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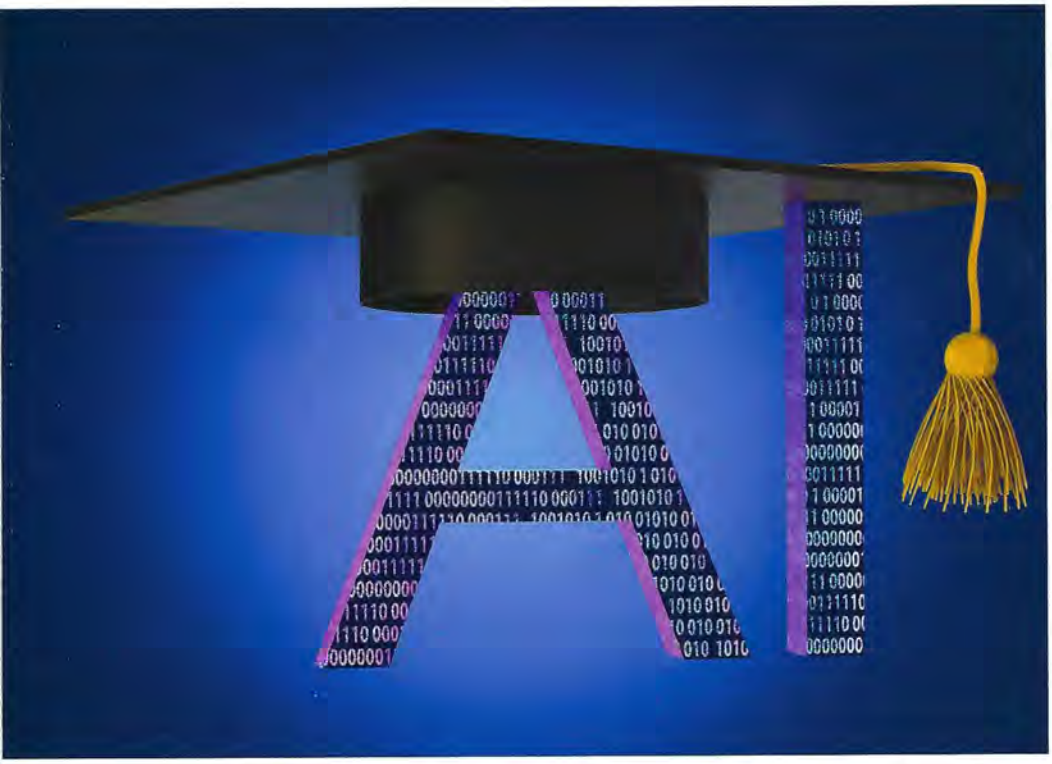
BY KATHLEEN DILLON NARKO

Rethinking Law School Teaching: Generative AI and Legal Education



> AI is going to do many things that lawyers have done. The question is what are human lawyers going to do that's going to provide some advantage? That is an existential question for law schools...
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> —*Professor John O. McGinnis, George C. Dix Professor in Constitutional Law, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, November 21, 2025*

Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is transforming the legal profession, and legal education is no exception. In a 2025 Thomson Reuters survey, 95% of participating law firms expect AI to be central to their workflow in the next five years. Law schools now face the challenge—and the opportunity—of integrating AI into their curricula. AI is a catalyst for rethinking law school pedagogy. This column explores the impact of AI on legal education, examining pedagogical challenges, curricular changes, and the skills future lawyers will need. More training in technology may ultimately save the human role of lawyers in the profession.

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What Do Law Schools Do Now?

Recent data from the ABA Task Force on Law and Artificial Intelligence shows law schools are moving toward the adoption of AI in legal education. Over 55% of law schools now offer courses dedicated to AI, and 83% provide opportunities—such as clinics—for students to learn how to use AI tools effectively.

However, in my experience, and in speaking to professors from around the country, many law schools are trying to fence off AI until they know how to detect its use and how to contain it. Many schools follow the rule that students may not use AI unless the professor allows it.

Professors have returned to school-scheduled exams (proctored exams given at a specified place and time) as opposed to take-home exams, self-scheduled exams, or papers. (This assumes laptop technology blocking AI use during the exam is effective.) Some professors consider barring all computers and phones from the exam room and moving back to handwritten exams in the old blue exam booklets.

Concerns about Using AI in Law School

The first objection is clear: Students are cheating. Students can ask ChatGPT, or whatever GAI platform they use, to write something better than they may be able to do themselves. The traditional methods of assessment (e.g., papers and take-home exams) have been undermined.

