degree such as mediators, paralegals, compliance officers and legal writers.

Although law school is the standard route to embarking on a legal career, completing a legal education opens up employment opportunities far beyond the legal profession. Understanding Canada's legal and constitutional history, learning how to analyze and interpret legislative documents and obtaining an efficient grasp of Canada's laws, rights, and freedoms are some of the key benefits of attending law school. Regardless of what you decide to pursue in your career, law school develops and prepares you for various situations and opportunities. Unlike other academic fields, law school requires no prerequisite knowledge of the law. This fact can be intimidating to many students interested in law school since it is akin to committing to a field you will not truly understand until you start. All that you can do is have trust in your abilities: reading comprehension, reading and writing skills and pair those with an ambition to work hard for what you are passionate about. Be confident that your time in law school will clarify your desire to become a jurist and provide you with ample opportunities!

As we will later discuss, creating a network through volunteering and mentorship programs with legal professionals and law students is a key method of understanding what law school and the legal profession may mean for you. Do not hesitate to ask pertinent questions to facilitate this unique journey!

### Steps to Becoming a Lawyer

Before you begin your law school journey it is important to understand the steps you will need to take to become a lawyer. In Ontario, the following steps are required:

- earn a high school diploma
- work towards earning an undergraduate degree\*
- write the Law Schools Admissions Test (“LSAT”)
- apply to law school
- earn a law degree
- obtain a license to practice law including:

- articling (working under the supervision of a licensed lawyer for 10 months) or completing the Law Society of Ontario (“LSO”) Law Practice Program (a four month training course and four month work placement)
- successfully passing the LSO’s bar admissions exams (i.e., the self-study Barrister and Solicitor examinations which are available to be written three times per year are each seven hours in length).

**It is important to know that after completing law school you are not automatically a lawyer!** You will have a degree in law, a Juris Doctor in most jurisdictions, but will not be licensed to practice law.

For those students who earn their law degree abroad additional studies may be required. We encourage you to review the licensing process in each province as they may vary from the above.

\* to be eligible to enter most law schools in Canada, you will need to have completed a total of three academic years’ worth of undergraduate studies



### III. Application Process

Applying to law school is a process! Your application requires many steps and a significant time commitment. It is important to know the following key components to applying to law school in Canada:

- undergraduate degree
- extra-curricular activities
- LSAT
- law school application
- choosing your law school

We will discuss each of these components in turn.

#### Undergraduate Degree

In most Canadian provinces, students will need to complete a four-year degree at a minimum to be considered for law school (although some schools will admit after three years). Many students are completing their application process in their fourth year of study. As a recent high school graduate, your reflex may be to do an undergrade degree that can be complemented with law, which is why some of the most common undergraduate degrees for aspiring law students are:

Political Science, History, Philosophy, and Criminal Justice. Such programs can aid in strengthening your reasoning and comprehension skills, but this does not mean it is a necessary road to take. No program is deemed a better fit to enter law school, nor does it put you ahead of others when applying. As we understand, law schools look for a diverse range of candidates with different academic interests. Completing an undergraduate degree in the sciences, fine arts, or other fields are common. Other fields may provide different advantages. For example, lawyers with backgrounds in science can bring valuable perspective to areas like patent law.

There are two key points to keep in mind throughout your undergraduate studies. The first is to study what you enjoy and are interested in, regardless of the field the program falls into. Once you are in an undergraduate program that enhances your interest in learning, this will motivate you to put in a strong effort and to maintain good grades. The second is regardless of program, ensure that you engage in courses that require significant research, analysis and writing. These are skills you will need in law school and having practice before you start will be very beneficial. Note, the university you attend is not necessarily important to warrant any distinction. Focus on your studies and grades as stated above and on finding a program at the university that keeps you intellectually stimulated, and will allow you to achieve academic excellence.

**Your undergrad grades matter!** We cannot emphasize enough that having good grades should be a priority during your undergrad. Although “late starts” may be taken into consideration, remember that there are many students with similar ambitions of attending law school which makes getting into law school a significantly competitive process. This is not to discourage you by saying that your undergraduate grades are the only consideration by law schools, but it is surely a big factor! Later in this guide, we will discuss what else you can bring to your law school application, but make no mistake, you must have a strong grade point average in order to be competitive. If not, getting in will be challenging. If you are reading this guide and are interested in attending law school, the earlier you take your studies seriously the better!

The process is different for Quebec students wishing to attend law school. Coming out of high school, you must apply to Collège d’enseignement general et professionnel (“CEGEP”) program (typically, a two-year program) and graduate with a Diploma of College Studies (“DEC”) before applying to law school. Another possible academic route is to complete a university undergraduate degree or a technical DEC (which typically takes three years). Similar to the undergraduate system in other provinces, the program that you take does not affect your chances of getting into law school. Many students tend to go into Liberal Arts and Social Sciences programs in CEGEP, but your R-Score is what really matters. An R-Score is a grade calculation that can be tricky to determine, but most Quebec universities will consider this calculation as the main requirement to be accepted into law school. For more information on the R-Score, we recommend that you visit the [Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire](#) website.

Some students will also apply to law school after completing a Masters degree or PhD or after taking time after their undergraduate studies to work. There is an option, if you have not completed

undergraduate studies but have worked for a certain number of years, of being considered under the “Mature Student” category at some schools. If this applies, you are encouraged to research the requirements at the law school in which you are applying.

