

# Exposure to Law in Practice: Introductory Lawyering Skills

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# Course context and content

# context of the ILS Course

- Osgoode Hall Law School JD (Juris Doctor) program
- Students (generally) enter the JD program with (at least) an undergraduate degree.
- The ILS course is one of the fundamental first-year courses. It is intended to begin their development of a number of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada skills competency requirements

# (Selected) course objectives

By end of this course, students should be able to:

- recognize circumstances that give rise to **ethical questions and issues of professionalism**, and demonstrate an ability to assess appropriate responses to these issues;
- understand the importance of **developing and maintaining trust** in a lawyer-client relationship;
- conduct an **introductory client interview** and **create client-centred correspondence**;
- demonstrate the **ability to work collaboratively** within a professional legal setting

## Here's a little more detail

The competences listed are atomised here for clarity as is usual in course handbooks; but they can't be left in this state in sim design. To be used effectively and authentically in a sim they need to be sited in the sim at the right moments of a legal matter.

They also need to dovetail with each other. Students will experience the rich weaving together of context awareness, practice, legal knowledge, relationship sensitivity to client, to other professionals, to colleagues and much else.

*Reflection on law in action:* describe and explain the interplay between legal concepts and the way that law operates in the context of real-world problems

*Client-centred legal problem-solving:* determine client's needs, design a strategy to meet client's needs, continue to communicate and adjust strategy throughout

*Communication skills:* interviewing, legal writing, legal drafting; oral advocacy; turning these skills to a variety of audiences

*Legal matter management:* initiate a matter, research, gather facts, plan strategy and resolve the matters arising in the case.

*Practice management:* managing risks, understanding digital technologies' opportunities and threats, and current trends in the profession

*Human management:* manage self (resilience, self-awareness), manage relationships in the virtual firm, based on trust, creating confidence, displaying integrity; manage time; manage project tasks and manage risks associate with these components

*Professional ethics:* know the code of conduct and its rules; comply with ethical obligations and responsibilities; identify and analyse ethical problems.

# An “in progress” Project

- In 2017, we introduced Sim Client interviews (during a massive snowstorm!) They are now conducted via zoom
- This component has continued, and in the 2025 year, the interviews provided the foundation case study facts for the law firm work on the SIMPLE platform

# Pausing to look at the experiential learning from Sim Client Interviews. Authentic? useful?

- 15 SCs were recruited, trained and used with 290 students 2018, 306 students 2019, in a 1L course, Legal Process (now ILS) and all years since then. The current 1L class comprises 320 students
- Excellent feedback. In 2018:
  - **92.6%** thought the interview experience authentic or very authentic.
  - **95.5%** thought the clients realistic or very realistic in conveying their concerns.
  - **93.5%** thought the experience useful or very useful in preparing them for real client interviews.
  - **97.6%** thought that the use of simulated clients was more beneficial to their learning than practising only with other students



## some comments...

- ‘One of my favourite and most worthwhile opportunities all year’
- ‘Great opportunity! [...] Good low stress experience’
- ‘I loved the feedback that the simulated client gave me. She was honest (but also very kind). I haven’t viewed my video yet , but I’m sure it will be extremely useful to go back and review my questions/demeanour/etc.’
- ‘I would love to get more opportunities to do this’
- ‘Yes, I feel better prepared and the feedback I got was very reassuring’
- ‘I really enjoyed this experience and would recommend that it be implemented into the legal process course curriculum’
- ‘The feedback was splendid I see where I need to improve and at the same time I was made aware of my strengths that I need to hone’
- ‘I feel like it was worthwhile and that we should have more opportunities to participate in similar activities’

- Building the experiential component:
- Fall 2025
  - Interviews were conducted and assessed by the Sim Clients
  - Students were divided into (80) law firms of 4 students per firm. Half represent an employee in a Human Rights dispute; half represent the employer
  - Student law firm members completed internal law firm “contracts”
    - the “how to” of their collaboration within the virtual law firm setting. This contract will be revisited and revised for each group assignment during the winter term.

