



**Carleton  
University**

Department of Law  
and Legal Studies

## Information for Applicants to Legal Studies MA and PhD Programs

The Department of Law and Legal Studies offers two interdisciplinary graduate programs in Legal Studies: the MA and the PhD. This short guide provides information about how to apply to these programs and what to expect about the admissions process.

### 1. What are the MA and PhD Programs in Legal Studies about?

The MA and PhD in Legal Studies are interdisciplinary graduate programs with a focus on theoretically grounded research. Students and faculty ask critical and challenging questions about how law works, how different people encounter and mobilize the law, about the relationships between law, cultural productions, and technologies, and about rights, regulations, and criminalization.

You don't need to be a trained lawyer to enter our MA and PhD programs, and we don't train you to be a lawyer. We provide a rich interdisciplinary environment for students of any background who want to pursue research involving questions of (il)legality, rights, crime, criminalization, regulation, and other dimensions of law.

Students can complete the **MA in Legal Studies** by completing coursework in addition to an MA Thesis or Major Research Paper, or they can choose the all- coursework option. The MA can be completed in two years of full-time study. Some of our MA graduates find employment in the public or non-profit sector, others continue their education in LLB/JD programs or in doctoral programs in areas such as Legal Studies, Sociology, Cultural Studies, Geography, Political Science, or History.

The **PhD in Legal Studies** offers advanced graduate students the chance to pursue in- depth interdisciplinary research in the areas of crime, law and security; law, regulation and governance; and human rights and global justice. PhD students acquire the skills to conduct theoretically grounded research independently. They have opportunities to present at conferences, work on publications, engage with diverse publics and stakeholders relevant to their research, and receive training on post-secondary teaching and pedagogy. Professional development options reflect different career options in the public and non-profit sector, research, and teaching.

## 2. How do I know if the Legal Studies Graduate Programs are a good fit for me?

Think about what you are interested in, what kind of research you are passionate about, and about your professional goals. When thinking about the fit between the program and your research interests, consider the course offerings and the research profiles of participating faculty members.

Find your intellectual community. When you apply to the MA or PhD in Legal Studies, you do not need to identify a research supervisor. However, you should be able to identify at least two or three faculty members whose courses you are interested in taking and who might be appropriate supervisors or committee members for your Major Research Paper, MA Thesis, or PhD Thesis. Admissions committees pay close attention to the fit between applicants' research interests and the faculty areas of specialization. Each department wants to admit students who will thrive in the program, and finding an intellectual community is an important first step.

You can find an overview of faculty areas of research interest here: <https://carleton.ca/law/faculty-supervision-areas/>

A full list of the Law & Legal Studies full-time faculty members is available here: <https://carleton.ca/law/faculty-staff/department-faculty/>

A list of courses offered in past years, along with links to course outlines, is available here: <https://carleton.ca/law/course-outlines/>

The Graduate Student Handbook can be found here: <https://carleton.ca/law/wp-content/uploads/sites/110/Graduate-Student-Handbook-Feb-2024-Final.pdf>

## 3. What is required for an application?

The minimum requirements to be considered for admission to the **MA** are: a BA (Hons) degree or equivalent in a relevant discipline with a B+ average (overall, or over the last two years or ten credits). In exceptional circumstances, candidates with a three-year BA and extensive relevant work experience can be considered for admission.

The minimum requirements to be considered for admission to the **PhD** are: a Master's degree in a relevant field with an A- average.

Meeting the minimum requirements is essential in order to be considered for admission, but it doesn't guarantee an offer. That is why applicants who meet these requirements should take care in assembling their application and devote special attention to the statement of intent.

### These documents are required for the MA application:

- Transcripts of all post-secondary studies
- At least two letters of reference from faculty members with whom you have recently studied
- Statement of intent

- Resume / Academic CV (optional): You may attach a regular resume. Information about a CV is available here: <https://carleton.ca/career/job-search/resume-cover-letter-cv-guides/resume-or-cv/>
- Writing sample (optional): Please show us an example of your writing in the academic or research context that you are proud of. We ask that you are the sole author and that the writing sample is at least ten pages long.