## Extra-Curricular Activities

Law schools look to applicants’ extra-curricular and volunteer work to gain a sense of how an applicant prepared for the challenges and discipline needed for a law school education. There is no one experience that is better than another; rather, having activities that show leadership and initiative, community involvement, and interest in the law or social justice are all helpful in demonstrating to law schools how you are unique and how you may contribute to the law school and the legal profession as a whole. These activities vary from student to student and can be in numerous areas including sports, arts, culture, volunteer work, government and part-time or full-time work. We do note however, that the longer you have participated with an organization and have grown in responsibilities with the organization, the better. It is important to avoid “padding” your application by signing up for numerous activities, particularly in the year of your application. Law school admission committees will look to the number of hours these additional activities take in your schedule.



## Law School Admissions Test

### What is the LSAT?

The Law School Admissions Test (“LSAT”) is a standardized test used for law school admissions. It is administered by the [Law School Admission Council](#) (“LSAC”). It is designed to test critical reasoning, reading comprehension and persuasive writing. It is a timed test that requires you to answer multiple choice questions under tight time constraints. The LSAT is a necessary requirement on the path to becoming a lawyer. It is a stressful test to undertake and it is critical that you understand how best to prepare. Be mindful that it is not an easy test and is not a measure of your intelligence. However, a strong LSAT score will strengthen your application and increase your chances of getting into law school. Note, the LSAT does not test any substantive law or legal questions; rather, it is a test designed to assess a student's ability to think critically. Although daunting, it is something that can be learned and mastered over time.

### When do I take the LSAT?

The LSAT is written multiple times a year in various locations. The dates, locations and fees to write the LSAT are set by LSAC and are included on their website. To write the test you must register directly with LSAC. There is no best time to write the LSAT. You may write the exam



before you apply to law school or during the application process. When thinking about when to take the LSAT, consider what works best for you given your studies, family matters, work and extra-curricular activities. Many students choose to write the exam in the summer as it provides them with time to prepare before they complete their applications and if they need to take the test again, which many students do, they have the option to do so in the fall. Be aware of the final LSAT scores the admissions committees at your chosen school will consider. Ultimately, the timing of the test is a personal choice based on your own schedule. It is important to be mindful of registration dates and deadlines. Visiting the LSAC website often will help keep you up to date.

### How is the LSAT Organized?

The LSAT has four parts: Logical Reasoning (2), Logic Games and Analytical Reading. You will have two logical reasoning sections during the exam. Each section of the LSAT is 35 minutes long and moves at a quick pace. Your raw score on the test is adjusted into a curve between 120 and 180, with a 160 being considered a “good” score at the time we wrote the exam. It is important to note that there is no score that ensures admission to law school; rather the score for your admission year is dependent on all other applicants in that year. So, do your best to get the highest score that you can.

### How Do I Prepare for the LSAT?

To start, you must first decide the time you have ahead and use it accordingly. Depending on your time frame prior to writing, you must create a plan that you can adhere to. There are many free resources that can help you with this. A Google search of “LSAT Study Plans” will show you many options depending on if you are dedicating 12 weeks to study or six months. Whatever your timeline, you will find a plan that fits. A sample LSAT study plan is the [PowerScore 6 Week Study Plan](#).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, you may be unsure how much time you need to study to get the results you desire. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer as it is quite dependent on your diagnostic score. What is a diagnostic score? This is your score on a previously released and actual LSAT – essentially a practice test. You take this test prior to preparing for your LSAT. This test is important as it will place you at the start, help you to understand your strengths and weaknesses, and will be the benchmark to which you will compare your progress.

Here are four steps that we followed in preparing for the LSAT:

#### **Step 1: Diagnostic Test**

The first thing you must absolutely do is to conduct a diagnostic test. Some individuals who start out can achieve a score of 155 on the LSAT on their first try; while others may start out at a 140 or 145. This diagnostic score is a key factor in determining how long you need study and what to

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<sup>1</sup> Provided with permission.

focus on. In order to understand your own personal timing, first do a diagnostic test and see where land. From there, create a goal score (in our experience, many students aim for a 160) and plan accordingly depending on your circumstances.

There are multiple free options in the below link to conduct a virtual LSAT the exact way you would the day of the test. Do not be disheartened if you score low - everyone starts somewhere! The [Law School Admission Council](#) makes available a number of free diagnostic tests once you set-up an account.

## **Step 2: Learning Theory**

Once you have your time allocated, you can understand what needs to be done prior to the actual test. Now that the LSAT is digital, it is important to practice virtually. Although there are numerous paper-based options, we strongly suggest doing and conducting all tests on a virtual platform to be familiar with the testing format so as to not be stressed on the day of the test.

The resources we used for learning theory are among the most popular: PowerScore,<sup>7</sup> Sage and Khan Academy. PowerScore is for those who are better at self-learning and studying at their own pace. <sup>7</sup> Sage takes a bit longer to work through but has videos that can allow you to follow along and mirrors the classes many students are already accustomed to. Khan Academy is another source that provides useful free tools.

**PowerScore:** PowerScore offers three versions of its [LSAT Bible Trilogy](#) at various prices and it breaks down each and every question into a category, making understanding the LSAT far easier. In addition, PowerScore offers a free [LSAT Podcast](#) that discusses tips and tricks to understand LSAT questions which many students find helpful.

**7Sage:** This vendor does not offer physical books but rather offers lessons designed by LSAT professionals. 7-Sage offer free trials of their LSAT lessons.

**Khan Academy LSAT Prep:** This vendor provides diagnostic tools, a personalized practice plan and interactive lessons.

## **Step 3: Practice**

Once you learn the theory aspect of the LSAT, all that is left to do is practice. And you will need A LOT of practice! Practice tests in conjunction with learning theory is the only way to improve and make a meaningful increase in your scores. Both PowerScore and 7 Sage have a monthly subscription that will allow access to the digital LSAT practice questions. As a reminder, when selecting your subscription, you will need a [Law Hub](#) Advantage Plan in order to access the online tests. We highly recommend that you practice using a timer so that you get used to writing the test under the tight time constraints.

