



Western  Law

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024 - 2029



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples (e.g. First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

INTRODUCTION

We are living through a time of profound disruption – in our society, in our profession, and in higher education. The COVID pandemic tested society’s trust in information, the limits of government authority in times of emergency, and our sense of empathy and social cohesion. We have also been witnessing the fragility of democracy and associated ideals like freedom of the press, equal rights and opportunities, and the independence of the judiciary.

At the same time, the pandemic highlighted underlying concerns with our legal system, including inefficiencies, delays, and unequal access to justice. While promising legal technologies have emerged, their integration into the justice system and other legal institutions must be critically designed and assessed.

The need for highly educated lawyers has never been greater.

Lawyers play a critical role in upholding the democratic values and the processes that ensure fairness and consistency in public decision-making. Law’s unique system of reasoning requires that opposing arguments be considered, evidence be tested, and that decisions be justified in accordance with precedent and established principles. Legal reasoning is not only relevant within the adversarial system, but also in policy-making, legislative drafting, and foreign affairs.

In the coming years, lawyers will also play an important and ongoing role in the process of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, the promotion of equity and diversity, the ethical use of artificial intelligence, and other global challenges.

Indeed, law is the reigning discourse of our time. Our society frames some of its most pressing issues – whether climate change, international conflict, the pursuit of equality, or the misconduct of public officials and corporate actors – through the lens of litigation, rights, and legal accountability.

Western Law is well-positioned to seize this opportunity and to educate the lawyers and leaders of tomorrow.

Western Law emerged from the pandemic having strengthened our distinctive sense of community and affirmed our dedication to teaching excellence. We had Canada’s most extensive in-person programming in 2020-21, as we prioritized the development of legal reasoning and critical thinking skills, which are best honed through real-time, personal engagement with professors and peers. Our ongoing commitment to small-group teaching also helps our students to build personal relationships that will sustain them throughout law school and into their legal careers.

Beyond our JD program, Western Law has a vision to expand legal literacy across the spectrum of both formal students and the general public. Broader and better knowledge of the law is an important component of an informed and engaged citizenry, capable of discerning truth and participating in constructive, respectful debate.

Equally important, Western Law is home to a growing community of scholars who analyze questions of law and justice from an increasing diversity of perspectives and methodologies. Our faculty make substantial and influential contributions to the legal and scholarly communities, through doctrinal analysis, theory, criticism, and advocacy. We are building our reputation as a national leader in intellectual inquiry – a reputation that will further attract the highest quality faculty, visitors, and graduate students from around the world.

In the plan that follows, we set out five strategic priorities through which we will build on our longstanding and emerging strengths, educating lawyers who will become leaders in the profession and in broader society, and establishing Western Law as a centre of legal knowledge and scholarly exchange at the university and in our local, national, and global communities.

Providing A Transformational Learning Experience



Legal education changes the way that students think, reason, approach problems, articulate and support their arguments, and view the world around them. At Western Law, we aim to amplify this transformational learning experience by prioritizing small-group learning, involving students in research, and providing experiential and international learning opportunities.

The Small Group Program

The first-year Small Group Program remains at the core of the Western Law experience. This program allows students to learn foundational legal reasoning skills in a comfortable environment, and to receive personalized feedback on their written work. The Small Group Program also helps students to develop strong peer relationships from the first day of class – relationships that last throughout law school and, often, well into practice.

The professors in the Small Group Program serve not only as classroom instructors, but also as academic and professional mentors.

Future-Proofing our Students

Western Law seeks to educate lawyers who will be able to adapt to disruption and respond creatively as the ground constantly shifts beneath them.

As legal technology becomes more sophisticated and legal work gets outsourced, modern lawyers will need to demonstrate the added value that only highly-educated human beings can provide. This will include an ability to critically evaluate information, develop sophisticated and context-specific arguments, and communicate in a persuasive manner to a variety of audiences. It will also include interpersonal and leadership skills, empathy, and intercultural competency.

This is why we will continue to emphasize and build foundational skills in legal research, reasoning, writing, and problem-solving, developed in a challenging but supportive learning environment. We help our students understand the variety of ways that legal problems can be approached and analyzed, and allow them to develop a depth of knowledge in their areas of interest. We also provide them with ample opportunities to apply their skills in clinics, complex simulations, advocacy competitions, and applied research projects.

