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# Reactive or Proactive? The Ambivalent Nature of Today's Legal Tech Education

Law schools are launching legal tech classes in response to the growing availability of tech tools and the demand for more cost effective services. But in the process, they are also defining the future of legal practice.

By Rhys Dipshan | May 06, 2019

This isn't your parents' law school curriculum. In a growing number of schools around the country, law students are getting the opportunity to dive deep into what was once an afterthought for professors and attorneys alike. Technology courses that teach everything from app development to using artificial intelligence and legal analytics are catching students' attention and preparing them for what may be a whole new world of legal practice.



For the most part, these courses are a response to the growing demand for attorneys to use legal tech platforms to better and more cost effectively serve their clients, as well as the growing availability of such platforms themselves. But while a reactive

development, these courses are also defining the future of legal practice. They're changing the way prospective attorneys think, and by extension, how they will approach the practice of law in the future.

That law schools are moving to inform their students about the technologies currently impacting the industry should come as little surprise.

"Attorneys in particular have a responsibility to their clients to be current with technologies and understand the different benefits they can achieve for their client by leveraging technology," said Frank Giovinazzo, a managing director at alternative legal services provider InCloudCounsel and a Harvard Law School graduate.

## **Class Now in Session**

The ways law schools are instilling such tech knowledge varies widely. Chicago-Kent University (<https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2019/04/04/chicago-kent-legal-tech-program-races-against-fast-evolving-legal-careers/>) for instance, will officially launch a Masters of Law degree in legal innovation and technology in fall 2019 that aims to get students up to speed on a wide scope of legal tech topics. Meanwhile, Cornell Law School (<https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2018/11/16/cornell-students-create-ai-powered-apps-to-solve-legal-challenges/>) launched a one semester course to allow its J.D., LL.M. and MBA to develop their own legal apps, something the Columbia Law School [Legal Technology Association](https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2018/12/11/columbia-law-school-students-are-turning-legal-tech-developers/) (<https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2018/12/11/columbia-law-school-students-are-turning-legal-tech-developers/>) is encouraging its own school to do as well.

What's more, Georgia State University has set up a legal analytics lab to teach its law students and even local attorneys how to analyze and [leverage](https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2019/02/08/alston-bird-partners-with-georgia-state-university-on-legal-analytics/) (<https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2019/02/08/alston-bird-partners-with-georgia-state-university-on-legal-analytics/>) data. Similarly, the University of [Kansas School of Law](https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2018/12/26/university-of-kansas-school-of-law-brings-ai-to-the-classroom/) (<https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2018/12/26/university-of-kansas-school-of-law-brings-ai-to-the-classroom/>) launched a legal analytics course in fall 2018, which it plans to continue in the future.

Andrew W. Torrance, a law professor at Kansas who teaches the legal analytics class, said he launched the course in response to "the availability of data coupled with the computational power we now have."

He explained that “data sets that we have now just didn’t exist 20, 30, 40 years ago” and that the use of legal analytics platforms is already changing the practice of law, especially within practice areas like patent law.

But Torrance’s course doesn’t just look to get students up to speed. In fact, it looks to train future attorneys to use quantitative thinking and evidence, something fairly novel in the practice of law.

“It used to be looking into the eyes of the defendant is the best we could do to assess whether we thought they were liable or not,” Torrance said. “I think today we can add an incredible richness of data that provides us with more source of evidence.”

The focus of the course is not so much on becoming familiar with data analytics tools as it is on knowing how to critically interpret data. “When you apply rigorous mathematical tools, even simple ones, sometimes what appears to be true, is not true in reality, not true mathematically,” he said. Such realizations allowed his class to have “a rich discussion about this about the quality of evidence that is used in law,” Torrance said.

## **The Next Wave of Instruction**

To be sure, legal analytics courses are not as the norm in law schools. Torrance noted that “there are not many classes being taught on quantitative analysis of law,” though he expects that to change in the years to come. For now though, he thinks such classes are groundbreaking.

“I think it’s not a reaction, it’s sort of a probing of new possibilities by some schools that, at least in my opinion have an enlightenment view of what the law might become,” he explained.

Of course, it’s not just data analytics classes that might be changing the way lawyers think in the future. Familiarizing future attorneys with current legal technology, whether through teaching artificial intelligence, tech development or other topics, after all, will make them more apt to look for tech solutions to client challenges in the future.

InCloudCounsel’s Giovinazzo, for instance, praised law schools for removing “any ambiguity or hesitation or fear around the notion of using legal technology to serve their client” and for pushing back on the notion that technology is “something separate

and aside.”

Still, this isn't to say that attorneys will become tech professionals in the future. Overly complicated IT management or execution is usually handled by a dedicated tech team, whether it be a IT department at a law firm or a legal operations department in-house. But law schools are noticing that technology platforms are becoming more accessible to the point where there is little stopping attorneys from using the technology themselves.

“Legal technology has evolved to the point where it is easily navigated by, and useful to, attorneys, and it's not necessary to outsource that to separate individuals anymore,” Giovinazzo said.