## Step 4: Pace Yourself

The LSAT can be a very stressful test and it is important that you do not burn yourself out by over studying. This will cause detrimental effects to your scores that may not be realized until days later. Pacing yourself is vital, as the test is a marathon rather than a sprint.



## Law School Applications

All Ontario law schools have their own admission policies and requirements. The elements that are common to most schools are as follows:

**Categories:** Many (if not all law schools) have different categories of applications. Some examples are: General, Access and Indigenous. The General category is for a majority of applications. The Access category is for students who faced challenges prior to law school that they want considered during their application. Law schools have different guidelines for what they will consider. Many law schools consider factors such as financial hardship, health issue and family issues in this category. These factors may help explain a low grade, or allow a different perspective to be presented in your application. The Indigenous category is for those who self-identify.

**Transcripts:** The law school you apply to will ask for your undergraduate grades. This is where grades are important in order to be competitive from an academic perspective. The degree itself or school where they came from is not as important. During our application cycles, a competitive GPA was approximately an A-. Official transcripts are sent directly to the Ontario Law School Application Service (“OLSAS”) for law schools in Ontario or directly to the law school from your academic institution.

**Reference Letters:** Typically, law schools require two reference letters in order to apply. It is best to book a meeting with current professors and talk to them about why you want to go to law school, and ask if they are willing to support you on this journey by writing a reference letter. Importantly, the better the relationship is with the professor usually correlates with the strength of the letter.

We suggest that you start thinking about possible referees early in your undergrad career and cultivate relationships where a professor can speak knowledgeably about you and your work. Make sure you ask for a "positive" reference as you would be surprised how many letters are simply not positive. While at least one reference should be academic, you can also look to someone such as an employer or volunteer supervisor who can speak to the quality of your work,

your work ethic or personal characteristics. We suggest that you do not use a "named" referee, such as a local MPP, unless they really know you well! And do not include family references.

**Personal Statements:** This is one of the most challenging aspects of applying to law school. Generally, the personal statement is a short essay about who you are and why you want to attend law school. As each law school asks applicants to talk about different things in their personal statement, it is difficult to give specific guidance as there is “no one size fits all.” In saying that, we can provide some general guidelines when preparing your personal statement.

First, it is important to reflect on why you want to go to law school and talk about any of these reasons using specific examples. Think about what has motivated you to apply to law school, i.e., was it a personal experience or life event? Do you have a particular passion that you want to pursue? Consider a “story” that carries throughout your personal statement and use examples to support and develop the story. Regardless of the reason for applying to law school, you will need to articulate it well in your personal statement while being honest and thoughtful.

Second, think about your personal achievements. Highlight those experiences that set you apart and that will be beneficial to you as a law student. Were you a student athlete? Did you volunteer with a charity? Were you the head of student government? Consider these achievements and what you learned from them and connect them to your story.

Thirdly, write with passion and make a persuasive case for your admission. Law schools want to see your critical thinking skills and that you can advocate for yourself. A few things to avoid include cliches about how great a lawyer you are going to be and about substantive laws. Law schools are more interested in learning about you.

Fourth, review the websites and speak to students or faculty at each school that you are applying to. This will help you gain a better understanding about the school and determine why it really appeals to you. With this information you will be able to better personalize the statement to the particular law school.

Lastly, editing your personal statement is critical! Make sure you are correctly answering the questions as there may be small nuances between law school applications. Be careful not to “cut and paste” the wrong school name in your personal statement. Yes, this happens! A rushed personal statement will not be successful. Rather, you may need to edit your paper line-by-line two, three, five or 10 times until you have a personal statement that truly reflects you as a person. Having a friend re-read the paper may help you catch grammatical errors or redundancies. Do not skip this step!

**We strongly encourage you to check the application requirements of each law school you are applying to well in advance of any application deadlines. Give yourself plenty of time when applying to law school as it is a time-consuming process that requires great care and preparation.**

The law school application process can seem daunting. It is important that you work hard to make your application as strong as possible and put effort into your application materials. That being said, many of the law schools have a holistic application process that considers your application as a whole. If one portion of your application is not as strong as the rest, do not be discouraged. Work on improving that area if possible, and highlight your other strengths in your application.

## **Choosing the Law School that is Best for You**

Each law school has their own strengths and weaknesses depending on the individual. Below is information on each law school in Canada. Clicking the links will allow you to read more about the school and their programs.

### **Ontario**

- ❖ [University of Toronto Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [University of Windsor Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [University of Ottawa Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [Queens University Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [Osgoode Hall Law School](#)
- ❖ [Western University Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [Lakehead University Bora Laskin Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [Toronto Metropolitan University Lincoln Alexander School of Law](#)

### **Outside Ontario (within Canada)**

#### **Alberta**

- ❖ [University of Alberta Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [University of Calgary Faculty of Law](#)

#### **British Columbia**

- ❖ [University of British Columbia Peter A. Allard School of Law](#)
- ❖ [Thompson Rivers University Faculty of Law](#)
- ❖ [University of Victoria Faculty of Law](#)

#### **Manitoba**

- ❖ [University of Manitoba Faculty of Law](#)

#### **New Brunswick**

- ❖ [University of New Brunswick Faculty of Law](#)

## **Nova Scotia**

- ❖ [Dalhousie University Schulich School of Law](#)

## **Quebec**

Note, Quebec's private law system follows the civil law system, which is distinct from other Canadian provinces. Most law programs in Quebec teach civil law strictly in French, with the exception of McGill University's bilingual law program. For general information on Quebec's law schools, we recommend this [article](#) provided in French.