## Winter 2026 Assessed elements (which are **mapped to Learning Objectives**)

- Client Opinion Letter (Collaborating on fall term research results, drafting an accurate, sensitive opinion letter to the client)
- *Court Factum* - Based on a decision in the (fictitious) case, collaborating on a court document and corresponding with opposing counsel within the Sim platform. (Emphasis on ethical obligations to clients, opposing counsel, and the court)
- *Moot Court assignment* – Members of opposing teams will conduct an oral advocacy assignment requiring professionalism
- Law firm peer assessment – Reflection on self and teammates contributions and learning

## Non-assessed elements:

- Recording time spent and “work in progress” within the SIMple platform

# The connections to be drawn

- Connections between law as written and law in action, connections between legal skills, legal practice (including practice technologies), and the law, and ethical issues that arise in the course of the simulations
- Document creation (via substantive research and analysis) & management is integrated with performative skills within and beyond the platform. SIMple is a crucial piece of the tech jigsaw; but it's only one of several pieces.
- Professional performance within role is emphasized; but learning also arises from potential work with **“Senior Counsel” (experienced mediators)** and debrief on role performance with course tutors (TAs)

# ILS Design process & structure - how are we doing it?

	Task	Person	Deadline	Comment
1	Review course outline; first draft of simdoc			Simdoc includes a narrative of the legal matter, learning outcomes, sim framework, etc
2	Second draft			
3	Final draft			
4	Sim build, first draft			Sim is built within SIMple – characters real & fictional, tasks, assets, deadlines, etc are created on the platform
5	Sim build, final draft			
6	Test sim build			
7	Upload all other relevant assets to class LMS			Eg document templates, practice/ethics guides
8	Train facilitators/tutors			Can also include mentors & coaches
9	Enter student & faculty/tutor data into SIMple system			Also includes assigning students to groups, tutors to groups, etc
10	Train students on SIMple			First class of the Capstone – sim begins...

There are many ways to create a sim. Here's one way to plan it in a 'simdoc', in 10 tasks...

# who do we need in this sim?

## Summary of simulation personnel

	Item	Amount
1	Students	[number]
2	Virtual Firms (VFs)	[total; and how many on each side of adversarial transaction; how will they be organised; whether students know each other, have different knowledge of the areas of law involved, etc]
3	Sim Info Managers (SIMs)	[number required, and their tasks, if required]
4	Facilitators	[number and their tasks, if required; their background, eg adjunct faculty or other]
5	Sim Clients	[number and tasks, if required]
6	Tutors	[number and tasks, if required]

# *what do we need in this sim?*

## Summary of resources

	Item	Amount
1	For students	Document templates, guides, examples, deadlines, etc
2	Virtual Firms (VFs)	VF page; partnership agreement, agreement on how they will communicate, etc
3	Sim Info Managers (SIMs)	How to communicate with firms; what to communicate & when; who to contact if things appear as if they might go off the rails...
4	Facilitators	Guidance on when to facilitate, how to do it
5	Sim Clients	SCs to be trained on role and assessment criteria
6	Tutors	How they will interact with students, when, to what effect.

# Sample part of sim framework

	Event/Comms	Assess-ment comment	SIMple requirements & assets	Day	Commentary
1	Orientation: students meet with VF & meet with firm supervisor. Students learn to use SIMple individually & as a firm.;	Mandatory, non-assessed.	<p>Comprises four elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Watch a short video tutorial explaining the comms features of the simulation.</li> <li>Virtual firm (VF) meets the firm supervisor (Zoom)</li> <li>Sandbox / social activity. Firm members meet to choose the values of their firm from a range of values, and create a document that can be used on their site and in transactions (eg retainer letter). Sandbox activity will engage students in using the assets of their firm's webpages, and opening of two matter files: a litigation matter file and a business / transaction matter file.</li> <li>Review flow charts of the two transactions Real person plays the role of the firm supervisor, who meets via a Zoom meeting with all her/his firms simultaneously.</li> </ul>	1	
2	Firm Contract (Charter)	Mandatory, assessed	Template provided	2	Email sent to students with instructions and reference to the template to be completed
3	Client Opinion Letter	Mandatory, assessed. Students work as a firm to analyze law, research and	Firm Precedent; professional Responsibility rules; assessment rubric	20	

# Wider issues to think about

# using other forms of simulation?

- Osgoode uses simulated clients (SCs) – real people trained to be clients, and trained to assess the client-facing skills of students/lawyers in either formative or summative assessment
- We're splicing SCs with SIMple
- Depending on resources, the integration of SCs throughout transactions can further augment the potential for professional skills development

# simulation / learning

- SIMple is not trying to mirror legal practice alone: it's a platform that merges authentic legal matters & tasks with learning and assessment, while supporting reflective and critical thinking
- There's always a necessary tension between these aims
- This tension is not weakness: it's a strength, a powerful lamination of legal practice and learning of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, culture and ethics
- It enables the sim platform to be flexible and adaptable. It enables students to be creative and adaptable too.