

BUSINESS & CAREERS



Articling student eyes litigation

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By the time Omar Ha-Redeye entered the University of Western Ontario's (UWO) law school three years ago, he had already pursued careers in nuclear medicine technology, health and emergency management, and public relations.

The chance to explore "a brand new world" drew him to law. But the 32-year-old, Hamilton-born 2010 UWO J.D. graduate admits that studying it was challenging, beyond the rigours of grasping new information and ideas.

"There is enormous emphasis on grades and competitiveness emerged from that," he says.

And it was competitive.

Ha-Redeye recalls attending an information session on UWO's Community Legal Services during his first year. It ended at around 5 p.m. and students interested in becoming involved in the law school's legal aid clinic could sign up, based on a first-come, first-served basis (since replaced with an interview system), early the following morning.

"The lineup started five minutes before the information session even ended and people stayed through the night in the rain," says Ha-Redeye.

"I arrived at 3:30 a.m., and I was too late."

So, he created his own opportunities to augment his studies.

Ha-Redeye established the Western Law Review Association, a group dedicated to publishing a student-run law review at UWO, and was active in various groups on campus, including as president of

the Black Law Students' Association, Health Law Club and Mature Students Club.

But his activities are best known in cyberspace.

Even before being called to the Ontario Bar, Ha-Redeye has made an impression on the profession with his blogs and postings on legal issues.

He runs his own website (www.omarha-redeye.com), as well as a blog and podcast on Canadian law schools (lawiscool.com) and regularly contributes to the legal weblog, Slaw.ca.

Now, he's on the path to practising law.

Currently, a student-at-law at Fireman Steinmetz, a litigation boutique in Toronto, Ha-Redeye is also one of two articling student ambassadors from Toronto that serve on the executive of the Ontario Bar Association's student division.

In that role, he brings forward students' interests and concerns for both the profession and the academy.

Some are practical, such as pressing the Ontario Bar Association to reinstate free membership for Ontario law students, which will give them access to events in which they could network with practising lawyers and inevitably encourage them to join the organization following their own call to the Bar.

Other issues are more far-reaching. While at UWO, Ha-Redeye was struck by how many students were affected by depression and loneliness.

"Quite often when people are studying, they're doing it themselves. It's not a very collaborative environment and you don't have as much interaction with others."

Ha-Redeye explains that compounding this silo effect are the enormous demands placed on students by their workload and anxiety over finding an articling position—and ultimately a job—at a law firm following graduation.

As a result, he would like to see law schools provide better social supports to students to ensure they maintain proper work-life balance.

Ha-Redeye says he survived school-related stress by recognizing his own limitations and carving out his own path.

Knowing he couldn't compete with younger colleagues with the stamina to endure endless hours in the library, he spent his first 18 months of law school working part-time at former Ontario Trial Lawyers Association president Barbara Legate's London, Ont.-based medical malpractice and personal injury firm to gain experience.

Legate is also certified as a specialist in civil litigation by the Law Society of Upper Canada—a credential Ha-Redeye might like to have one day.

At UWO, Ha-Redeye won or was a finalist in more than half of the law school's upper-year appellate moot courts—an unprecedented accomplishment, he was told by his professors.

"With that record, I can approach a litigation firm as someone who can research issues, identify what the important points are and articulate them in a high-pressure situation before a judge," boasts Ha-Redeye.

"There's definitely a litigator within me without question."