- ❖ [McGill Faculty of Law](#) (dual common law and civil law program)
- ❖ [Université de Montréal](#) (civil law program)
- ❖ [Université de Sherbrooke](#) (civil law program)
- ❖ [Université du Québec à Montréal](#) (civil law program)
- ❖ [Université de Laval](#) (civil law program)
- ❖ [University of Ottawa](#) (civil law program)

## **Saskatchewan**

- ❖ [University of Saskatchewan College of Law](#)

## **Outside Canada**

We will briefly mention attending law school outside of Canada. There are also numerous opportunities to study law abroad and you should be aware that there are additional requirements to become licensed in Canada which may include additional training, courses and time. To practice law in Canada, students with degrees from abroad will be required to demonstrate their competence to the National Committee on Accreditation ("NCA") who will assess their legal qualifications to determine admission to a bar in Canada. Before you consider attending a law school outside of Canada familiarize yourself about what is required to become licensed in Canada. If you choose to attend law school outside of Canada, consult the [NCA](#) website. Additional resources are available through [Osgoode Professional Development](#) and various NCA alumni groups.

In making your decision, it is important to take the opportunity during your undergraduate studies to visit various law schools and attend their open house events, whether that be in-person or online; attend the Ontario Universities' Fair; and speak to law students and alumni who attended a particular law school. This will give you great insight into the law school, its programs and its culture.

The financial cost of law school should also factor into your decision to attend law school. Attending law school and becoming a lawyer is expensive! Determine the cost of tuition at your chosen law school, as well as the cost of books, accommodation and meal plans; and importantly,

do not forget to factor in lawyer licensing fees! Once you understand the overall cost, think through how you will finance this cost including employment, bursaries, scholarships, student assistance programs such as the Ontario Student Assistance Program (“OSAP”), etc.

An important resource for Canadian law schools is the [LSAC Guide of Canadian Law Schools](#). For Ontario law schools specifically, we recommend you familiarize yourself with [OLSAS](#) which is the organization through which all applications are submitted. These applications are submitted by November 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, the year before you wish to attend law school.



## IV. First Year of Law School

Once you have been accepted to law school, you will need to plan for your first year. The first year of law school is known as “1L”. Being very honest, the first year of law school will be difficult. It will be challenging as the work will be new, the expectations will be high and the work will come quickly. This is not meant to scare or stress you, but it is important to understand what the expectations are going forward. Additionally, there are some things students must keep in mind when going forward in their law school journey. Our 1L experiences will be discussed in more detail in the Our Personal Experiences section.

### Grades

**First and foremost, grades matter.** Everyone seems to have an opinion as to whether grades “really” matter during your first year. The answer is that to be competitive in the job market, your grades will be the first thing employers look for. However, do not let this scare you! Different employers value different skill sets, backgrounds and do look at applications holistically. Your grades in law school will matter primarily in trying to secure summer employment and articling positions after graduation. As time goes on and you gain experience as a summer student, articling student and eventually as a lawyer, your grades will matter less!

### Courses

In first year, most law students take the following courses: Constitutional Law, Contracts, Criminal Law, Orientation to Law & the Legal System, Legal Ethics and Professionalism, Legal Research, Writing and Advocacy, Property, and Torts. This will vary slightly by law school. After first year, students have more flexibility to choose their courses. It is important to know that many law school courses have final exams worth 100%.

Some law schools establish a small group program in the first year whereby students take some first-year courses only with their small group members. This approach helps student share the same



academic experience in first year, and become a mutually supportive community, both academically and socially. There are some law schools that provide peer mentoring, matching upper year students with those in first-year to assist in adjusting to the law school experience.

## **Experiences**

An important part of law school is gathering experiences that are not only enjoyable but help to build your professional network and practical legal skills. There are numerous experiences available and include pro bono legal clinics, mootings, exchange programs, and research opportunities. Participating also provides referees for future employment opportunities, graduate studies, etc. Get to know your professors and those professors who are engaged in extra-curricular activities. When choosing a law school, note that some schools are more experiential. For example, Toronto Metropolitan University and Lakehead University offer the Integrated Practice Curriculum which combines legal theory with real-world experience providing students practice skills throughout law school.

## **On Campus Interviews**

Your first-year grades will largely dictate your competitiveness in trying to secure second-year summer employment. Different geographical areas recruit students for summer positions or for articling positions at different times of the year. For example, the Toronto 2L Summer Recruit has application deadlines in July for On Campus Interviews (“OCIs”) held in October and the “In-Firm” interviews held during November.

OCI’s are the first step in the interview process for recruitment activities in some markets. For example, most of the large corporate firms in the country will take part in the OCI process for the Toronto 2L summer recruit. However, some schools, employers and markets do not partake in OCIs and it is best to reach out to your career development office to see if OCIs will be held.

OCIs are short, 15-minute interviews where employers meet you for the first time. Interviewers will ask about three to four questions and will then give you the opportunity to ask them questions. “In-firm” or interview weeks is a three-day period where employers will give candidates longer interviews leading up to “call day.” Call day is when employers will contact successful students with job offers. Note, there are relatively few roles in the process for 1L or first year law students.

Recruitment is just one aspect of law school. While you will hear a lot about “Bay Street” firms or “big law” in law school we want to stress that there are many other great employers and career paths to consider. There is no one single path to becoming a successful lawyer. Use the resources at your law school, including alumni, to determine which path you are most interested in pursuing. The HCLA is also here to help. Our lawyers are happy to speak to prospective students about their law school and area of practice. We encourage students to contact their law school’s career development office early and create a plan!