Western Law's JD program thus educates students to succeed in a wide range of careers, to become engaged democratic citizens, and to take on leadership roles in the profession, community, and world stage.

In addition, we know that the current generation of law students will be responsible for a more meaningful and comprehensive integration of Indigenous legal orders into our Constitutional structure and legal institutions. We are committed to infusing Indigenous legal principles and traditions across our curriculum, including through our relationships with local First Nations communities.

Teaching: A Top Priority

We make teaching a top priority in our JD program. Our compulsory courses are taught by full-time faculty members, many of whom have authored the texts used by students at Western and across the country. Several of our faculty have won university-wide teaching awards, and we regularly collaborate to share effective techniques, develop innovative exercises and assessments, and find meaningful ways for our students to engage with the law.

At Western Law, we believe that research and instruction are complementary: better research fosters better teaching and supervision, and better teaching and supervision foster new and innovative research.

As we enhance the depth and breadth of our curriculum, we will make it a priority for full-time faculty to teach courses within their main areas of research expertise. This will allow both faculty and students to benefit from the expertise of the Western Law research community.



Professor Valerie Oosterveld
WESTERN RESEARCH CHAIR
IN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL
JUSTICE 2024-2028

Professor Joanna Langille
MARILYN ROBINSON
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
IN TEACHING 2023



Professor Wade Wright
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
FACULTY SCHOLAR 2023-2025

Facilitating Learning through Better Infrastructure

To maximize the transformational experience of our legal education, we need to build learning spaces that are more modern, flexible, and accessible. Teaching innovations, including simulations and group work, require space that facilitates collaboration and creativity. In addition, the learning of Indigenous legal traditions requires space that is more appropriate for gathering and speaking than what the conventional linear and hierarchical law school classroom provides.



OUR COMMITMENTS

- Maintaining the small group program at the heart of the first-year experience
- Helping students build foundational skills in legal research, writing, and problem-solving
- Emphasizing the importance of building interpersonal and leadership skills, empathy, and intercultural competency
- Infusing Indigenous legal traditions across our curriculum
- Providing opportunities for students to apply their skills in clinics, complex simulations, advocacy competitions, and applied research projects
- Prioritizing the complementarity of teaching and research
- Building more accessible, modern, and flexible teaching and learning spaces

Empowering Students to Expand their Horizons



In addition to our rich and rigorous academic program, we are building experiential opportunities, international programs, and the supportive environment that will empower students to chart their own paths – whether in law, business, politics, diplomacy, the arts, or other pursuits. We encourage students to use their time in law school to explore their interests, build their skills, and discover how their strengths align with their career and life goals. We mentor them in their development and equip them to create their own sense of professional identity.

Broadening Career Horizons

Our Careers and Professional Development Office (CPDO) prides itself on its counselling and mentorship programs, its diverse employer network, and the consistently high articling placement rate of our graduating students.

The CPDO helps students to explore career opportunities across Canada, in full-service firms, boutiques, and government offices. We are also building new programs to empower our students in their career planning.

Beginning with the 2023-24 entering class, our Summer After 1L (SA1L) program will provide a minimum of 10 weeks of meaningful, paid legal experience to all JD students in the summer after their first year. This will include clinical positions, research assistantships, and internships with local and international agencies that provide social justice advocacy, serve equity-deserving groups, and tackle the leading issues of our time. SA1L will not only help to build students' skills and confidence, but also expose them to a range of careers in law and the many ways that they can use their legal education to contribute to society.

We will build on recent success to enhance our judicial clerkship program, increasing both the number and quality of applications to courts across the country. Our target is to have at least one graduate placed at the Supreme Court of Canada annually, as well as several at provincial and federal appellate courts. Judicial clerkships provide a unique perspective on advocacy and judicial decision-making, and allow recent graduates to make critical contributions on some of the most pressing issues facing modern society.

Exploring the World

Western Law has a robust international program, with 16 exchange partnerships across four continents, and nearly 20% of third-year students participating in a term of study abroad. These programs build students' cultural competency, global outlook, and knowledge of different legal systems.

We also offer a range of international internship opportunities each summer, placing students at UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, sporting bodies, and multinationals. We will build this program to include a greater variety of internships, allowing students to make important contributions to global justice, development and humanitarianism.

Moving forward, we will build additional partnerships with academic institutions and other agencies so that students can enhance their learning in areas of international law, governance, and relations. This will help prepare them for careers in diplomacy, trade, and international justice.

