



**Law**  
**Final Assessment Report &  
Implementation Plan**  
**March 2025**

<b>Faculty / Affiliated University College</b>	Law	
<b>Degrees Offered</b>	LL.M., MSL, Ph.D.	
<b>Date of Last Review</b>	2015-2016	
<b>Approved Fields</b>	No fields in the program.	
<b>External Reviewers</b>	Prof. Benjamin Berger Osgoode Hall Law School York University	Assoc. Dean Heather Heavin College of Law University of Saskatchewan
<b>Internal Reviewers</b>	Dr. Cameron Anderson, Graduate Chair, Political Science	Julia Brott Ph.D. Candidate, Anatomy and Cell Biology
<b>Date of Site Visit</b>	September 19 & 20, 2024	
<b>Date Review Report Received</b>	December 13, 2024	
<b>Date Program/Faculty Response Received</b>	Program/Dean – February 25, 2025	
<b>Evaluation</b>	Good Quality	
<b>Approval Dates</b>	SUPR-G: June 23, 2025 ACA: September 9, 2025 Senate (for information): September 19, 2025	
<b>Year of Next Review</b>	Year of next cyclical review: 2031-2032	
<b>Progress Report</b>	June 2027	

### **Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process**

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the cyclical review, internal responses, and assessment and evaluation of the graduate programs in Law housed in Western's Faculty of Law.

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's self-study brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response from the Program and Decanal Office, Faculty of Law

This FAR identifies the strengths of the program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Graduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-G) and ACA, then for information to Senate and to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance. Subsequently, it is publicly accessible on Western's IQAP website. The FAR is the only document from the graduate cyclical review process that is made public; all other documents are confidential to the Faculty of Law, the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies (SGPS), and SUPR-G.

## **Executive Summary**

The Faculty's first graduate program (the LLM) was created in 2004, with the Master of Studies in Law (MSL) initiated in 2010 and the doctoral program (PhD) in 2013. The LLM program is aimed at candidates who have an undergraduate law degree (LLB or JD) who wish to learn more about a particular area of legal study at a graduate level. The MSL program is intended for candidates who have a degree in a discipline other than law. Both the LLM and MSL have a project-based and a thesis-based option. The PhD program is aimed at those who wish to pursue academic careers in law.

The Faculty currently aims to enroll approximately 8-10 new Master's students and 3-4 new PhD students per year, for a cohort of about 25-30 graduate students at any given time. With the planned development of a course-based LLM, total Masters enrolment from 2025-2026 onward is projected to be 35-40.

To inform the self-study, the Faculty's Graduate Program Committee began review deliberations regarding each graduate offering in 2022. Strengths and weaknesses of each program were discussed at a Faculty retreat in June 2023. Given the small size of the graduate student population, the Faculty opted to solicit student feedback by open-ended email query.

The external reviewers shared a positive assessment of the Graduate Law Program offerings. They offer eight recommendations with considerations for further enhancement.

## **Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program**

- Provision of funding for both thesis-based and project-based LLMs and MSLs, which is not typical of universities.
  - o Offer competitive funding for international graduate students.
- MSL students are from diverse disciplines whereas LLM students have a grounding in legal education; having both MSL and LLM students work together enriches the program.
- Project-based LLM is practice-oriented as it enables students to hone legal practice skills and acquire practice-relevant information.
- Western Law views its small size as a strength, as it creates a close sense of community and fosters interaction among faculty and students.
  - o Students have unparalleled access to the time and expertise of their supervisory team and instructors.
- Students have the opportunity to tailor their courses of study to their academic and/or professional goals through: 1) many elective options; 2) a bespoke experience and the opportunity to work one-on-one with the instructor to shape a learning outcome in accordance with their research agenda and needs.
- The Transitional Justice Collaborative Graduate Specialization attracts approximately one student per year to earn this additional qualification alongside their PhD, LLM, or MSL degree.

