

What I wish I knew in law school...



The first instalment of “What I wish I knew in law school”, an article by LAWPRO’s articling students and newest hires, was one of the most popular features in the inaugural student issue of *LAWPRO Magazine*. We decided a sequel was in order, so we asked our former articling students, Maurizio Artale and Andria Cramer, to reflect on their law school years.

Maurizio Artale

“... building long-term client relationships is a necessary part of private practice”



Legal writing matters

While he was a student, Maurizio participated in a study that canvassed board and tribunal members about perceived skills shortfalls. Number one on the list? Legal writing. While law students get plenty of opportunities to do essay writing, Maurizio recommends that students capitalize on rarer opportunities to practice writing pleadings, briefs, and facta.

Consider alternative articles

Maurizio feels that law schools could do a better job of informing students about alternatives to traditional law firm articling. He notes that non-traditional settings can offer a valuable learning edge: “the primary benefit of commencing your career at LAWPRO is that it offers a bird’s-eye view of errors and omissions that lawyers commonly make throughout the course of their careers.” Good articles will ideally offer an opportunity to learn about “best practices, professional conduct, and client relations” – areas often not well-covered as part of the law school curriculum.

Business of law

Finally, Maurizio felt that the law school curriculum lacked good introductory exposure to what he calls the business of law: “even if you pursue a career in government or in-house, dealing with clients and building long-term client relationships is a necessary part of legal work.” Because even very bright students sometimes struggle with client relations and business development, Maurizio would like to see law schools introduce business management and business communications courses tailored to the legal profession.

Andria Cramer



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basic understanding of the principles and case law underlying the materials.” She also noted that while evidence was not a required course at her law school, “everyone who doesn't take it will be at a huge disadvantage going forward.”

Keep your materials handy

And once the bar exam is over, don't bury the materials in the backyard. Andria has found that those materials – along with her old summaries from law school – are an invaluable resource when she needs to look up a point of law. Andria stores her favourite resources on DropBox, an online document storage service, so that she can access them from anywhere.

Be resourceful before answering questions

Last year's crop of students noted that articling students should ask plenty of questions, but Andria adds a key caveat: “optimize other resources within your environment before bothering the lawyer you are working for,” she suggests, so that when you ask a question, it's the right question, at the right time. Andria notes that support staff, the department database, and even Google can help narrow down your search so that you can ask questions succinctly and get good clarification. And when receiving an assignment, the most important question to ask is: *what is the deadline?* Knowing the answer is essential to knowing how to prioritize your work. ■

Core courses “core” for a reason

While law students are often encouraged to choose law school courses based on their interests, no matter how esoteric, Andria recommends not going overboard. Upper year “core” courses are core for a reason – they cover areas in which lawyers are actually likely to find themselves working. They are also covered in detail on the bar exams. “Taking the core courses that are covered on the bar exams really helped me to pass,” says Andria, “because I had a



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