

Making the grade

BY KIRSTEN MCMAHON

Students give high marks to Canadian law schools

It's a good time to be in any one of Canada's law schools — alumni and law firm donations are rolling in, dated facilities are being renovated, and even the LLB is getting a makeover. Looking over the results of *Canadian Lawyer's* 2008 Law School Survey, it's easy to see that Canada's future lawyers have a wealth of excellent schools to choose from.

Because our rankings don't often change drastically from year to year, *Canadian Lawyer* decided to do something a little different this time. In addition to calculating grades for the law school from recent survey results, we have averaged them with the marks from our 2006 and 2007 survey. This year, we took the new responses and combined them with the 1,000-plus of the last two years to give a more accurate picture of law schools across the country.

The complaints are the same as always: tuition is too high, grading can be unfair, the facilities aren't as good as they could be. But more often than not, respondents praised their alma maters, noting improvements are also a constant.

One thing that is changing is the global nature of business and of law. It has some schools and students rethinking the traditional LLB designation. The University of Toronto made the move to a JD (juris doctor) in 2001, and now Queen's University is thinking of following suit. There, the Law Students' Society held a referendum in February 2007, with more than 75 per cent of students in favour of changing their degree to a JD.

"The JD is internationally regarded as indicating a second-entry professional degree program, unlike the LLB, which in most common law countries indicates a first-entry degree program with no post-secondary entrance requirements," says Queen's law school's web site. "In short, most international employers regard the JD as evidence of a much more sophisticated legal education." This move is not without controversy, with many blasting the Americanization of Canadian law schools.

Osgoode Hall Law School partnered with New York University's School of Law and has a joint program that qualifies graduates on

both sides of the border. The University of Windsor has a similar partnership with The University of Detroit Mercy School of Law for a joint JD/LLB law degree program. "In a competitive global economy, a key success factor is the ability to provide a service that your competitor cannot match. A joint degree can be the first step to advancing your competitive edge," says Windsor's web site.

With some U.S. firms paying starting salaries of US\$160,000, a JD can be an attractive option for law students. But there is the risk that Canada, already aching for good legal talent, will experience a brain drain, something we'll be watching closely in the next year.

As for this year's results, although someone always has to come in near the bottom of any rankings, all of the schools surveyed placed quite closely and were given great marks. Rather than focus on the areas where schools may have been missing the mark, this year's rankings highlight news and milestones from the past year. Schools missing from the survey did not garner enough responses to be meaningful.

1. OSGOODE HALL LAW SCHOOL

1

Curriculum: **A-**
Faculty: **A-**
Professors: **A-**
Testing: **B-**
Facilities: **B**
Practice Relevance: **B**
Recommendation: **A**
Final Grade: **B+**

This year's winner has had a long and storied history in our rankings. More than five years ago, Osgoode generally languished near the bottom of our rankings. But it listened to its graduates and made improvements. And things are only getting better.

Last year, Osgoode launched its Building Osgoode Campaign — the largest ever Ontario law school fundraising campaign. The school has already raised more than \$6 million of the \$25-million price tag for the renovation and expansion. While Osgoode's infamous windowless structure will still exist, the expansion's centrepiece is a three-storey atrium that "will bring light and will give inspiration to the community at Osgoode," said Dean Patrick Monahan. Construction is scheduled to begin this summer.

2

Curriculum: **A-**
 Faculty: **A-**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **B**
 Facilities: **B**
 Practice Relevance: **B**
 Recommendation: **A-**
 Final Grade: **B+**

2. UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

In late November, David Asper, executive vice president of CanWest Global Communications Corp., donated \$7.5 million to create the David Asper Centre for Constitutional Rights at the University of Toronto — the largest single-person donation to a Canadian law school. A significant portion of the gift will go toward the faculty's building renewal and expansion.

"This unprecedented gift will have an enduring impact on the protection of the principles and values enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. The new centre will ensure that future generations of lawyers will serve as guardians of what are deeply held principles in just and democratic societies," said U of T president David Naylor.

