



INTEGRATING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN WEEK 3 OF L1: TOO SOON?

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OUTLINE

- Context of Legal Education in Quebec, Canada
- The UdS's new course, "Becoming a Legal Professional"
- Professional development and reflective practice in Week 3 of L1: successes and challenges

CONTEXT OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN QUEBEC, CANADA

- The L1 students are mostly 19–20 years old, no undergraduate degree required
- The law degree takes 3 years to complete, after which students must choose between attending Bar school to become attorneys or pursuing a specialized master's degree if they wish to become notaries (about one more year)

CONTEXT

In 2022, following a Canada-wide study conducted among more than 7,000 legal professionals, Professor Nathalie Cadieux's report *The National Study on the Determinants of Health and Well-Being Among Legal Professionals in Canada* (Cadieux et al. 2022) revealed that:

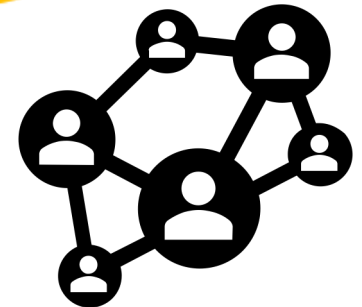
- More than half of Quebec's lawyers (**57.7%**) and notaries (**66.8%**) reportedly suffer from psychological distress (depressive, anxiety-related, aggressive, and/or cognitive symptoms)
- The prevalence is significantly higher among articling students (**72.0%**) and professionals with less than 10 years of experience (**70.8%**)

Her first recommendation: improve university education to better prepare students for the realities of legal practice

“BECOMING A LEGAL PROFESSIONAL”

The course is organized around five themes:

- Work methods
- Ethics and professional conduct
- Professional identity
- Emotional intelligence
- Mental health



“BECOMING A LEGAL PROFESSIONAL”

- The course is worth **3 credits**, consisting of 15 hours of class time per year, spread out over the 3 years of law school
- **Active learning:** guest panels, case studies based on the Harvard case method, discussion groups, simulations and role-playing exercises, testimonials from legal professionals and “escape room” type activities!
- Students must complete a **reflective assignment** after certain activities

“BECOMING A LEGAL PROFESSIONAL”

- Groups of 25 to 35 students
- The course is assessed on a pass or fail basis
- The course is optional, but about two-thirds of the students take it
- The lecturers are experienced legal professionals who are known for their student-centered approach



PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

In the third week of L1, students attend a **panel of legal professionals**

- Panel gathering lawyers and notaries who come from a variety of backgrounds, from various work environments and who practice in different areas of law
- Discussions about their career paths, their typical workday, the skills they've had to develop, what they're passionate about, and the challenges they face in their work
- Many questions from students about work-life balance

REFLECTIVE ASSIGNMENT

Guided reflective assignment (1 page)

- What did you learn during the panel? What surprised you? Why? Give at least two (2) examples.
- Which panelist speaks to you the most? Did you identify with one of the panelists in particular? Why?
- Has your perception of the legal profession (lawyer or notary) changed? How?
- What academic and professional goals would you like to set for yourself at this early point in your legal journey?

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN WEEK 3 OF L1

Successes:

- Early counter-narratives to common beliefs about legal practice
 - *No, not all lawyers work at big law firms like in “Suits”*
 - *No, not all legal careers follow a linear path*
- Debunking the myths around the articling recruitment process (“the race”)—a highly competitive process most had heard about even before they started law school

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN WEEK 3 OF L1

Challenges:

- Lack of time to properly teach reflective practice
- Students overwhelmed by life transitions and newly acquired knowledge, perhaps not in the best frame of mind to reflect and think about their future professional lives
- Some skepticism about the role of law faculties in professional development



QUESTIONS?
THANK YOU!

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