

Still Wondering What Course to Take For Next Year's January Term?: Insight Into Some of This Year's January Term Gems

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The January Term is always an exciting time for students at Western Law. This concentrated term offers Western Law students a remarkable opportunity to delve into a specific area of law for its duration. These course offerings, some of which change year to year, bring leading practitioners, legal academics and even judges to Western Law's classrooms. Here we offer student experiences from two of the terms offerings that we thought were Gems:

Judging a Judge – ST: Judging 5580C

We all have to deal with it every year, with the exception of first year students. We all stress over what class we should enrol in for January term. We all look through the course descriptions and course outlines in search of the perfect course to take during January term. Not only do we search for a class that is interesting, we also want to make sure the course objectives are in line with our own objectives: to be able to sleep in and to do as little work as possible during a month when we all feel depressed because of the snow and the fact that the holidays came and went so quickly.

Judging 5580, taught by Justice O'Reilly from the Federal Court, is the perfect January term course. The work was interesting, it was evenly spread out throughout the term, we had every Friday off and our paper was a maximum of fifteen pages. The entire course consisted of three weeks. During the first week we were required to read about how judges make their decisions, how they go about writing their decisions and about the challenges judges face in making their decisions. The readings were interesting and relatively light.

Week two was spent watching Justice O'Reilly at regularly scheduled hearings at the Federal Court in Toronto via video conference. Although we faced technical difficulties during the first few days, we managed to watch most of the hearings live. We were expected to submit a rough draft of our essay by week three and to conduct a five minute class discussion about our paper in order to hear our classmates' views on our paper.

The structure of our paper was to resemble a Federal Court decision and we were to assume the role of a judge at any one of the hearings we watched via video conference during week two. We were also given the last week of January term off in order to prepare for the final copy of our essay.

During class, Justice O'Reilly discussed his own experience as a sitting judge and provided us with a glimpse of his life as a judge during week two. Justice O'Reilly also spent a considerable amount of time discussing each case and ensuring our understanding of the issues immediately after each hearing.

Whether or not your plan as a future lawyer involves advocacy, Judging 5580 is an asset for anyone who is preparing for a career in law. We will all have to decipher piles of cases during articling, and even during summering. As lawyers, we will still have to read cases, whether we are litigation lawyers or corporate lawyers. It is helpful to know how judges make their decisions, what factors hinder their ability to make decisions and to be able to read between the lines of the decisions rendered.

A Refreshingly Practical Course Offering ST: Family Law Dispute Resolution 5845C

This course, taught by UWO graduate and family law mediation practitioner Hilary Linton, offered students an

opportunity to put aside case law for a little while and delves into the practical aspects of dispute resolution. The course offered interdisciplinary insight into the practice of dispute resolution in the context of family law and is a great practical course offering for students, whether you're interested in learning more about family law, or dispute resolution theory and practice, or if you just want to take a break from memorizing case ratios.

It began appropriately with a tribute to our dearly missed and extremely well respected late Professor J. McLeod. Guest lecturers such as Dr. Peter G. Jaffe, Director Emeritus for the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice system in London, Thomas G. Bastedo Q.C. and Alfred Mamo leading family law practitioners in Ontario graced our presence and offered us insights into live issues encountered in the practice.

The course evaluation was based on an essay on a topic in the field and our preparation and performance in a mock negotiation. The course begins with the theoretical underpinnings of dispute resolution practice and then moves towards its application in the context of real life negotiation. As the course progressed we were frequently paired off to conduct mock mediations and negotiations based on true to life fact scenarios. We were challenged to evaluate and refine our oral negotiation skills and learned the value of strategic and well planned negotiation.

Professor Linton shared her own experiences in the field and encouraged us to think about a lot of the tough ethical issues the practice often requires practitioners to tackle head on. Her teaching style is casual and approachable. The course was a great experience and is a refreshingly practical January term offering. ♦

Pro Bono Valuable to Students and the Community

by *Erin Almost*
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Students at Western Law have a wide variety of programs and activities in which they can become involved. Pro Bono Students Western is one program that has proven to be a valuable experience to both students and the London community.

Pro Bono Students Western is a part of Pro Bono Students Canada, a national network that exists in every law school in Canada. In its 10th year at Western Law, Pro Bono is having yet another successful year. With 110 student volunteers involved, the 2008/2009 program includes projects that assist non-profit organizations, legal clinics in both London and Northern Ontario, and family court litigants.

What Pro Bono is traditionally known for is providing non-profit organizations with legal research and information that pertains to their organization or clients. By arming organizations with proper legal information, the aim of the program is to improve an organization's ability to deal

with significant issues, and more generally, increase their access to justice. An exciting new endeavour Pro Bono Students Western had the opportunity of implementing this year is having a number of students involved with projects for non-profit organizations and legal clinics in Northern Ontario. These projects varied from corporate, employment and labour law, to human and disability rights. All students are currently in the final stages of their projects, and we are looking forward to the impact these completed projects will have on the students, organizations, and London and Northern Ontario communities.

Another way students can get involved through Pro Bono is the Clinic Externship Program. The Clinic Externship Project provides upper year students with the opportunity to work directly in the legal clinic setting. The practical skills and experience students can gain is truly invaluable. Depending on the needs of the clinic, students may interview clients, work directly on files, perform research and draft documents. This year two student volunteers have externships with local legal clinics.

Lastly, the Family Law Project presents an additional opportunity for upper year law students to get involved

with Pro Bono. Through the Family Law Project, student volunteers assist unrepresented clients at Family Court in drafting legal forms and navigating through the court system in general. Students have the chance to not only explore their interest in family law but attain general practical law skills such as interviewing clients and drafting memos. We have seen an increase in the number of students involved with the Family Law Project this year, and we have been able to help more people in need as a result.

Pro Bono enables students to put their legal knowledge and skills to use to make a real difference in the community and people's lives. Whether you are in your first, second or final year, there are many opportunities for you to become involved. For more information, please visit our website (www.law.uwo.ca/ProBono/index.html), give us a call, or drop by.

We hope that Pro Bono will continue to thrive in the coming years, and in order to make that happen, we need the continued participation and support of the students at Western Law. ♦

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