
Legislative Drafting Program Provides Global Reach

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Due to the retirement of a large number of drafting experts both in Canada and around the world, as well as the limited number of educational opportunities in the field, a shortage of legislative drafting expertise appears to be looming in a wide range of jurisdictions. This article looks at a program designed to train future legislative drafters.

New initiatives come about because of a need. As society continues to rely on the rule of law as the foundation for order and civility, the creation of legislation is a critical element of the legislator's role, whether in the form of laws, bylaws or policies.

The Legislative Assembly of Alberta recognized a need for a program that could provide instruction in sound drafting practice and allow graduates to develop that knowledge and apply those skills in various real-world settings. The majority of the few drafting programs in existence were residence based; requiring students to study on campus for extended periods and consequently were not a feasible option for many working on a full-time basis.

Given this anticipated need, the next step was determining whether a drafting program could be developed which would provide more flexibility to those seeking further education in this field. As a result of previous collaborative efforts, officials of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta were familiar with the online/distance education expertise of Athabasca University and the wide range of learning materials including a legislative drafting program available through the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). The

COL is an intergovernmental organization created by the Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning/distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

After bringing these two parties together and after a number of years of collaborative effort, the Commonwealth of Learning and Athabasca University officially launched the Graduate Diploma in Legislative Drafting program in November of 2009. This program is seen to benefit not only Albertans and Canadians but will benefit legislators and their constituents world-wide.

This program reaches out to prospective students from around the world, providing accessible materials and guidance by experienced and knowledgeable instructors in a global classroom where students work independently while benefiting from online workshops, discussions and exercises with their peers. Currently, one-third of the students enrolled in the program are from outside of Canada, including those from countries such as Belize, Bermuda, Hong Kong and Kenya. The unique aspect of this program is that although the students come from different backgrounds and do not share common borders, the student body shares a common goal of obtaining drafting expertise.

Who is the program suited to? Individuals who are beginning a drafting career or who wish to enter a drafting career and people from all levels

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of government and nongovernmental agencies or departments involved in planning and writing laws, bylaws, policies and similar material.

Graduates of the legislative drafting program will have the expertise to undertake diverse and challenging drafting responsibilities with proficiency and confidence. The program will teach the principles of legislative drafting in common-law jurisdictions and provide students with a foundation in sound drafting practice.

The Legislative Assembly of Alberta is proud to have been a participant in the development of this unique learning opportunity, where the global community will be able to benefit from the skills of its graduates. The partners, both Athabasca University and the Commonwealth of Learning are an example of successful organizations that came together to make this program a reality. For more information on the program visit: www.athabascau.ca/gdld.