## V. Volunteering and Professional Experience

As previously mentioned, gaining exposure to the legal work can be a challenge at times. Outside of burying yourself in books during law school, it is crucial to understand the professional aspect of the field. This can be gained through social connections and through volunteering. When taking on volunteering projects, law students have the potential to become introduced to different areas of law and engage with fellow law students or legal professionals. Important networking and learning can be acquired through volunteer work, all while opening yourself to new opportunities and experiences! Volunteering can be a first step to understanding how you, as a future legal professional, can aid and give back to the community with your legal knowledge and support!

Volunteer opportunities in your community can be found through your law school. Almost every law school has their own legal clinic and legal research facilities that provide their law students with volunteering opportunities. Furthermore, numerous shelters, associations and organizations are looking to provide opportunities to law students. For instance, the HCLA is always looking for law students across Canada to partake in networking events, volunteering projects and mentorship opportunities with fellow Greek legal professionals!

Although we recommend volunteering during and before law school, finding a job in your first year can be tricky. In our experience, some employers prefer law students with some legal experience, but others look for students who have demonstrated leadership and responsibility. Nevertheless, obtaining a job in the first year is a possibility! Remember that employers will seek law students after 1L, so there is no need to stress about jumping into a legal career as quickly as possible. Overall, your chances of practical learning and gaining experience in the legal profession are vast, depending on the initiative you take. We encourage you to remain confident in your abilities and to be open to new experiences; your hard work will pay off before you know it!



## VI. Scholarships and Bursaries

Funding the cost of a legal education can be daunting. Each law school has its own tuition rates which vary across cities and provinces. For those living away from home during law school, living expenses also need to be considered. Outside of bank loans and provincial student loan programs, there are numerous scholarships and bursaries available to law students. Many law schools post scholarship opportunities on their websites so it is a great place to start. Other organizations

including those in the Hellenic community such as the HCLA and [American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association \(Canada\)](#) also offer generous scholarships opportunities. The [HCLA](#) typically offers scholarships to law students including the Justice Karakatsanis Student Scholarship and the First Year Law Student Scholarship.

Scholarships and bursaries not only aid financially during your years of studying in law school, but are great ways of learning about different organizations, associations and opportunities in your career. Oftentimes, students can maintain involved with the organization providing the scholarship and bursary, regardless of whether they are granted the scholarship or bursary. Such opportunities can equally get students involved in projects that can help develop new interests, as well open doors to networking in their field. In our experience, applying for the HCLA scholarships lead us to exciting opportunities to get involved with the HCLA.



## VII. Our Personal Experiences

Applying to and succeeding in law school takes a lot of work, but there is no one path to success in law school and your legal career. We felt it was important that each of us share our personal experiences and our path to law school to demonstrate what we have done to arrive at law school and to help you, a prospective law student, understand some of the highlights and challenges we have faced along the way. As you will see, everyone's journey is different and it is important to highlight your particular strengths and experiences in your application. We have organized this section in an interview format with each of us providing our own personal account.

### Question 1: What was your background prior to beginning law school?

**Gabriella:** Throughout high school, I began to understand that my academic passions and interests would eventually lead me to the path of law school. However, at such an early age, this process seemed overwhelming and unattainable, requiring a lot of research on what my next steps would be.

As I live in Quebec, the next academic step out of high school was to attend a CEGEP and obtain a DEC. Traditionally, a student goes to a CEGEP that offers a 2-year program in a vast topic such as Social Sciences or Liberal Arts. I knew that these programs were not for me, as I wanted to immerse myself as much as I could into the legal world before making the final decision of attending law school. Therefore, I took the unconventional route of attending a private CEGEP, O'Sullivan College of Montreal, in order to first become a paralegal.

During my time in CEGEP, I developed a base to my legal knowledge, learned from talented lawyers, notaries and paralegals, and gained experience in the legal field through an internship. This process solidified my passion for the law and ensured my confidence in making the decision of attending law school upon my graduation from Paralegal Technology!

**Thalia:** Before starting my law journey, I had an academic and professional foundation rooted in business. I earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration at the University of Massachusetts Lowell with a dual concentration in Finance and International Business and a Minor in French. During my summers, I gained valuable experience at the Royal Bank of Canada, where I started getting real exposure to the business world.

Additionally, I represented UMass Lowell Women's Soccer as an NCAA Division 1 Student-Athlete. This experience set a strong foundation for my professional career and gave me a fantastic set of tools going into law school and starting my legal career.

Seeking to delve deeper into analytics, I continued my education at UMass Lowell with a Master of Science in Business Analytics and a concentration in Big Data. Concurrently, I was working at Deloitte LLP full-time as a Financial Analyst. I honed my skills in the finance sector, where I engaged in financial analysis, data management, and strategic decision support.

Through this experience, the thought of law school persisted in the background. While it was a lingering consideration during my education and work experience, the idea felt distant. An increasing curiosity eventually prompted my transition to law.

Although my journey to law school is less linear than most, I truly appreciate the depth and range of my background. It has provided me with a unique lens to view legal challenges, equipping me with analytical tools that have proven invaluable. As I move through law school and into my legal career, my business background is instrumental in shaping my future in the legal profession.

## **Question 2: Why law school?**

**Christina:** I chose to go to law school for a variety of reasons! First and foremost, however, there are endless amounts of reasons why you would want to go to law school and there are no invalid reasons. Personally, my two most motivating reasons were to find a career where I felt fulfilled and to secure stable employment that would allow me to live a comfortable life.

While you can absolutely attend law school and work in different fields, most people will end up becoming practicing lawyers. I decided to go to law school because I want to be a litigator: the kind of lawyer that stands up in court and argues on behalf of their client. I find public speaking, crafting arguments, and working to reach a client's goals to be extremely rewarding. There are, however, lots of different kinds of lawyers who do lots of different kinds of work. If you are wondering whether you will feel fulfilled by a career in law, the best way to find out is to search

up the kinds of careers you are interested in on LinkedIn and talk to people in that field. Do not be afraid to reach out– lawyers love to talk!