**These documents are required for the PhD application:**

- Transcripts of all post-secondary studies
- Three letters of reference from faculty members who have taught and/or supervised you (including the MA Supervisor)
- Statement of intent
- Resume / Academic CV (optional): You may attach a regular resume. Information about a CV is available here: <https://carleton.ca/career/job-search/resume-cover-letter-cv-guides/resume-or-cv/>
- Writing sample: please show us an example of your writing in the academic or research context that you are proud of. We ask that you are the sole author and that the writing sample is at least ten pages long.

**Requirements for all MA and PhD applicants:**

**All applicants must complete the online application in Carleton 360.**

If your first language is not English, please review the options from Carleton University Graduate Studies to **demonstrate your language proficiency**:

<https://graduate.carleton.ca/international/english-second-language/> The language of instruction at Carleton University is English. For admission into Carleton's graduate programs, you will need to demonstrate that your knowledge and use of English are strong enough for graduate studies at an English-language university.

#### 4. How can I complete a strong application? What does the admissions committee look for in applicants?

The MA and PhD in Legal Studies are interdisciplinary graduate degrees that focus on research. The admissions committee does not rank the applicants; it asks about each applicant: Is this person capable and motivated to complete the MA or PhD in Legal Studies? Do their research interests and experiences overlap sufficiently with our departmental areas of focus so that we can support them and they will thrive in this program?

In order to answer these questions, the committee holistically assesses the application, paying special attention to the **academic record**, the **letters of reference**, and the **statement of intent**.

## **Academic Record**

The academic record includes grades, academic achievements and awards, presentations, research projects, presentations, publications, and other relevant research experience. For the purpose of MA admission, the GPA for the last ten credits (equivalent to two years of full-time study) is considered. Many students see their grades improve considerably over the course of their undergraduate study.

The more recent grades are a better indication of preparation for a graduate program because they show the current level of capacity and are more likely to be obtained in research-intensive courses.

*What if my grades for some portion of my last degree suffered because I dealt with external problems?*

Grades are a good predictor of the level of preparation for MA or PhD study if your academic performance was not significantly impeded by factors beyond your control. If you were dealing with health problems, family situations, or comparable events that affected your grades, please comment on them in your statement of intent. It is also a good idea to mention these issues to your referees so that their reference letters can adequately comment on your academic potential.

*Which other parts of my academic record should I highlight?*

The admissions committee wants to know about your involvement in research activities. Did you write research papers you were excited about? Did you have a chance to collaborate with others or help on a larger research project? Did your job include the opportunity to write research reports? Did you write an Honours Research Essay? Or, if you are applying for your PhD, did you write an MA Thesis or Major Research Paper? Did you present your research at conferences? If you have any such research experiences, please list them in your CV or highlight them in your statement of intent. What research did you do, and what did you learn from it? How do your experiences influence your plans for further research?

*Which parts of my extracurricular record should I highlight?*

If you had professional, volunteer, internship, advocacy, or community engagement experiences that shape your perspective on your research and your goals, the admissions committee would like to know about them. Your connections and commitment to a community might motivate you to pursue a specific research project, and your skills at navigating complex ethical issues might become invaluable tools in your research process. If you have any relevant experiences, please highlight them in the statement of intent.

## **Letters of Reference**

The admissions committee would like to hear from professors who have taught you recently about your preparation and motivation for the MA or PhD.

If you are applying to the **MA Program**, please submit **two** letters of reference. Your ideal referee is a full-time faculty member who has taught you recently (in your last year of study) in a research-intensive course. This person is familiar with your work and academic record, your statement of intent, and with the requirements and standards of the Legal Studies MA. They can make a strong case that you will thrive in this program.

If you are applying to the **PhD Program**, please submit **three** letters of reference. Your ideal referees are full-time faculty members who have taught you or have supervised your research projects. If you have completed an MA Thesis, please make sure to include a letter from your MA supervisor. Your referees should be familiar with your research and your broader academic record, your plans for your PhD, and the requirements and standards of PhD work.