3

Curriculum: **A-**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **B**
 Facilities: **B**
 Practice Relevance: **B**
 Recommendation: **A-**
 Final Grade: **B+**

3. UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

The University of New Brunswick is fundraising for its Campaign for the Faculty of Law. Started more than two years ago, organizers set an ambitious fundraising target of \$1.5 million, which has been surpassed almost fourfold. Nearly \$5.5 million dollars has been raised for scholarships and bursaries, a new teaching and learning space, programs and services, and the law library.

"UNB's faculty of law has more than a century of tradition and excellence," said university president John McLaughlin. "It is gratifying to know that the quality of the educational experience that our graduates enjoyed while they were students has instilled a great loyalty and real desire to give back in whatever way they can."

4. UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

UVic law's renowned Environmental Law Centre (ELC) has come a long way in the past decade — from its humble beginnings as a student-run volunteer organization to a busy law clinic dealing with a full range of environmental law issues and providing assistance to individuals and organizations.

The ELC celebrated its 10th anniversary in October 2007. It marked a decade devoted to educating UVic Law students, raising public awareness of environmental issues and advocating on behalf of First Nations, community, and environmental groups.

4

Curriculum: **B+**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **A-**
 Testing: **B**
 Facilities: **B**
 Practice Relevance: **B**
 Recommendation: **A**
 Final Grade: **B+**

5

Curriculum: **B+**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **B**
 Facilities: **B-**
 Practice Relevance: **B**
 Recommendation: **A-**
 Final Grade: **B**

5. MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Although McGill has always placed quite well in our rankings, the school was also ranked among the world's top universities by the Times Higher-QS World University Rankings in November 2007. The THES/QS declared McGill the number one Canadian university by global standards and 12th among the top 200 universities ranked. The ranking also classes McGill as North America's best public university and the only Canadian university ranked in the world's top 30.

6. UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

6

Curriculum: **B+**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **A-**
 Testing: **B-**
 Facilities: **C+**
 Practice Relevance: **B-**
 Recommendation: **A**
 Final Grade: **B**

A common complaint in our surveys is that lawyers wanting to pursue a career in public interest law feel they can't because of their large debt.

Windsor's new Debt Repayment Assistance Program (D-RAP) — funded by The Law Foundation of Ontario — will encourage students to pursue and maintain careers with organizations that engage in public interest law in Ontario.

By providing assistance to a law graduate who makes a commitment to a career in the public interest, it is hoped that this program will build a stronger pool of talented and dedicated lawyers in Ontario, and therefore enhance the accessibility and quality of legal services provided to the public. The first D-RAP recipient, Sara Jane Souliere, will receive up to \$30,000 over three years.

7

Curriculum: **B+**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **B-**
 Facilities: **B**
 Practice Relevance: **B-**
 Recommendation: **A-**
 Final Grade: **B**

7. QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

Late last year, Queen's students and professors, and lawyers from Borden Ladner Gervais LLP celebrated the completion of work funded by the \$10,000 BLG research fellowship program. Professor Erik Knutsen and law student Ashley Brown were recognized for their success with the program, designed to promote legal research and offer a student a valuable opportunity for legal research, writing, and mentorship. The pair spent last summer researching "police pursuit collisions" and related standards for liability. "The cost of a police pursuit collision [to the public]

can be enormous," said Knutsen. "And some times it's just over a speeding ticket or \$76 in gas." Knutsen said a major focus of the research is determining when police chases are vital and when it would be better to go without.

8

Curriculum: **B**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **A-**
 Testing: **B**
 Facilities: **B-**
 Practice Relevance: **B**
 Recommendation: **B**
 Final Grade: **B**

8. UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

Western has also entered the JD fray, with a vote being held late last year on whether to change the school's degree designation from LLB to JD. Students were asked: "Are you in favour of Western Law changing its degree title from LLB to JD?" The results aren't yet in, but there's sure to be controversy and perhaps more Canadian law schools following suit.

9. UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

There's a new dean in town. Last summer, Alastair (Al) Lucas moved from acting dean — a position he's held since 2006 — to dean of the law school. He was one of the law school's founding faculty in 1976.

"In his role as dean, Lucas will continue to focus on establishing the faculty as a nationally recognized leader in the specializations of energy, naturalization, and environmental law at the undergraduate and graduate levels," says provost and vice president Alan Harrison.

