



Year one:

Navigating a new professional landscape

It's sometimes said that law school doesn't fully prepare students for most of their actual work as a lawyer. No class teaches students how to get through a heated phone call with difficult opposing counsel or how to collect outstanding accounts from a tardy client. No class teaches students how to get clients, for that matter.

Today, with so much of the legal profession transitioning to virtual work environments, digital workflows, and online filing and communication, it might be said that even 20-years' experience doesn't fully prepare a lawyer for what the profession may look like tomorrow.

Senior and junior lawyers alike are adapting to new tools, new techniques, and new work environments. We sat down with Mithea Murugesu, Simona Ristic, and Susan Wu, who recently joined LAWPRO as articling and LPP students, to ask them about their journey to LAWPRO, their experiences so far, and how they're responding to a changing legal profession.

Mithea Murugesu

After undergrad, Mithea saw two possible career paths: teaching or law. Laughing, she says she chose law because, "I didn't want to be in a classroom for the rest of my life." More seriously, she adds, "with law, I thought I could make an impact and help more people." It was that desire to help people that drew her to her clinic work in law school. "My number one thing was the human element—to be able to hear someone's story, empathize with them, and give them some assurance that help is available."

Although her clinic work gave her a strong interest in social justice, when it came time to apply for articling positions, Mithea conducted a broad search. Although professional insurance wasn't initially on her radar, the more she learned about LAWPRO the more it appealed to her: "I realized that, since all lawyers are insured through LAWPRO, this was an interesting way to learn to be the best lawyer I could be. Or at least learn what not to do."

After securing an interview with LAWPRO, Mithea says she "did a deep dive of the website—every page and detail. I also read some issues of LAWPRO Magazine and found a list of sample interview questions in an older Student Issue. I said to myself 'This is perfect!' so I printed it out and prepared with that as well."

Articling while working remotely can be difficult. But it also has its advantages. Mithea says, "I knew if I didn't make an effort to reach out to my coworkers, I was going to be literally alone. I try to reach out remotely to at least one new person every week, learn about their background and their work at LAWPRO, and really make up for any lost social elements from being away from the office most of the time."

Susan Wu

As a legal graduate from Hong Kong who came to Canada to complete her Masters and practice law, Susan is used to adapting to new challenges. "At this point, I've gotten used to the virtual environment," she says. "I don't even remember what it's like to be in a class or meeting with more than five people at a time."

"You learn to be patient," she says, reflecting on the remote work environment. With such a major and rapid move to new technologies, "tech hiccups will always crop up, and you just need to have confidence it will work out." But with the frustrations come opportunities, and Susan is quick to stress that the environment has pushed her to develop her electronic communication skills. She says, "drafting emails and communicating electronically is such an important skill, and communicating concisely only comes from practice."

Law is a demanding profession, so it's important to find the little things that bring you joy every day. At LAWPRO, Susan says she loves "going through the file and seeing how the events played out. But my favourite part is forming an opinion on the issues. Being able to discuss it with other people and having a conversation about the claim is really exhilarating."

Simona Ristic

After seven months at LAWPRO, Simona has a positive view of the work-from-home and hybrid-work models put in place due to the pandemic. She explains, "some people seem to feel bad for us because we're articling remotely, like we're missing something. But articling depends on your mentors and your colleagues, not whether it's virtual or in-person. I've had a great experience because my mentors and colleagues at LAWPRO have been so helpful and willing to provide feedback."

Going further, Simona stresses that there are benefits to being thrown into a mostly remote and digital world: "There's this transition happening right now—in the courts, in the business registry—where everything is moving to an online and electronic format. I can already tell that articling remotely has better prepared me for the future practice of law."

"For one thing," she adds, "this remote work has definitely improved my tech skills. You don't have any choice, you just have to learn these things. It's made me much more proficient communicating outside of in-person conversations."

Even beyond the remote workplace and the tech-heavy learning curve, the articling experience has been different from Simona's expectations, in a good way. "I wish I knew just how much I would learn in the articling process," she says. "When I graduated, I felt wholly unprepared to go out into the legal world. I didn't know how I was going to learn everything in ten months, and then be fully licensed as a practicing lawyer. But now it's been seven months and when I look back at who I was when I started, I say 'oh my god. I've learned so much!' And I still have over three months to go! So, it's only up from here," she adds with a laugh. ■