My second reason for attending law school is one that people sometimes frown upon but I believe is a completely normal, good and real reason for applying. It is not a secret that some lawyers make a lot of money, but the advantage of having a law degree will help with securing employment in a wide range of fields. Remember that law school is an investment in yourself and your abilities, and that when choosing to go to law school you are helping to secure a career and not just one job!

### **Question 3: Tell us about your experience preparing for the LSAT.**

**Phil:** The LSAT was by far the most difficult part of my law school application. Being very upfront, I had a weak GPA (roughly 2.9) in university, which made my chances of being accepted to law school quite low. To compensate, I needed to have a strong LSAT score in order to make my application more competitive. This was quite challenging as my diagnostic score was 140, which was also quite low. Thus, I studied for more than six months for the LSAT. I wrote over 50-60 practice tests (this was very much overkill) and I ended up with a 169 which led me to the 95th percentile. What I learned in hindsight more than anything, is that this needs to be considered a “one and done.” Get the work in, work hard, get a good score and then never look at the LSAT again!

### **Question 4: How did you come to choose your law school?**

**Thalia:** From the early stages of my academic journey, I always had a subtle inclination toward law. Every experience, whether in the classroom or the corporate world, seemed to amplify this sentiment.

During my undergraduate and Master's studies, I was consistently drawn to the legislative framework accompanying the subjects at hand. For instance, while delving into Business Analytics, my intrigue wasn't just about the technology or methods. Instead, I found myself intrigued by potential legislation, including the evolution of the law and its adaption to technological advances.

My tenure as a Financial Analyst at Deloitte deepened this fascination. As I navigated various regulatory landscapes across different jurisdictions, I was exposed to the coexistence between business ambitions and regulatory demands. I witnessed first-hand the nexus between finance and regulatory compliance.

As I synthesized these academic and professional insights, a career in law became a very compelling field for me. I was excited to merge a career where analytical rigour met societal impact and where I could use my problem-solving skills.

I was drawn to the Dual JD program at Windsor Law and Detroit Mercy Law for various reasons. At the core, my decision blended personal and professional experiences. Having studied in the US while having Toronto as my unwavering home, the program seemed like a natural progression.

As an international student in the US, I moved back to Toronto for work and started to appreciate business nuances from both American and Canadian standpoints. From my time at Deloitte, I have recognized the significance of grasping how companies function across the US-Canada border, given the extensive business interactions between the two nations. The Dual JD program offered a unique perspective that provided a foundation to understand the legal landscapes of both countries in parallel.

In addition to this, the program's unique structure was a significant draw. It allowed me to learn two distinct legal systems by doubling my exposure to each topic. Drawing on parallels and understanding the differences between both jurisdictions strengthened my understanding and enriched my educational experience.

**Gabriella:** Situated in Canada's capital city, the University of Ottawa has an excellent legal program. Considering my interests in federal and international law, living and studying in Ottawa was a great option for someone wishing to learn more about Canada's legal system and its international relations.

uOttawa offers programs in civil law and common law. As my plans were to begin my degree in civil law, uOttawa's vast law programs would also give me the opportunity to complete a common law program, giving me the possibility to practice law in all provinces. Furthermore, as an anglophone who grew up in a francophone province, I enjoy uOttawa's bilingualism, as it allows me to write my essays or exams in either official language.

When attending uOttawa's open house, there was a great sense of friendship among the diverse groups of students, rather than intense competition. I was attracted to the grading system that focuses on student achievement through the usage of individual averages, rather than the bell curve grading system that oftentimes creates competition and tensions amongst students. Similarly, students coming from CEGEP are not accepted with their R-Score as they are accepted through the average of their grades. This appealed to me as I felt that uOttawa emphasized the student's academic achievements rather than complex grading systems.

#### **Question 5: What do you wish you had known before starting your 1L year?**

**Phil:** You need to create a schedule for Day 1. The work piles on a lot faster than you think, exams feel like they creep up on you instantly, and if you fall behind it is very difficult to catch up. A schedule, detailing your class time, your time to study outside of class and your time off is vital. The stress initially of making the schedule will save you hours of stress later when you are not panicking/cramming for a final!

**Thalia:** Starting my first year of law school with a business-centric background presented a unique set of challenges. The transition from a world of numbers to diving deep into the intricate details of legal reasoning had its challenges.

At first, grasping the nuances of law school seemed daunting, but I soon noticed that students from all backgrounds faced their own hurdles. It takes some time to understand how law school operates, especially when figuring out the most efficient and effective way to digest and understand course materials.

How I managed through the transition was by forming a study group. Discussing topics and asking questions among peers proved far more productive than trying to navigate the first year of law school solo.

It is surprising how quickly that first year goes by! Reflecting on it now, it is incredible to see the personal growth and the skills acquired in such a short time. There is a lot to learn during that first year, but the experience is both educational and, believe it or not, exciting.

**Christina:** Here is a list of the three things I wish I had known before starting my first year of law school:

**1. Focus on yourself.**

Law school is a highly competitive environment. It can be extremely daunting to feel like you are falling behind, and it is a guarantee that at one point or another, you will feel like you are not cut out for law. It is easy to get caught up in what other people are doing – how many hours they are studying, how many extracurriculars they are doing, etc. I wish that someone had taken the time to tell me that the best strategy for making friends, having an enjoyable experience and still reaching my goals is to ignore the noise and focus on yourself. Try to stop comparing yourself to others and realize that your journey is unique! Only you know what works for you.

**2. You can still have fun!**

Just because you are in law school, does not mean you cannot have any fun. Carve out time for your interests and for your friends because that is what makes it all worth it in the end.