9

Curriculum: **B**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **A-**
 Testing: **B-**
 Facilities: **B+**
 Practice Relevance: **C+**
 Recommendation: **B+**
 Final Grade: **B**

10. DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Recent grads note Dalhousie's wide range of optional classes, along with its offerings in the marine and environmental law areas, with about a dozen related classes in those areas. As well, there is the school's Law and Technology Institute, where students have the opportunity to conduct advanced research under the supervision of faculty on information technology law issues.

Professors were given top marks at Dal, with Jennifer Lewellyn, RONALDA MURPHY, and Richard Devlin getting mentions from respondents. "I enjoyed many of the people and many of the professors," says one grad. "Dalhousie attracted many bright, interesting students from across Canada."

11. UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

Despite the fallout of *Macleans*' law school rankings last year, Ottawa's Faculty of Law placed first in the "National Reach" category, making it the most diversified program in the country. Overall, the faculty placed fourth in the evaluation. "We do well on Bay Street and everywhere else," stated Dean Daniel Graves, "and we are proud of the fact that our students often choose alternative career paths."

The ranking system, created by Brian Leiter, a professor of law at the University of Texas (Austin), relies on data gathered from secondary sources and relied on the Lexpert list of Canada's leading law firms for its "Elite Firm Hiring" calculations, which ruffled many feathers. This list, however, as the *Macleans* methodology states, "does not include firms headquartered in Ottawa and Edmonton," and as a result excludes a significant number of common law students who choose to stay and practise in Ottawa.

12

Curriculum: **B+**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **C+**
 Facilities: **B-**
 Practice Relevance: **C+**
 Recommendation: **B+**
 Final Grade: **B-**

13

Curriculum: **B**
 Faculty: **B**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **C+**
 Facilities: **B-**
 Practice Relevance: **C+**
 Recommendation: **B**
 Final Grade: **B-**

12. UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Former students are proud of the law school's advocacy program, which progressively builds upon skills learned in each year of law school. In first year, all students prepare and present an oral motion. In second year, students prepare and present a trial and then take the matter on to appeal. In the appeal, the students must write an appeal factum and then present oral argument before a panel consisting of a lawyer, an articling student, and a third-year student. In third year, students build upon these skills through a number of optional courses, which include advanced advocacy and the intensive courses in administrative law, family law, or criminal law.

13. UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

The planned November grand opening of the renovation and addition to the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan has been postponed until later this year. There was a work stoppage on the campus, and work on the addition, and in particular the new Law Foundation of Saskatchewan wing of the college, was unable to be completed by November 2007.

14. UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

UBC has been criticized for its outdated and unwelcoming facilities over the years. Much like Osgoode in the past, UBC is intent on doing something about it. A \$1-million gift from Vancouver law firm Richards Buell Sutton LLP and another \$1 million from Davis LLP will definitely help the faculty's new building project. These gifts will be matched by the Law Foundation of British Columbia, which has committed to match donations — up to a total of \$6 million — in support of the faculty building project.

"This generous gesture from RBS will help improve legal education and contribute to Canada's future legal professionals for many years to come," says UBC president Stephen J. Toope. "It is gratifying to note that RBS was the firm that helped create the founding legislation for this university 100 years ago."

The new building will provide space for more than 60 faculty members, 600 undergraduate, and 100 graduate students. It will replace the existing faculty building. Construction should begin later this year and be completed by the end of 2010. **Q**

10

Curriculum: **B+**
 Faculty: **B+**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **C+**
 Facilities: **B**
 Practice Relevance: **B-**
 Recommendation: **B+**
 Final Grade: **B**

11

Curriculum: **B**
 Faculty: **B**
 Professors: **B+**
 Testing: **B-**
 Facilities: **B-**
 Practice Relevance: **B-**
 Recommendation: **B+**
 Final Grade: **B**

14

Curriculum: **B**
 Faculty: **B**
 Professors: **B**
 Testing: **C+**
 Facilities: **C-**
 Practice Relevance: **C+**
 Recommendation: **B**
 Final Grade: **C+**