Helping Students to Focus on their Studies

Studying law requires focus and a clear, open mind. We want students to be able to apply their best selves to their legal education, research, and co-curricular opportunities.

Western Law has been a leader in supporting student wellness. Since 2018, we have had a full-time, embedded Wellness Counsellor, who provides individual counselling and group programming to our students. We also offer mindfulness training and peer supports, so that students can learn to navigate the challenges that they will encounter in law school and in their personal and professional lives.

We will continue to prioritize financial aid, in order to promote the accessibility of legal education, allow our students to focus on their studies, and ensure that their career choices are based on their interests, not their finances.

Providing Wrap-around Student Services

We aim to provide our students with high-quality, wrap-around services that help them to navigate every aspect of their education. We plan to build a student services hub to bring all of these services together in one welcoming space, so that students know exactly where to turn.





OUR COMMITMENTS

- Supporting and enriching the Summer After 1L (SA1L) program, which guarantees meaningful, paid legal experience to all first-year students
- Enhancing our judicial clerkship program, increasing the number and quality of student applications
- Building new international partnerships and global learning opportunities with a focus on supporting global justice, development, and humanitarianism
- Supporting student wellness through individual counselling, mindfulness programming, and peer supports
- Increasing financial aid
- Creating a new student services hub to provide wrap-around supports

Expanding the Spectrum of Learning Opportunities in Law



Enhancing our Graduate Programs

Since we first introduced our LLM program in 2006, Western Law’s research-based graduate programs (LLM, MSL and PhD) have provided highly-customized learning experiences for a variety of students, including legal practitioners, aspiring academics, and graduates from other disciplines.

We plan to enhance our suite of graduate programs to provide new, specialized learning opportunities for those who wish to deepen their knowledge of particular fields, build their professional or academic credentials, or qualify for the licensing process in Canada. These programs will be designed with the students’ academic, career, and personal circumstances in mind, such as through intensive or online offerings, mentorship programs, and access to world-class faculty.

Building Legal Literacy

In addition to our traditional JD and graduate programming, we plan to provide educational opportunities in law to a broader range of learners, including undergraduate students, working professionals, and the general public. This will help to build legal literacy across a broader portion of the population, thereby building a more informed, engaged citizenry. It will also position Western Law as a hub of law-related education at Western and in the community.

Building on the success of our existing undergraduate courses, we will develop new undergraduate educational offerings and qualifications. This will allow undergraduate students at Western to expand their knowledge of law and complement their studies in other



disciplines, and will increase Law's profile across Western's campus.

We will also develop Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs for lawyers and other professionals. In particular, we will explore opportunities to provide programming in law for medical and healthcare professionals, taking advantage of London's position at the heart of healthcare in southwestern Ontario.

Finally, we will find new opportunities to offer Public Legal Education in London and the surrounding community. By educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities, we will help promote access to justice and fairer processes for those interacting with the justice system and administrative agencies. We will also offer lectures on current legal issues in the public eye, helping to spur the informed debate that is vital to a healthy democracy.

OUR COMMITMENTS

- Developing new, specialized graduate learning opportunities
- Expanding our undergraduate educational offerings and qualifications
- Developing Continuing Professional Development programs for lawyers and other professionals
- Offering public legal education in London and the surrounding community

Accelerating our Research Trajectory



Western Law is a faculty on the rise. Since 2018, we have engaged in significant faculty renewal and growth, appointing over one-third of our current professoriate. This included our first Canada Research Chair as well as endowed Chairs in Corporate Governance and in Mining Law and Finance. We have appointed new faculty from diverse international backgrounds with a wide range of research expertise and approaches to studying the law. This has created a culture of robust scholarly exchange and collaboration, inspiring excellence and mutual success.

Through strategic investments, collaborations, and outreach, we will accelerate our research trajectory so that our faculty are considered – individually and collectively – to be national and international leaders who influence scholarly debates, professional practice, jurisprudence, and policy-making.

Investing in our Scholars

Western Law seeks to cultivate a research environment that values, promotes, and rewards high-quality research and academic inquiry. We will provide enhanced research supports to our faculty, including guaranteed student researchers through the SA1L Program, stable financial support for those who actively apply for Tri-Council funding, and the ongoing support of our Research Officer. In turn, this will help us to increase our success in securing external funding from the Tri-Councils and other agencies that support legal and interdisciplinary research.