**3. Get into a routine.**

Similar to Phil's answer, creating good routines and habits will be the key to having a good experience. Other than studying, make sure you have a routine down for things like cooking, cleaning, going to the gym, and other aspects of life. Once you have a handle on your life necessities, you are able to focus better on your studies.

## **Question 6: Tell us about your experiences and adjustments throughout law school.**

**Gabriella:** When starting law school, I thought that my knowledge as a paralegal would make the first year a breeze...was I ever wrong! I had to quickly understand that there is a technical and intellectual side to the law. For example, you may be able to apply the law, but understanding the depths of it and debating it as a lawyer entails a different task.

I made adjustments to the way that I grasped a new concept through considering all elements instead of sticking to what the law clearly states. It was necessary for me to begin challenging and questioning the law in order to comprehend all aspects surrounding the case at hand. There tends to be no right or wrong answers, as each response can offer a new standpoint. Maintaining an open mind is key to improvement!

Overall, my experience in law school has required me to challenge the way that I think and process information. It is crucial to stay positive in the adjustment period of your first year and to not be afraid to ask questions! There are ample resources, students and professionals ready to help you through this process. By the end of my first year, I could recognize my development into a future lawyer; the persistence that you put into self-improvement does not go unnoticed! Although it can be intimidating, staying confident and building connections will get you through the most difficult aspects of law school.

**Thalia:** Transitioning into law school after coming from a predominantly business and quantitative background was both an exciting and challenging experience. Before law school, I was accustomed to dealing with clear numbers, structured data, and definitive outcomes. Law school, however, presented me with interpretation, extensive reading, and analysis deeply rooted in statutes, cases, and legal principles.

At first, it was quite an adjustment. But as time progressed, I began to understand and appreciate the value of this shift. One of the most helpful strategies during this transition was forming study groups. Collaborating with peers allowed me to see different perspectives, clarify anything uncertain, and reinforce concepts discussed in class. It became clear that we all had our strengths, and by leaning on each other, we could navigate the complexities of law more efficiently.

One key strategy that helped me transition into law school was to be bold, ask questions and leverage my resources. Whether clarifying a concept with a professor, seeking guidance from a mentor, or discussing a challenging case with classmates, asking questions was crucial to understanding intricate legal topics. I also quickly learned that you should not fear that your questions are unnecessary. Even though it might not seem like it, most of your peers have the same uncertainties.

In reflection, the experience has reinforced my belief that every background, no matter how distinct, can contribute unique value to the study of law. For those transitioning from non-



traditional backgrounds, embracing the change, seeking collaborative environments, and remaining inquisitive can make the journey more insightful and rewarding.

### **Question 7: What experiences have you had that has shaped your legal career thus far?**

**Sotiri:** During my time in law school, I was fortunate that a friend convinced me to participate in my school's negotiation competition, despite my initial reluctance. Surprisingly, my friend and I emerged as finalists, earning the opportunity to compete internationally in Italy against other law schools. This experience was truly eye-opening, introducing me to a diverse group of individuals from around the world and offering new perspectives. Through this journey, I realized I had a strong passion for negotiation and oral advocacy, which significantly influenced my choice of law courses, firm applications, and legal areas of interest. Needless to say, engaging in extracurricular activities like negotiations in law school provides a fantastic platform to connect with people, hone skills, and uncover your passions and strengths.

**Phil:** My first-year criminal course really changed the way I think about law. Our professor was a judge at a municipal court and had been a judge for more than a decade. He regularly shared his experiences in class. Although I do not necessarily want to be a criminal lawyer, I was always very focused in his class! One class, he mentioned that lawyers have a unique opportunity to help more than many believe. He discussed how helpful pro-bono initiatives can be for people, and explained the many times he has helped others and how much it influenced him as a person. After many of these stories, I realized how important it is to give back, and it was something I vowed to focus on further in my career. His class reinforced my reasoning for why I want to be a lawyer!

### **Question 8: What did you study in your undergrad?**

**Sotiri:** My journey to law school was not linear and traditional, as I originally earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biology. I originally pursued a science degree since I thought I wanted to go into medicine and research. But as I went along, I realized I loved the problem-solving elements in scientific research, yet I missed the teamwork and personal connections that came with working in law. Surprisingly, the skills I honed in my science studies were greatly transferable to my legal education and career. My scientific writing experiences fostered a direct, concise style that proved to be beneficial in legal assignments, employing point-first communication. Moreover, the critical thinking and problem-solving skills cultivated during my undergraduate degree seamlessly transferred to the legal realm. My educational path took an unexpected twist and there are many other people who have pursued "non-traditional" undergraduate degrees, yet have been able to develop and transfer the necessary skills that allow for success during their journey through law school.

If you have the desire to pursue law school, do not let the absence of a “typical” undergraduate degree discourage you. While certain aspects might feel unfamiliar upon entering law school,



numerous skills crucial for success can be transferred and cultivated across diverse educational backgrounds.

### **Question 9: What extracurriculars have you taken? How has it shaped you/what have you learned from it?**

**Christina:** The extracurricular that I focused on in law school is working with Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC). As a first-year student, I volunteered with the ID Clinic which helps homeless and marginally-housed people in Kingston obtain government ID. For example, we help people get a health card so that they can seek medical services without having to pay costs. In my second year, I became the project lead at the Clinic. I cannot recommend getting involved with PBSC enough! They have chapters at all law schools across Canada. Working with PBSC is a great way to get involved in your community by using the new skills you are learning as a law student. Plus, employers like to see candidates who care about giving back to others. My experience with PBSC has shaped my understanding of the law and how we, as future lawyers, can create a more equitable society. I am very excited to return for my third year as a volunteer once again and in a special advisory role to the newest project lead!

