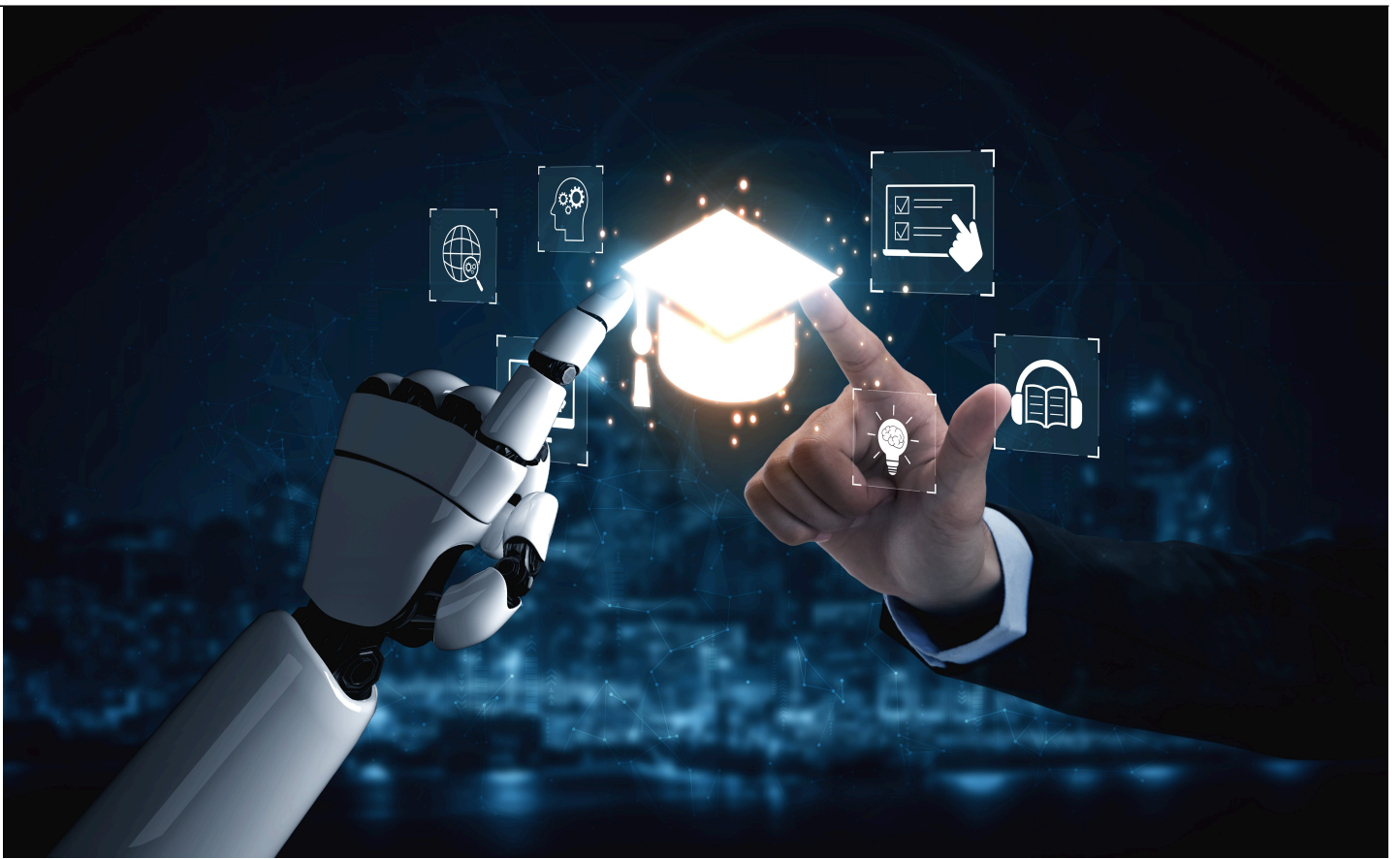




Evolving Legal Education: Preparing Tomorrow's Lawyers for a Transformed Landscape

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



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Cheat Sheet:

- **Teach AI fluency early.** Law schools must prepare students to use AI, data, and legal technology before they enter a market where traditional entry-level work is already changing.
 - **Expand career pathways.** Career services should support broader opportunities beyond law firms and courts, including in-house roles, legal operations, government, and nontraditional legal careers.
 - **Build business-ready lawyers.** Future lawyers need training in project management, change management, entrepreneurship, client relationships, and business development.
 - **Prioritize hands-on experience.** Clinics, apprenticeships, internships, and real-world simulations can help students develop the judgment, communication, and practical skills employers value.
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As an in-house lawyer with a background in law firms, I have witnessed firsthand the shifting landscape of the legal profession. The challenges and opportunities that today's law graduates face are vastly different from those of previous generations. It's crucial for law schools to adapt educational practices and curricula to ensure that new lawyers are equipped to thrive in this evolving environment.

“The data is clear and the window is closing. Six out of seven leading AI platforms predict fewer legal jobs by 2030, and the first roles to disappear are exactly the ones new graduates have historically relied on to learn their craft — document review, basic research, routine drafting. Law schools can no longer treat AI fluency as an elective or an afterthought. A graduate who enters the workforce without it will not just be behind; they will be competing for a shrinking pool of roles against colleagues who started building AI intuition years earlier. The time to prepare lawyers for this profession is before graduation — not after.” *Connie Brenton, Founder and CEO of LegalOps.com, Founder and Former CEO of Corporate Legal Operations Consortium (CLOC), Former VP, Legal Ops at NetApp*

Rethinking job placement for the majority

One pressing issue is how to help the 90 percent of law graduates who make the top 10 percent possible. Career services must be revamped to support a broader range of opportunities, including placements in non-traditional legal roles or sectors outside the law. For example, I was fortunate to work at the Texas Legislature through an internship program for course credit. This gave me real world exposure, experience, and a network of future colleagues whom I count as friends today.

Law schools need to continue to grow this model into other areas beyond the law firms and court houses. I've seen an increasing number of summer internships with in-house legal departments over the years, but interns are often splitting their summers between two roles. This is not as impactful as a semester long program with a cohort in different roles, even companies, that comes together to share what they have learned and build community. Companies and future employees would likely both value a chance to test drive each other through an extended internship. Could something similar be done with a legal operations focus?

Embracing project management and AI

As legal work increasingly intersects with technology, soft skills will be our differentiator as humans, but we also need to evolve or die.

It is imperative for law schools to incorporate project management and AI training into their curriculum. Law students should be instructed on leveraging AI tools for document review, legal research, case management, matter management, contract lifecycle management, and selecting appropriate tools. I was pleased to learn that my alma mater, The University of Texas School of Law, has recently established arrangements with Legora and Harvey AI. Students have access to, and training in, the AI-capabilities that are being built into LexisNexis, Westlaw, and Bloomberg.

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Courses focused on data analysis and its application in legal decision-making will further equip students to make data-driven choices in their practice. This is the way the profession has been going and it will have to be learned. Why wait for the job to start? How many of us would be more interested in a candidate that had taken courses on this over one that had not?

Managing change in organizations

Many business schools have been teaching change management for some time, and perhaps those courses could be — or already are being — cross listed, but I am convinced change management education should now be mandatory for successful lawyers regardless of their career path. Law students should be prepared for the reality of change management within organizations — be they law firms, corporations, non-profits, courts, or any of the other fields where lawyers end up.

How do you get buy-in for a new idea? How do you gain traction? What do you do about adoption? Training in adaptability, embracing innovation, and nurturing a growth mindset will better position them to lead within complex legal environments. Providing opportunities for students to work on real change initiatives within organizations will cultivate these essential skills.

An excellent read on this is *Change: How Organizations Achieve Hard-To-Imagine Results in Uncertain and Volatile Times* by Kotter, Akhtar, and Gupta.

Training future entrepreneurs

Getting back to a more traditional practice of law route, many if not most attorneys will not enter the world of large, established law firms upon graduating. Even some that do may at some point find themselves in the position of running their own firms. Law schools should introduce courses focused on entrepreneurship in legal practice, teaching students to navigate the complexities of starting and managing a business.

Topics could include business development, marketing strategies, financial management, and client engagement — essential skills that will enable graduates to cultivate a sustainable practice. If you are a law student considering having your own practice one day, are there business courses you can take on how to run your own business?