Second, and more significantly, students may fail to learn critical thinking skills. Students need to know how to read cases and build arguments before they can critique a brief AI wrote. They need to learn how to research and evaluate the results of their research before turning the task over to AI.

Integrating AI in Legal Education

Proponents of AI seek to reframe the discussion. Law schools are missing opportunities to improve education if they focus on AI as a cheating problem. Professor Daniel W. Linna, Jr., of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law urges law schools to "think about how these technologies can help accelerate learning." Linna asks, "How could students learn the things we want them to learn faster?" By overemphasizing fencing off AI from students, law schools may miss opportunities to improve education.

AI can provide innovative study methods, such as generating practice exams based on a few of a professor's past exams. Then AI can give the student feedback on the practice exam answer. AI could summarize a student's notes and assist in creating outlines. AI can create quick Q&A-style flashcards based on key doctrines or elements of a claim. Students are already exploring these innovative methods. Linna believes "the vast majority" of law students will use AI to learn better and faster—not to cheat. "They want to learn these things because they want to be a lawyer [and] pass the bar exam."

The next step is to bring AI into law school classrooms. Some faculty have embraced GAI to help students succeed in law school. Professor Sean Harrington, Director of Technology and Innovation at the University of Oklahoma College of Law, presents biweekly programs on AI to students. The most popular one by far is how to study for law school using AI. Harrington has created quiz bots that question students on key concepts in his class. By reviewing the transcripts between students and the quiz bots, Harrington can gauge how well students understand the concepts. He can then adjust his teaching to spend more time in areas where students are confused.

In one of his classes, Linna has students draft a thesis paragraph and full sentence outline of their final paper. Then, the students engage with an AI assistant, which reviews the document for clarity and argument consistency. Linna finds these tools raise the baseline quality of student writing and allow him to focus on higher-level feedback.

Challenges and Risks

Despite the promise of AI, risks remain. Law schools need to be especially careful with teaching first-year students. Those students have not yet learned to read a case and find the legal rule. They may be most at risk for overreliance on AI, which could weaken critical thinking and case analysis skills.

Students need to learn the limitations of AI and minimize them. They need to weed out hallucinations (fabricated cases or other authority) and misattributions (real sources that are misused or incorrectly described) and verify every claim. They need to learn prompt engineering— how to design questions for AI—to get the best results. They need to have a functional understanding of AI—how it works, its limitations, and responsible use.

Only after developing these skills can law students use AI effectively. Professor Jess Miers from the University of Akron School of Law says in *A Generative AI Primer for Law Students*, "Generative AI is most useful once you've done the work. These tools shine when you already understand the core concepts and want to reinforce, practice, or sharpen your thinking. Used thoughtfully, they can give you a real edge and complement your growing legal expertise."

Future Vision for Legal Education

Law schools should prepare students for a world where AI is ubiquitous in practice. Students need to learn how to use these powerful tools as well as the human role in using them. According to Linna, AI is not going to replace attorney jobs. Students need to learn "the unique human traits and skills and abilities that they bring to the equation."

Law schools can prepare students by introducing AI in the first year. In Linna's vision, it will be integrated across the curriculum. Every law student will have an AI tool as their coach and mentor through law school while they hone their judgment and ethical reasoning. Textbooks may evolve into interactive platforms, allowing dialogue with AI tools.

Grading will also change. Law schools need to rethink how they assess students. The take-home exam and other traditional testing are "completely broken," says Harrington. Harrington holds 15-minute interviews with each student. Linna requires oral presentations, debates, and group discussions. Both admit these methods would not be feasible in a large class of 60 or 80 students.

As Linna envisions, legal education must prepare students not just to "know the law" but to navigate a profession where technology mediates nearly every interaction. As the lawyer's role changes, law schools may offer more education in soft skills such as project management, leadership, and technology.

Law schools can prepare students for AI-related issues, such as confidentiality of information fed into AI tools or whether the AI tool drafted a contract correctly. Knowledgeable attorneys will also be involved in AI policy. "AI is everywhere," says Linna. It will play a role in deals, litigation, ethics, and law firm operations. All this makes AI-literate law students more attractive candidates for law jobs.

Existential Changes

To deliver this new AI-enhanced education, law schools must commit resources to train faculty to learn AI platforms, create AI assistants, and incorporate AI in their courses in other ways. This is a tremendous change in how professors have taught for generations. It is unlikely to happen without help from those skilled in technology.

Law schools are facing an existential question. As Miers states, "Learning to use these tools effectively is no longer optional." She continues, "No matter how advanced the technology, it still relies on human judgment, oversight, and care." By incorporating AI into education, law schools will prepare students for a changing practice and develop lawyers who add human value to AI use. ■