We will celebrate our research success by nominating faculty at all levels for awards and recognition – whether for early and mid-career researchers or for lifetime achievement.

Indeed, a number of our faculty have won prestigious research awards in recent years. We will also prioritize fundraising for research chairs and professorships, which will help us to attract leading scholars to Western.

Beyond our professors, Western Law has a strong tradition of involving students in research, thereby providing them with advanced skills, the opportunity to make an impact on pressing legal issues, and a lifelong sense of intellectual curiosity. We will continue to fund student researchers and, where possible, develop research teams to advance special projects.

We will develop a more robust postdoctoral program and regular opportunities to host visiting professors, both for emerging and more prominent researchers.

Building Collaborations

Since our last Strategic Plan, we have increased the number of Research Groups in the Faculty, and most colleagues now participate in at least one such collaboration. These groups provide opportunities to host guest speakers and workshops, share current research, and build Western Law's profile at Western and in the broader legal academy. We will continue to support the creation of new research groups, as well as collaborations with other disciplines at Western and other institutions.

We will create at least one Research Centre in an area of strategic focus and strength. A Centre will bring together scholars from across Western and other institutions, eminent legal practitioners and judges, and graduate students. It will provide a forum for the creation and dissemination of new knowledge, and will allow us to amplify our influence on the law, scholarship, policy, and practice. A Research Centre will also provide a

physical focal point in the Faculty where participants can collaborate and build scholarly community.

Research Strengths

We believe that faculty perform their best when they can pursue the research questions and modes of scholarly expression that most inspire them. Thus, our professors engage with matters of legal theory, doctrine, interpretation, criticism, policy, and social justice, on issues that cut across local, national, and international boundaries. Indeed, the diversity of our scholarship encourages us all to be more agile and inquisitive in our work.

Our multiplicity of perspectives also allows us to tackle some of the most important issues facing modern society – issues where the law provides the all-important framework for human interaction, ingenuity, and flourishing, such as:



Expanding our Influence

Western Law seeks to become an international research destination both for people – faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and students – and for the creation, development, and exchange of ideas. Through workshops, conferences, and public lectures, and through postdoctoral fellowships, visiting professorships, and speakers' series, we seek to bring the world to Western Law and bring Western Law to the world.

We will also explore the potential for research partnerships with other academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other associations. This will help us to identify pressing issues facing law and society and amplify our influence in important debates.

To support our priority of expanding legal literacy, we will increase our leadership of seminars and online events in response to current affairs. This will allow our researchers to share their expertise with a broader audience, expand Western Law's

influence in public conversations, and provide opportunities to develop new research collaborations.

Through all of these activities, we aim to expand the influence of Western Law on the academy, policy- and law-making, and public commentary.



OUR COMMITMENTS

- Providing enhanced research supports to faculty
- Nominating faculty at all levels for awards
- Fundraising for research chairs, professorships, and visiting scholars
- Involving and funding students in research projects
- Developing more robust programs for postdoctoral scholars and visiting professors
- Supporting new research collaborations, including at least one new research centre
- Exploring new external research partnerships
- Increasing our leadership and visibility in public debates through seminars and online events

Cultivating Community



A Defining Feature

Our faculty, staff and students form a tight-knit community that is central to the Western Law experience, as any alumnus will attest. Our small size fosters an atmosphere of engagement, peer support, and mentorship, while also allowing us to maintain high admissions standards and a high articling placement rate. For these reasons, we are committed to maintaining a relatively small JD program.

Most of our students come from outside of London, and their law school classmates are their most important social supports during their studies. The law building, in turn, is a critical gathering space for their academic and recreational activities. It is important for this building to be modernized in the near future to provide a more accessible, welcoming, inclusive, and student-focused atmosphere.

Enhancing Diversity and Belonging

We are continuing to increase the diversity of backgrounds and lived experiences of everyone in our community – students, faculty and staff. We want to ensure that every member of our community feels valued and respected, and that they have the supportive relationships and services they need to thrive at Western Law.

Led by our new Assistant Dean, EDID and our EDID Committee, and in consultation with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, the EDID Central Working Group, and the wide range of student associations that represent diversity, we will identify priorities and develop an EDID action plan for Western Law. This will include educational opportunities for the entire Western Law community, improved accessibility for those with disabilities, new curricular options, and enhanced student supports.