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Building a book of business

A critical area where law schools must improve is teaching students how to build and sustain a book of business. This includes understanding client relationship management, networking strategies, and the importance of providing value to clients beyond the hourly billable hour model. Integrating experiential learning where students participate in projects or simulations that focus on client development will offer invaluable hands-on experience.

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Law school doesn't typically teach this, but fundamentally, this is sales. Many organizations have their own internal sales courses. Law firms typically do not. Consider working in a job that offers sales training while in school. A friend of mine prefers candidates who have worked in customer service because those skills are so valuable in the legal profession, even though they are not directly relevant to the practice of law.

Enhancing client relationships

The same skills needed for students to build a book of business are needed in-house: relationship building. For those entering in-house roles, clear and effective communication is paramount. Yes, AI can do more and more entry level work, but it does not yet get to the point. Or know how the internal stakeholder wants to receive information.

Legal education must prioritize the training of soft skills. How can you tell who is open to your

partnership? How do you work with someone who is not? What are tactics you can deploy to gain trust? What do you do when something goes wrong? Most of us have to learn this as we go or from mentors and bosses, but why not teach some of it too?

Much of the stereotypical mindset of law students and their legal education is focused on identifying risks. This leads to a worst-case mentality. Advice like “this is a business decision, if you do it, it’s against the advice of counsel” is not helpful for the client or your relationship with them. What about giving students difficult real-life scenarios and training them on how to accomplish their clients’ goals instead of saying “no”? This could include an ethics component so you are clear when you have to say “no” and how you handle that in a way that ensures the client understands you have their best interests in mind when you do so.

If you are a law student, consider taking communications courses and reading books like *Crucial Conversation: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler and *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* by Fisher and Ury.

Practical experience through clinics and apprenticeships

One area where legal education can significantly improve is testing students in real-world environments before graduation. Law schools should expand legal clinics and apprenticeship programs that allow students to apply their knowledge in practical settings. These experiences will not only strengthen their skills but also give students valuable insight into the realities of legal practice and client interactions.

Litigation clinics have been successful for years and are actually some of the most valuable experiences that can be gained. Are we doing enough of these in the other disciplines? Instead of three years of course work, I could see a third year of entirely supervised, semester long, working apprenticeships. Those could include commercial negotiations and other areas of practice.

If you are a student, don’t just study. Do. Enroll in a clinic. Clerk at a firm. Intern at a company. You will learn by doing, by applying your studies. It will also give more context to your studies when you return.

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Bar exam preparation

Revising the approach to bar exam preparation could also benefit students. Offering bar review courses integrated into the final semester of law school could streamline the transition from student to licensed attorney. Consideration should be given to scheduling the bar exam before graduation, making the process a single event for graduating students, ensuring they can enter the profession promptly and with confidence. That way, when it’s over, you’re done and ready to get started.

AI and the unauthorized practice of law

Artificial intelligence is increasingly engaging in what some would argue is the practice of law. We are training AI agents on our playbooks and processes. Legal AI providers tout their capabilities. Some Large Language Models have even passed bar exams, but they cannot obtain a law license. Should AI be required to pass the bar exam to be considered legal AI? Should it be considered unauthorized practice of law if legal AI or agents are not licensed?

Nippon Life vs. OpenAI, filed in early 2026, claims just that. If AI is going to be doing more of this work, perhaps it should. One proposed solution would be to exempt AI from UPL rules and include a disclaimer. For now, ethics rules and opinions emphasize that lawyers must supervise AI-generated work and ensure non-lawyers (including vendors) comply with ethics obligations.

Conclusion: A call to action

The evolution of legal education is essential to meet the needs of a profession in flux. If we don't want to be susceptible to AI taking our jobs, we have to differentiate our services from what is being commoditized. By focusing on diverse job pathways, entrepreneurship, relationship-building, technology, and practical experiences, we can prepare the next generation of lawyers for success. Law schools must take an active role in reassessing their curricula and training methodologies, ensuring that our future legal professionals are not only knowledgeable in the law but are also equipped with the skills necessary to navigate and thrive in this dynamic landscape.

The legal profession is rapidly evolving, and our educational systems must evolve with it. By addressing these essential areas, we can better prepare new lawyers to flourish in a transformed career landscape.

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