#### *How do I choose my referees?*

Your referees should know you from an academic context. They should be familiar with your work and with graduate studies. References from a work supervisor are usually not helpful for the admissions committee unless the supervisor can speak to your ability to conduct research independently or as part of a team. If you have been working rather than pursuing a university degree over the last few years, please don't hesitate to contact the professors who taught you in your last year of university.

#### *How do I approach potential referees?*

Approach your potential referees and ask them if they are willing and able to write you a strong recommendation for the graduate program(s) you are applying to.

For faculty members, writing reference letters is considered part of the job. You don't need to apologize for asking them to write a letter for you, but you need to give them advance notice and be professional in supplying them with all the relevant information. It is a good idea to discuss your MA or PhD program choices with potential referees and ask them if they can write you a strong letter of reference for this program. If they think that another program would be a better fit or that another faculty member might be a more appropriate reference, consider their advice.

You can help your referees write a strong and well-supported letter by providing them with information. They might ask for:

- Your draft statement of intent
- Your transcript
- A copy of a recent research paper (written for their class or elsewhere)
- Your CV/resume
- Information about the programs you are applying to, including its scope

- Information about all the deadlines and delivery methods (email, online form, hard copy) for the reference letters

A referee should never ask you to “draft” your own reference. They should ask you for data (grades, papers, CV/resume) on which they can base their evaluations.

Please give your referees 2-3 weeks to complete their reference.

### **Statement of intent**

In the statement of intent, you tell the admissions committee what motivates you to pursue the MA or PhD in Legal Studies, what kind of research questions you would like to ask, and how this department would be a good match for your research interests. You can also use the statement of intent to discuss challenges you faced that impacted your academic performance.

When you discuss your research ability and motivation, the “show, don’t tell” rule applies: instead of telling the committee that you are an outstanding and motivated researcher, you want to show them your research strengths. Give them evidence of your skills, interests, and motivation. For example, rather than stating “I am an exceptional researcher” you can write something along these lines: “In course A, I wrote a research paper for which I analyzed B, drawing on theory C and approach D. My findings were E and F.” This way you are giving the committee evidence of your skills and experiences that would lead them to the conclusion that you are indeed a very promising researcher.

It is a good idea to share your statement of intent with peers and ask them to read it for clarity. In addition, referees who have indicated that they support you and your plans for graduate study will need your draft statement in order to write their letter of reference. They are also great sources for suggestions about improving your statement.

### **MA application statement of intent:**

Please submit a brief statement of intent (500 words maximum) that addresses the following questions:

- Why would you like to pursue an MA in Legal Studies, and which preparations (and/or experiences and motivations) make you a suitable candidate?
- Which areas of research would you like to pursue? Please tell us about the questions, theories, issues, and approaches you are interested in studying.
- Why is this program a suitable place for you to pursue these research interests?

*Do I need to secure a supervisor before I apply? Will the program assign me a supervisor?*

No. If you plan on writing a MA Thesis or Major Research Paper, you will need a supervisor during the second year of your MA. You choose your supervisor at the end of the first year in the program. At that point you will be familiar with the research areas and approaches of the faculty members and

can make an informed choice. For the statement of intent, please list two or more faculty members whose research areas overlap with your research plans. You don't have to contact these faculty members.

*What if I am undecided about my area of research, or about choosing between MA Thesis, Major Research Paper, and coursework?*

The statement of intent is not a contract. You can change your mind about the area of research and about your path through the program. The statement shows, however, what kind of thinker you are. What kinds of questions do you ask? How do you intend to answer them? What motivates you to pursue research? Even if you change your topic, your statement communicates to the committee what kind of research you plan on pursuing.

### **PhD application statement of intent:**

Please submit a short statement (500 words maximum) that addresses the following issues and questions:

- Why would you like to pursue a PhD in Legal Studies, and which preparations (and experiences) make you a suitable candidate?
- What is your intended PhD Thesis? What is your anticipated area of research? Which questions do you want to pursue and why? Which approaches and theories do you find promising for answering these questions, and why?
- Why is the Department of Law and Legal Studies a suitable place for you to pursue these research plans? (You do not need to have a faculty supervisor in order to be admitted, but please list at least two faculty members whom you might approach about PhD supervision or committee membership.)

