

## Unique Dual J.D. Program continues to grow

*UDM Canadian / American program helps students on each side of border*

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The middle of August is here, and that means school is just around the corner for students across Michigan.

At University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, many students will be returning to a program that is allowing them to earn degrees in both American and Canadian law.

UDM's Canadian and American Dual JD program allows students to earn two law degrees in just three years by earning 60 credits at UDM and 44 credits at the University of Windsor Faculty of Law.

Stephanie Winbigler, the program's director, said the program began in 1982 with four students, and there have been 685 graduates since then.

This year, there are expected to be 225-250 participants, with about 90 percent of them from Canada.

"The program took many years to build the enrollment that it has now. Today, we hear feedback from alumni that completing this program instantly distinguished them from their peers," Winbigler said. "By choosing to earn a second law degree in three years, they have self-identified as attorneys who think outside the box, and who are willing to go above and beyond the minimum."

Through teaching comparative legal theory, Winbigler said the program provides students with a unique perspective for their careers.

"There is an increasing demand for transnational perspectives in business, politics, and certainly in the legal world. It has become increasingly common for attorneys to serve clients from diverse backgrounds, and to find themselves working on challenging international matters," Winbigler said.

"Our faculty have noted that the international perspectives the Canadian students bring to the classroom encourage a deep analysis of how the laws are actually interpreted by courts in both countries, and why these interpretations might be very different, even if the law itself appears to be the same."

### **Student/teacher perspective**

While there are advantages to the program, it does present some challenges to students in terms of adapting to the teaching styles of each country.

Aruna Vithianathan, a 2017 graduate of the program, noticed quickly in her educational experience that UDM and Windsor teachers present material differently.

“The most apparent difference is that Detroit Mercy School of Law practices the Socratic Method, where students expect to be called on in class, and Windsor Law usually offers lecture-based courses,” Vithiananthan said. “Practically, UDM requires students to engage in a clinic and a law firm practice course which are not requirements at Windsor Law. I found that the law firm practice course was a highlight of my legal education.”

Professor Andrew Moore teaches the program’s Canadian and American Tort class, which is offered in the second year. Moore also has a co-teacher who is a practitioner who handles tort cases on both sides of the border.

“In terms of the way I conduct the class, it is a little different from the regular JD Torts class. I probably spend less time on the basics of making sure they properly briefed the case and extracted the correct rule of law, as those are skills I expect to have been developed,” Moore said. “That leaves more time for digging deeper into how the law works and exploring alternative approaches to issues.”

Moore said his course seems to help Canadians a bit more by exposing them to a great variety of options.

“There is more law on the U.S. side,” Moore said. “Looking at both Canadian and U.S. systems allows students to compare those policy decisions and have more comprehensive understanding of how each works.”

Matthew Tapia, a current third-year student in the program, attended the University of Toronto for his undergraduate degree, but is hoping to use the dual law degree to practice in the U.S.

“Not only is an understanding of American law crucial to the practice of law in Canada, as many of its doctrines and ideas are based on the American experience, but having two degrees means that I can work in both Canada and the United States and practice under both systems of law,” Tapia said.

Tapia added that the program has many benefits outside of the classroom as well.

“I plan on pursuing a career in business and corporate law at a large full-service American law firm,” he said. “This program has enabled me to build my network on both sides of the border. I have immensely enjoyed the opportunity to build relationships with Canadian and American students and lawyers, and the mentorship and alumni networks in and from the program are outstanding.”

*If you would like to comment on this story, email Thomas Franz at [tfranz@mi.lawyersweekly.com](mailto:tfranz@mi.lawyersweekly.com).*