### **Areas of Improvement Identified and Discussed by the Program**

- Explore: 1) replacing the thesis-based LLM and MSL with project-based versions; 2) generating revenue by eliminating the project-based LLM and offering a course-based LLM, or other postgraduate program, to foreign-trained lawyers.
- Improve recruitment of students with more diverse research interests and implement measures to better match students with supervisors.
- Enhance the curriculum by: 1) combining 9001 and 9002 into a single course, which would address concerns regarding course content overlap and redundancy; 2) replacing 9003 with a multi-day “Law Graduate Research Conference” which will give students and faculty an opportunity to present their research.
- Establish a more formalized system to remain in contact with alumni as careers progress. Examining the possibility of developing and administering a dedicated exit survey for each program.

### **Review Process**

As part of the external review, the review committee, comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and a graduate student reviewer, were provided with Volume I and II of the self-study brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met in-person over two days with the:

- Vice-Provost of the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost of the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies
- Acting Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty
- Dean, Faculty of Law
- Associate Dean, Faculty of Law
- Acting Associate Chief Librarian
- Acting Director, John & Dotsa Bitove Family Law Library
- Graduate Program and Department Staff
- Program Faculty Members
- Graduate Students

Following the site visit, the external reviewers submitted a comprehensive report of their findings which was sent to the Program and Dean for review and response. Formative documents, including Volumes I and II of the Self-Study, the External Report, and the Program/Deanal response form the basis of this Final Assessment Report (FAR) of the Law Graduate Program. The FAR is collated and submitted to the SGPS and to SUPR-G by the Internal Reviewer with the support of the Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement.

## **Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report**

External reviewers shared that they were *“impressed with the quality of the graduate degree programs at Western Law. The programs are well-crafted from a structural perspective, have strong outcomes in terms of completion and (it seems) professional outcomes, and have the ongoing potential to allow Western Law to occupy an important and distinctive place on the terrain of graduate law programs offered in Canada.”*

### **Strengths of the Program**

- Western Law has excellent faculty, including very strong and promising early career academics. The breadth and depth of scholarly ability is impressive.
  - o Western Law has made strides in growing and deepening its faculty research excellence in areas beyond those in which it has a well-earned and long-established reputation for strength.
- Option to switch to part-time or take a leave of absence contributes to strong completion rates.
- Curriculum is enhanced by: 1) a large number of core courses which support academic and professional development; 2) the opportunity to develop strong social and professional relationships within a cohort; 3) varied elective and subject-specific courses which ensure that students can keep current with areas of law relevant to their thesis; and 4) class activities that stimulate engagement and develop communication skills.
- LLM theses and PhD dissertations host high quality written work on a diverse range of topics of importance to the development of domestic and international law.
- Good gender representation among students enrolled in the LLM, MSL and PhD programs.
- In Canadian law, greater attention has been brought to Indigenous ways of knowing, approaches to scholarship and perspectives.
- Overall, strong completion rates and appropriate time in program.

### **Prospective Improvements for the Program to Consider**

- Students expressed the need for: 1) greater professional development opportunities and further engagement with faculty members through additional research talks, participation in faculty seminars and/or teaching-development opportunities; 2) addressing the sense of scholarly and social community within the graduate student body and, particularly, between graduate students and faculty; and 3) re-examining JD electives that are unappealing and unproductive to PhD and thesis-based LLM students. (*Associated with Recommendations #2 & #3*)

- Develop and implement a robust recruitment strategy to enhance the reach, breadth, and quality of the graduate student body at Western Law. (*Associated with Recommendation #1*)
- Review distribution of graduate student supervision; and, explore ways of 1) recognizing and supporting supervisory activities; 2) incorporating supervision into workload expectations; and 3) providing teaching credit for supervision. (*Associated with Recommendation #4*)
- Assess whether provisions for a slightly longer term for the LLM might be attractive. (*Associated with Recommendation #5*)
- Enhance communication to: 1) students about funding package details as soon as possible; 2) keep students and faculty informed about ongoing program changes. (*Associated with Recommendation #6 & #8*)

### Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
<b>Recommendation #1:</b> Develop a Student Recruitment Strategy	<b>Program/Dean:</b> The program has engaged with the SGPS to help review the recruitment strategy, specifically with respect to website design, as this strategy has been closely tied to JD student recruitment efforts. Changes to the program's website will enable easier contact with prospective applicants to share targeted admissions information. Given the restriction on international enrolment, more targeted recruitment activities would be needed—focusing on Canadian law schools as well as Canadians enrolled in LLB programs abroad. There are a number of these programs in Australia and the UK that intentionally attract Canadian students. The program will utilize academic networks to reach out to colleagues at these domestic and international institutions to encourage their strongest students to apply. Specifically, the program is hoping to attract more students in areas of strength that are currently under-represented in the graduate program: private law, Canadian constitutional law, and legal theory.
<b>Recommendation #2:</b> Promote Graduate Student Engagement and Community	<b>Program/Dean:</b> Graduate students are integrated in all faculty academic events, even the faculty workshop. The program will discuss with the convenors of the faculty workshop whether a more formalized procedure for including graduate students should be implemented. During Graduate Student Welcome Day the Faculty will make sure to emphasize how welcome graduate students are at the many academic talks as it seems not be to communicated effectively. The Law Graduate Program Coordinator will send out specific invitations to our graduate student community to encourage them to attend faculty research events. Faculty colleagues will be encouraged to attend graduate student research events.  The Faculty has largely left the social aspects of the graduate student body up to the Graduate Law Student Association, however, will aim to be more proactive in supporting social events. For instance, exploring a faculty-funded Graduate Law Student-Faculty reception at the Law Faculty for the incoming and current graduate students this coming September.

<p><b>Recommendation #3:</b> Retain Graduate Courses (9001/9002) and Reconsider JD Electives in PhD and LLM (Thesis)</p>	<p><b>Program/Dean:</b> With respect to the merging of 9001 and 9002, the program believes that these courses could be successfully integrated into a single course; and, are considering implementing this change in September 2025 or September 2026. There are two main reasons for this: (1) limited teaching resources to support these courses; (2) significant degree of overlap between the courses.</p> <p>The program does not currently have a sufficiently large graduate class to offer additional graduate level electives. Currently, graduate students in the Law Faculty are permitted to enroll in graduate and undergraduate courses outside the Faculty of Law on Main Campus provided they receive their supervisor's permission, the Associate Dean (Graduate) of Law's permission and the grad chair or equivalent's permission in the course's program. The program will work to communicate this more effectively.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #4:</b> Encourage a Culture of Supervision</p>	<p><b>Program/Dean:</b> The program is working with the Communications Officer to make sure all faculty bios contain information regarding whether a faculty member is seeking graduate students and, if so, in what disciplines. Through the Research Officer, the program is also encouraging faculty members to include requests for graduate student funding in their external grant applications.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #5:</b> Retain the LLM (Thesis)</p>	<p><b>Program/Dean:</b> The program is taking the retention of the LLM-T and the potential to extend its timeline under advisement. This will be part of a larger conversation that will include all relevant faculty members.</p>



<p><b>Recommendation #6:</b> Address Graduate Student Funding</p>	<p><b>Program/Dean:</b> In addition to maintaining the current process of clearly indicating the funding amount in the welcome letter, communication regarding graduate funding will be made clearer by emphasizing that funding details will be made available by a certain date provided that all outstanding SGPS requirements have been met. In the past, because SGPS requirements had not yet been met, funding details were not available, leaving students confused. This past summer as well, due to the ratification of a new GTA collective agreement, details were necessarily shared later.</p> <p>With respect to the amount of funding, unfortunately, given the budget model of the University and the current times of financial austerity, the program is unable to offer more to help support graduate students. Welcome letters clearly communicate that the financial assistance offered is not meant to be a replacement of full-time employment income.</p> <p>Faculty are strongly encouraged to include requests for funding graduate students in their SSHRC and other external grants.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #7:</b> Develop Opportunities for Teaching/ Training Experience</p>	<p><b>Program/Dean:</b> Doctoral students who are ABD are welcome to propose courses to the Associate Dean Academic. Teaching of these proposed courses is not guaranteed, however. All full-time doctoral students within their funding window are also guaranteed a GTA position within the faculty. Notably, this assignment entails grading and not teaching students directly. The Law Faculty is considering investing more teaching resources into undergraduate teaching – a suite of pre-law courses at the undergrad level. The program believes that this could be a profitable site for graduate student teaching (e.g., leading tutorials).</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #8:</b> Refresh Policy Documents and Program Communication</p>	<p><b>Program/Dean:</b> The program will be creating a universal Law Graduate Program handbook that will be emailed to students and faculty and will be made available on our website.</p>

### Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Graduate Program Chair, in consultation with the SGPS and the Dean of the Faculty is responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
<b>Recommendation #1:</b> Develop a Student Recruitment Strategy	Review the graduate program recruitment strategy with the SGPS, specifically with respect to website design. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the program's website to enable easier contact with prospective applicants and share targeted admissions information.</li> <li>• Use connections within academic networks to enhance recruitment efforts.</li> <li>• Emphasize areas of strength that are currently under-represented in the graduate program: private law, Canadian constitutional law, and legal theory.</li> </ul>	Associate Dean Graduate Studies	By December 2025
<b>Recommendation #2:</b> Promote Graduate Student Engagement and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize how welcome graduate students are at the many academic talks during the Graduate Student Welcome day and other moments of connection with students.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Send out specific invitations to the student community to encourage them to attend faculty research events.</li> <li>○ Encourage Faculty to attend graduate student research events.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Discuss with the convenors of the faculty workshop whether a more formalized procedure for including graduate students could be implemented.</li> <li>• Liaise with Graduate Law Student Association to proactively support student social events.</li> </ul>	Associate Dean Graduate Studies  Graduate Program Coordinator	By September 2025

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine the possibility of a faculty-funded Graduate Law Student-Faculty reception for the incoming and current graduate students for September.</li> </ul>		
<b>Recommendation #3:</b> Retain Graduate Courses (9001/9002) and Reconsider JD Electives in PhD and LLM (Thesis)	<p>The Graduate Programs Committee will consult with faculty and graduate students to explore the potential merger of 9001 and 9002.</p> <p>In the new graduate student handbook, clearly outline opportunities to take courses outside of the Faculty of Law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore whether PhD students can increase the number of external-to-Law courses.</li> </ul>	Associate Dean Graduate Studies	By December 2025
<b>Recommendation #4:</b> Encourage a Culture of Supervision	<p>The Communications Officer will ensure all faculty member bios contain information regarding whether a faculty member is seeking graduate students and specify disciplines.</p> <p>The Research Officer will communicate to faculty members that requests for graduate student funding should be included in their external grant applications.</p>	Associate Dean Graduate Studies  Communications Officer  Research Officer	By December 2025
<b>Recommendation #5:</b> Retain the LLM (Thesis)	At an upcoming Faculty Retreat, discuss the retention of the LLM-T and the potential of extending its timeline or offering students a choice of a 1 year or 18 month / 2 year LLM.	Associate Dean Graduate Studies	By December 2025
<b>Recommendation #6:</b> Address Graduate Student Funding	<p>Clarify communication regarding graduate funding by emphasizing that funding details will be made available by a certain date provided that all outstanding SGPS requirements have been met.</p> <p>Enhance communication to faculty members regarding the need to include requests for funding graduate students in their SSHRC and other external grants.</p>	Associate Dean Graduate Studies	By June 2025

<b>Recommendation #7:</b> Develop Opportunities for Teaching/Training Experience	Communicate with doctoral students, who are ABD, the existing option of proposing courses to the Associate Dean Academic.  Explore the option of expanding teaching resources at the undergraduate level —a suite of pre-law courses. This is an opportunity for graduate students to gain teaching experience.	Associate Dean Graduate Studies	By December 2025
<b>Recommendation #8:</b> Refresh Policy Documents and Program Communication	Develop a universal law graduate program handbook that will be emailed to students and faculty and posted on the program's website.	Associate Dean Graduate Studies	By September 2025