

Does Canada need another law school?

Ryerson thinks so

At a time when law graduates face a fiercely competitive job market, Ryerson is hoping to launch new law school.



Field of dreams: Ryerson University campus as seen from the Kerr Hall building, 2010. (ADRIEN VECZAN / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO)

By **ALICJA SIEKIERSKA** Staff Reporter

Mon., Oct. 31, 2016

At a time when law graduates face a fiercely competitive job market in a sluggish economy, [Ryerson University](#) is applying to open a law school of its own.

In a letter of intent published in October, the university said its program will be a departure from traditional law schools found in Canada and focus on innovation in legal education that addresses changes in the profession. The letter is the first formal step aimed at getting internal approval in order to establish a law school at the university.

Mitchell Kowalski, a lawyer and professor at the University of Calgary, said the Ryerson program “has the potential, if the school does it right, to be the premier law school in Canada.”

“The last thing that this province needs, even this city needs, is another traditional law school,” Kowalski said.

“But something as unique, innovative and dynamic as what this Ryerson proposal outlines is very exciting.”

According to the letter, Ryerson's law school aims to be a transformative program, shifting away from traditional schools by providing more opportunities for hands-on learning and focusing on "new competencies," such as entrepreneurial spirit, financial literacy and technological proficiency.

"Many law schools are changing. Many are adapting and talking about innovation and using technology," said Anver Saloojee, a Ryerson political professor who was on the committee that wrote the letter of intent.

"We have an opportunity that few have had: being able to start from scratch. We're going to be able to take the best practices from all the universities across the country."

Ryerson is not the only university in Canada that has pushed to create a different type of law school.

Lakehead University in Thunder Bay launched the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law in 2013, offering a unique education where graduates can practice law without going through the articling process.

The Canadian legal community has been grappling with an "articling crisis," where the number of lawyers searching for articling positions has increased steadily over the last decade, while the number of positions available has remained static. The Law Society of Upper Canada released a report from the Articling Task Force in 2011 trying to address the challenges facing Canada's articling program.

Omar Ha-Redeye, a lawyer with Fleet Street Law and adjunct professor at Ryerson, said the program will help create new jobs in the legal profession.

"Future jobs for lawyers will not be traditional ones in a law firm doing traditional work. Jobs will be very tech-oriented, and more hybrid positions," he said.

"Ryerson is positioning itself as a solution, not a contributor, to the problem."

Leslie de Meulles, the president of the Law Student Society of Ontario, is skeptical of whether the program can solve the problems facing law school graduates in Ontario.

"Opening another law school will not address some of the issues currently facing students, with respect to articling, high tuition costs or access to justice," de Meulles said.

Ryerson will provide a full proposal to the school senate in the spring. The school would still need approval from the government, as well as the Law Society of Upper Canada, to go forward with the program. The first intake of students could potentially start as early as September 2018.

Read more about: [Ryerson University](#)