

WHY AND HOW TO BECOME A LAW PROFESSOR

Advice and Resources for J.D., LL.B. and LL.M. Candidates

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OVERVIEW



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The path to becoming a law professor is strewn with unspoken norms and expectations. This document puts the quiet bits in writing by outlining what it is law professors do, and what law students might like to think about now if they're curious about a future career in legal academia.

The advice is primarily directed at J.D. and LL.M. students receiving their degree in a common law jurisdiction such as Canada, but will hopefully be useful for other students too.

Topics covered include:

1. What does a law professor do?
2. Qualities of a law professor
3. During the J.D. program
4. After graduation: practical experience?
5. Master's programs (LL.M. / B.C.L. (Oxon))
6. Doctoral programs (Ph.D. / S.J.D. / J.S.D.)
7. Publishing
8. Advice



This is just one assistant professor's perspective.

Speak with others about their perspectives!



1. Research-track (most common)
 2. Teaching-track
 3. Clinical-track
- You begin as an Assistant Professor pre-tenure.
 - You have 4-7 years to prove yourself for promotion to tenured Associate Professor.
 - Full Professor is bestowed upon internationally-recognised expert authorities in their fields.

WHAT DOES A RESEARCH-TRACK LAW PROFESSOR DO?



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1. Research and publishing (40%)
 - Become an expert authority in your field.
 - Publish in reputable (peer-reviewed) journals and book publishing houses.
 - Present at conferences and workshops.
 - Bring in grant funding.
 - *Expectation: Research is the most important part for career-advancement.*
2. Teaching (40%)
 - Lectures, seminars, student paper supervision, student mentoring.
 - *Expectation: Don't be terrible.*
3. Administrative/committee service (20%)

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QUALITIES OF A LAW PROFESSOR



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- Independent work-ethic – there's no boss looking over your shoulder.
- Independent scholarly views.
- Commitment to academic freedom: attacking ideas, not people.
— see *Ridd v James Cook University* [2021] HCA 32, [29]-[33].
- Have good ideas and communicate them effectively.
- Strong writing skills.
- Participate in a scholarly community.
- Mentor students.
- Figure out your own path.

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DURING THE J.D. PROGRAM



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- Consider getting involved in academic clubs and initiatives (e.g. the Law Review).
- Find two professors who will know and appreciate you well enough to be able to write you reference letters in future. How?
 - Upper-level seminars/courses; clinics; moots; student clubs.
 - Self-directed research papers → which you can develop into scholarly publications.
 - Research/teaching assistant positions.
 - Office hours; showing up to things.
- Identify people whose careers you admire. Consider their path. Reach out to them.
- Treat your classmates/peers with respect. Reputations travel fast ... and stick.

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AFTER GRADUATION: PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE?



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- Many law professors were [judicial clerks](#) and practiced law before they became academics.
- **Legal practice is an excellent way to find problems that spark ideas to write about!**
- If you have the time/capacity, perhaps look into teaching an adjunct course part-time. (It's good to have some teaching experience, but teaching will **not** in itself make you a shoo-in for a law professor career.)
- Plan where and when you want to pursue higher education. Think about where you ultimately want to end up.
- Think carefully about **the risks of going down the academic track**. You are pulling yourself out of legal practice for *at least* four years. You will earn only a modest stipend. Doctorates are difficult and make most people depressed at least some of the time. There is no guarantee you will get an academic job at the end of it.
- If you are content to accept that risk, know that this is the best job in the world.

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MASTER'S PROGRAMS (LL.M. / B.C.L.)



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- Begin preparing several months before applications are due. You need a research statement, a personal statement, CV, references, etc. The best applications take time and revision.
- By this point, you don't need to have your ultimate research area/topic figured out. The master's is an opportunity for you to explore new ideas.
- Consider going to the UK or US. The social/international experience is a big part of an LL.M.
- It's obnoxious, but branding/reputation matters and can carry you far. Shoot for the highest-ranked school feasible for you. Top schools: Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, Harvard, Yale, Stanford.
- Apply for scholarships. (Even with scholarships, most candidates still pay a lot out of pocket.)
- Get to know your classmates!
- Get to know two (or so) professors as well as you can (they're busy people).

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DOCTORAL PROGRAMS (PH.D. / S.J.D. / J.S.D.)



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- What does doctoral study entail? See [Doctoral Studies in Law: From the Inside Out](#) and [Doctor of Juridical Science: Advice to Prospective and Current Candidates](#).
- By this point, you should have your ultimate research area/topic largely identified.
- Don't embark on a doctorate unless you're sure. It is a bold and risky career choice.
- If you have a reputable master's, where you do your doctorate may be less important. Shoot for programs that will pay you a manageable stipend, that have supervisor(s) well-placed to guide your research interests, and that suit your family/life situation.
 - See 2014 job stats: [Thinking about Teaching Law in a Cdn Law School \(Common Law\)](#).
- **Choose your advisor carefully.** Advisors can make or break students' careers (and often do). Do their other students think they're a good advisor? Do their students get jobs afterwards?!
- See [The Law School Research-Track Job Markets: Advice & Resources for Ph.D. Candidates](#).

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SCHOLARLY WRITING RESOURCES



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UBC Centre for Writing and Scholarly Communication: [Writing Consultations](#).

Use a browser-integrated research management program (!!!): [Zotero](#) or [Mendeley](#).

Formatting resources:

- Use [this Word template](#) and [Word Styles to Improve Writing](#).

Article writing resources:

- [Archetypal Legal Scholarship: A Field Guide](#).
- [Producing an Insightful Research Paper: Some Elements to Consider](#).
- [Really Basic Rules for Writing Good Papers in Law School](#).
- [How to Write a Law School Seminar Paper or Law Review Student Note—A Ten Step Process](#).
- [Twelve Tips on Writing a Thesis](#).
- <https://twitter.com/emilyaprifogle/status/1343541458704412673>.

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PUBLISHING



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Commonwealth (incl. Canada) law journals	United States law reviews
Articles average <10,000 words plus footnotes.	Articles average <25,000 words including footnotes. (Final wordcount may increase considerably during editing process.)
Editors are typically well-established law professors, sometimes supported by students.	Editors are JD students . The quality ranges, but top law reviews are top for a reason.
Submission is typically exclusive, blind peer-reviewed, and decisions can take months.	Submission is typically nonexclusive, not blind or peer-reviewed, and decisions take days.
No submission cycles, but summer is slow.	Two submission cycles : a (major) February cycle, and a (minor) August cycle.
No submission fees. You might even get paid!	Typically submit through Scholastica (US\$6.50 per submission ☹, student waiver available for up to 20 submissions).
Style guides and submission criteria differ considerably journal to journal.	Bluebook style guide. Submission criteria can differ journal to journal.

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