

AN ARTICLE ABOUT ARTICLES:

Recent law school graduates in their own words

To be a lawyer is to be accustomed to words. Files, contracts, factums, letters, memos, dictation, transcripts, docket, emails, pleadings. Words. Some words seldom seen or used outside the parlance of the profession.

A new lawyer isn't simply *licensed*, they're *called*. At which point they will hopefully not be *hired* by a client, but *retained*. And, perhaps, bring that client's matter before a judge where they won't *argue*, but make *submissions*. Until they not simply *ask for a remedy*, but make a *prayer for relief*.

Before all of that though, they don't just *train*, or *intern*, or *apprentice*—but *article*.

In a profession suffused with ancient and awkward terms of art, *to article* is a particularly opaque piece of jargon. Etymologically, it comes from the Articles of Clerkship, meaning the literal terms (i.e., *articles*) of the contract between an apprentice lawyer and their principal. To be working under such a contract came to be known as completing one's *articles*. In much of Canada, those training to be lawyers were therefore known as *articled students*—evoking the notion that the difficult licensing process is, perhaps, not something these students are doing but is instead something being done *to them* (one can be *articled* like one can be *tackled*, *trampled*, or *conussed*). In Ontario it's now commonly used as a present-tense adjective—*articling student*.

Those entering their first years as a lawyer, from the forests of textbooks, essays, footnotes, fact patterns, and three-part tests festooned upon blackboards, may understandably find this profession to already be a surfeit of words. But even so, we asked them to add a few more of their own.

We sat down with three articling and LPP students starting their careers with LAWPRO—**Alexandra Alayche**, **Bianca Zuzu**, and **Elliot Wilson**—to speak, in their own words, about transitioning from student to lawyer.

On working remotely

Alexandra's final year at law school was done entirely by remote learning. She says, "I was a bit worried when starting the articling process that the whole journey might be online. I couldn't even fathom doing it that way because articling is a steep learning curve. You want to be able to have social interactions with the people you're working with."

"Thankfully," she continues, "I feel like a hybrid environment is a great balance. There are a lot of opportunities that arose while articling that I was only able to attend because they were done remotely. Things like examinations for discovery or court appearances that are happening in different cities. When they're on Zoom, an articling student can still be there and just observe."

Elliot agrees. For him, "working directly with different people and understanding their personalities, what they're looking for, and how to communicate with them" is a major benefit to working in a hybrid environment.

On the job search and coming to LAWPRO

Thinking back to the job search in law school, **Bianca** laughs and says, "I didn't even know what the OCI process was until I started law school." She explains, "I always had a passion for real estate, but I didn't want to pigeonhole myself by starting at a boutique real estate firm. Thankfully, at LAWPRO, there's just so much real estate work to do."

For **Alexandra**, the process was an evolution. She says, "I used to volunteer at a hospital all throughout high school. If I didn't pursue political science and law, I would have gone down the biomedical route."

She continues, "I ended up doing an internship with Sport Resolutions in the UK, which is an alternative dispute resolution tribunal. I love sports, and it was a great opportunity to gain legal knowledge in a field that connected to my biomedical experience. From there, I started volunteering with a Health Professional Review Board. That led me to an interest in professional liability and LAWPRO."

On building new skills

Elliot has fond memories of law school, particularly classes like Negotiation, where mock deal-making provided real experience with the legal profession. But he stresses that the LPP program has been much more valuable than law school. "When you're assigned a memo at the beginning of the day and told you have to finish it by 6pm," he recounts, "it forces you to pump through it and figure out what it is they want. Exposure to all parts of the law is what you're doing on a day-to-day basis as an LPP student."

Alexandra explains how her writing has changed since leaving law school. "One thing that stuck with me so far," she says, "is the importance of concise writing. Prior to joining LAWPRO, I think

I wrote maybe five memos through law school. I've since written over 30. There can be volumes and volumes of material to condense, which can be overwhelming at first, so you need to think about who your target audience is, who you're writing for, and summarize only what is important. That's a skill that will help in the future."

On time management

Bianca describes herself as "the kind of person that always needs an answer." She says, "I always need to get to the bottom of everything. And in law school, there usually is an answer. But in practice, you need to know when there isn't an answer. It's not a failure to discover there's nothing to be found on a particular question. When you have multiple files or assignments, you can't afford to go down a rabbit hole sometimes. Articling has taught me to accept the limits of our knowledge, and to know when I'm reaching a dead end."

After her undergrad, Bianca had to quickly develop time-management skills to balance her studies with a strong commitment to athletics. "Throughout law school," she explains, "I was coaching tennis every day. The most important thing I learned was how to organize my time—you need to just write out your entire schedule because it's impossible to memorize it all."

In building that schedule, Bianca stresses the importance of avoiding burnout, saying "I also made sure I was taking care of my mental health. In law school, it's easy to not see your friends for three or four months, if you're not careful. Finding a balance kept me sane and allowed me to perform better."

For **Alexandra's** part, she says, "I was very young starting my first year of law school, with only two years of university experience. I remember saying I was going to give myself one semester to just focus on my studies. But then you always want to get involved with volunteer activities and *pro bono* work. During exam season I would have this calendar full of sticky notes with due dates, assignments, grocery shopping lists, and I would always fall behind. When you put too many things in a day, you can't seem to catch up. I would eventually just tear it up and start a new calendar."

"It became very important to balance my extracurricular activities, commitments, and academic success at the same time. Time management is a transferable skill applicable to not only articling, but anything that you undertake."

Now that she's at LAWPRO, Alexandra has become proficient with organizing her time through online calendars and time-management tools, but looks back fondly on physical calendars. "There's something about the feeling of crossing something off your list that that is just so..." Alexandra trails off. Ironically, she is unable to find the right word. ■