We will ensure that sufficient financial and human resources are dedicated to this important work.

By tracking our applications and admissions data, we will identify the communities in which we need to enhance our recruitment efforts and improve pathways to legal education.

We will host more events to celebrate diversity at Western Law and educate each other about the rich contributions that different communities can make to our law school, profession, and society. This will help to build a stronger sense of belonging, allyship, and mutual support. It will also help students to build cultural competency, provide barrier-free services, and better understand the increasingly diverse society they will serve when they enter legal practice.

Contributing to our Community

Western Law also gives back to London and the surrounding region in a variety of ways, including our five legal clinics and Pro Bono Students Canada program. We are committed to moving relevant clinic services to Western's downtown location. A downtown presence will also allow Western Law to provide public legal education and continuing professional development programs in a location that is more convenient and attractive to their audiences.

We will also develop our outreach with local First Nations communities as a means of building opportunities for mutual learning and support, and of instilling a spirit of respect and reconciliation among our graduates.

CLASS PROFILE

56%

female

50%

racialized

36%

bilingual

9%

multi-lingual

13%

first generation
to attend a
post-secondary
institution

21%

born outside of
Canada

7%

identified as members
of the 2SLGBTQIA+
community

20%

identified as having
an accessibility need

*based on class of 2026 profile. Results exclude "prefer not to answer" responses and values < 1%.

Engaging our Alumni

We are proud that Western Law alumni are such outstanding leaders in the legal profession, public services, business, the arts, and other pursuits. We are also grateful that our alumni support the next generation of Western Law students by acting as guest speakers, adjunct professors, moot coaches and judges, and mentors.

We have recently established two new alumni advisory groups, the Western Law Advisory Council (2021) and Young Alumni Advisory Council (2022), to help us enhance our relationship to the profession, implement our strategic priorities, and promote Western Law and our students across their networks.

Through their generosity, our alumni and other donors support our academic mission and student success. To take a recent example, we were amazed with the response to the Student Support Bursary, introduced during the pandemic, which allows us to

provide ongoing support to students who are in financial need.

Moving forward, programs like SA1L will allow our alumni to provide integrated support by funding and facilitating placements for our first-year students, exposing them to the wide range of opportunities that a legal education affords.



OUR COMMITMENTS

- Maintaining a relatively small JD program to ensure continuity of individualized student support
- Modernizing our physical space to provide a more accessible, welcoming, inclusive and student-focused atmosphere
- Continuing to increase the diversity of background and lived experience of all members of the Western Law community – students, faculty, and staff
- Developing an EDID action plan and providing the resources for its successful implementation
- Celebrating diversity at Western Law through events that include diverse speakers and are focused on the intersections of EDID and the law
- Continuing to integrate clinic services with London community
- Developing mutually beneficial relationships with local First Nations communities
- Engaging our alumni in our academic, co-curricular and professional programming, students supports, networks, and philanthropy

CONCLUSION

This is a critical time for legal education. Recent developments in law and society have highlighted the need for highly-educated, creative, and empathetic lawyers who can tackle challenges like artificial intelligence, financial innovation, access to justice, climate change, and the erosion of democracy.

Western Law is well-positioned to educate the next generation of leaders in the profession. Our faculty offer a diversity of scholarly and methodological perspectives for studying the law, and our commitment to small, in-person and interactive classes means that our students can learn in a stimulating and supportive atmosphere. We also provide students with ample opportunities to apply their classroom learning through simulations, legal clinics, research projects, and work-integrated learning, both in our community and around the world.

Western Law's faculty form a dynamic, collaborative scholarly community with a national and, increasingly, international reputation for influential research.

We can capitalize on this reputation by recruiting more full-time faculty, pre-eminent visitors, and postdoctoral scholars, and by developing research centres in our established and emerging areas of strength.

Western Law aims to be a centre of legal knowledge and scholarship not only for future lawyers and the legal academy, but also for the broader university, for legal and other professionals, and for the public at large. As society increasingly turns to law as the framework for pressing issues, Western Law will be integral to the development of an informed democratic citizenry and to critical public discourse.

With both a modernized building and a downtown location, we will be able to provide world-class education and student supports to JD students, recruit leading scholars, and provide public legal education and clinical services in the heart of our community. Western Law will thus contribute to a richer understanding and of law and justice on both a local and global scale.



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**Western
Law**