**Thalia:** I have always been active outside of class, and being a Division 1 soccer player at the University of Massachusetts Lowell was a big part of that. This experience was far beyond the sport and helped me prepare for law school and my career.

Being a student-athlete was a threefold challenge of performing in the classroom, the community, and the field. It instilled in me the values of commitment, discipline, and community engagement. During my undergraduate years, I actively participated in various clubs related to my interests. Such involvement enriched my academic experience, expanded my network, and exposed me to diverse perspectives.

Making these connections for potential reference letters for law school applications is essential. Most law schools require references; creating these connections while in undergrad will relieve stress.

When I moved on to law school, I continued to engage in extracurricular activities that resonated with my interests and values. I found clubs and activities that matched what I was passionate about. This has given me great experiences and introduced me to many exciting individuals.

### **Question 10: How has the HCLA assisted us in our journey?**

**Phil:** I was lucky enough to have joined the HCLA a few months into my law school journey. To say I feel blessed is an understatement. I have relied on the HCLA as a support mechanism more times than I can count! If I had any questions about anything law school related, I felt comfortable asking anyone in the association for their opinion, guidance and help. On top of all this, I was a part of a pro-bono/access to justice initiative where we created a legal education webinar that was

an introduction to the legal field for Hellenic youth across Canada. All in all, it has been a pleasure to be a part of such a wonderful association, and I would highly recommend for everyone to join the HCLA!

**Sotiri:** I joined the HCLA thanks to a friend's recommendation. During my time as a member in the organization I had the opportunity and privilege of meeting a diverse array of people within the Hellenic legal community. These connections made through the HCLA allowed me to broaden my understanding of law school and the legal profession, including meeting lawyers specializing in areas of law I was keen on exploring. Additionally, I engaged with individuals navigating or recently completing the OCI process, gaining valuable insights from their experiences.

My experience with the HCLA allowed me to foster these connections through fun and interactive in-person and online events that the organization has hosted, including the Professional's Gala and the Under 8 After 8 networking events. The guidance and insights I have gained have been pivotal in assisting during my time in law school and I would highly recommend to everyone to join the HCLA during your journey through law school and the legal profession!



## VIII. Closing Comments

We hope this guide has been helpful in providing a basic understanding of what is involved in pursuing a law school education. As you have seen, there are many elements in the application process and a lot of hard work required to complete law school. We cannot emphasize enough that this is process that requires you to do your homework and to start early. We hope the general information we have provided and our personal stories have inspired you to take the next steps in pursuing a law school education. We are confident that our community, whether it be first generation students or otherwise, can reach new heights of academic success!



## Author Biographies



### **GABRIELLA PANAYOTIDIS**

University of Ottawa Faculty of Law

Gabriella is currently a second year civil law student at the University of Ottawa. Prior to her university studies, she graduated from Paralegal Technology at the O'Sullivan College of Montreal. Throughout her legal career as a paralegal and law student, Gabriella has focused her legal studies on civil litigation in the federal sector and international law.



### **PHILLIP PASCHALI**

Osgoode Hall Law School

Phil is a graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly, Ryerson University) where he graduated with a degree in Business Management. From there, he began his law school journey at Windsor's Faculty of Law and then transferred to Osgoode Hall Law School. He is currently in his second year and will graduate in 2025.





### **ATHANASIA (THALIA) PETSIS**

University of Windsor /  
University of Detroit Mercy

Thalia is in her third year of the Dual JD program (US and Canadian JD), studying law at both the University of Windsor and the University of Detroit Mercy. Before law school, she was a student-athlete at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, where she earned a dual Bachelor's degree in Finance and International Business, along with a Minor in French. Thalia further pursued her academic interest at the same institution, completing a Master of Science in Business Analytics, specializing in Big Data.



### **CHRISTINA PAPAGEORGAKOPOULOS**

Queen's University Faculty of Law

Christina is a third-year law student at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Prior to law school, she attended McGill University and studied history and political science. She focused mainly on the history of global combat and nation-building efforts in Western Europe after the First World War. During her law school experience, Christina has focused on litigation with a key interest in securities and professional liability.





## SOTIRI KATSURAS

Osgoode Hall Law School

Sotiri is currently in his final year of the dual JD/MBA program at Osgoode Hall Law and the Schulich School of Business. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from the University of Toronto. He previously completed a summer internship at Blaney McMurtry LLP and will be returning to the firm to complete his articling.



## Author / Supervisor



## CHRISTINE ARRUDA

Christine is Senior Counsel at Royal Bank of Canada. She advises on a broad range of securities and corporate/commercial law matters, as well as regulatory and cross-border matters related to RBC's Canadian Wealth Management business. Prior to joining RBC, Christine was Vice-President, Legal and Chief Compliance Officer for the Canadian affiliate of a U.S. based investment fund manager where she was responsible for all legal, regulatory and governance matters related to the firm and its investment fund management, advisory and distribution. Christine has advised on numerous transactions including the formation and structuring of public and private investment funds, and has experience in private company mergers and acquisitions. Christine is a past member of the Ontario Securities Commission's Registrant Advisory Committee and has served on various committees of The Investment Funds Institute of Canada and Portfolio Management Association of Canada. Christine has earned a Master in Business Administration and has served as President of the HCLA since 2022.







## Contact Us

If you have any questions please feel free to contact the HCLA through any of the channels below.

Email: [hcla.information@gmail.com](mailto:hcla.information@gmail.com)

LinkedIn: [The Hellenic Canadian Lawyers' Association](#)

Instagram: [thehcla](#)

Facebook: [Hellenic Canadian Lawyers' Association - HCLA](#)

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