*Do I need to secure a supervisor before I apply to the PhD Program? Will the program assign me a supervisor?*

No. You will only need a PhD supervisor once you start your comprehensive exam after the first academic year in the program. You choose your supervisor. Over the course of the first year, you will refine your project, get new ideas in the courses you take, meet possible supervisors, and think about what you are looking for in a PhD supervisor.

For the statement of intent, please list two or more faculty members whose research areas overlap with your research plans. You don't have to contact these faculty members.

## 5. How will my application be assessed?

All complete applications are assessed by experienced faculty members who form the Graduate Admissions Committee. The evaluations of the applications are holistic: the committee pays attention to all elements of the application and to unique circumstances as explained in the statement and the reference letters.

The admissions process is not about competition among the applicants. In reading each application we ask: “Does this applicant have the skill, capacity, and motivation to succeed in the program they applied to? Is this program a good fit for this applicant?” We look for evidence of skill in the applicant’s preparation and academic record, evidence of motivation in the statement and the academic record, and evidence of fit with the program in the statement of intent.

## 6. When and how will you hear from us?

The evaluation of the applications starts after the initial January 15th deadline and continues until the cut off date in early summer or earlier, if the spaces in the program have been filled. Those whose applications are complete on Jan 15th will hear before the end of February. Later applications will be assessed on a rolling basis. We aim for 4-6 weeks after submission of the last documents (completion of application). If you apply later than January, be assured that your application will be assessed by the same criteria. However, we might have to reject otherwise qualified applicants if the program is already full. We cannot guarantee that funding is available for MA students applying close to the last deadline.

## 7. How can I transition from one degree into the next one?

We support students who would like to continue their higher education without breaks, as well as students who work between their degrees. You do not need to have completed your current degree in order to apply. However, you will need to have the degree completed (and documentation available) before you can start the program you applied to.

If you are still completing your program, your transcript might not fully reflect your achievements. For example, if you are a 3rd year undergrad student applying to the MA Program, your initial transcript might not include any 4th year grades. We ask that, if possible, you upload a transcript that includes the grades from the Fall term of the year in which you are applying. If the committee is unsure about your academic development, it may delay the admissions decision until after your final grades (BA Hons or MA) are available.

## 8. What kind of financial support is available?

Funding upon Admission



Offers of admission to the MA or PhD Program can include a funding package. This form of funding is conditional on maintaining full-time status and can be a significant source of funding over the duration of the degree.

**MA students** who enter the program with a strong or excellent academic record are eligible for TA positions and scholarships. TA positions for MA students are awarded for four terms (Fall and Winter of both years). Scholarships can be awarded for the first year or for both years.

**PhD students** who are not international students can expect to hold a TA position for five academic years and receive a scholarship for four academic years.

The department endeavors to provide scholarship funding to incoming PhD students as equally as possible.

For exceptional international MA and PhD students, scholarship funding and/or TA positions are available. Permanent residents of Canada will be considered “domestic” and not “international” students. Students who are in the process of applying for permanent residency, protected persons, and diplomats are eligible to be considered domestic students.

#### External Funding

The department supports students in applying for external scholarships such as the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Scholarships, and the Vanier Graduate Scholarship. These awards are competitive and require a high level of preparation. If you are interested in applying for an external award before you apply to the program, please contact your referees for support. Students in the Legal Studies MA and PhD Programs will receive support from Faculty.

For a **tuition fee estimate**, please see the following fee estimator webpage provided by Graduate Studies: <https://graduate.carleton.ca/financial-assistance/cost-and-fees/>

## 9. What if I have more questions?

We're here to help you.

If you have questions about the application process and administrative issues, please contact the **Graduate Program Administrator**, Nomsa Maphangoh: [LAWGrad@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:LAWGrad@cunet.carleton.ca)

If your questions concern the academic profile of the department, course offerings, and academic expectations, please contact the **Graduate Program Supervisor**, Megan Gaucher: [megangaucher@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:megangaucher@cunet.carleton.ca)