

Ahead of the Curve: Pod Save the Lecture. Plus, Law School Gets Way Cheaper (It's True!)

Saint Louis University Law Professor Marcia McCormick has a few thoughts about incorporating technology into the law classroom, and the University of Kansas is about to give out-of-state law students a big tuition break.

By [Karen Sloan](#) | December 10, 2018 at 09:00 PM

Welcome back to *Ahead of the Curve*. I'm [Karen Sloan](#), legal education editor at Law.com, and I'll be your host for this weekly look at innovation and notable developments in legal education.

This week, I'm chatting with **Saint Louis University Law Professor Marcia McCormick** about how to **incorporate technology into the law classroom**, and how well (or not) the academy is doing on that front. Next up is a look at how **SUNY Buffalo Law** is branching into undergraduate education. Finally, I check in with the **University of Kansas**, which about to give out-of-state law students a big tuition break. Please share your thoughts and feedback with me at ksloan@alm.com or on Twitter: [@KarenSloanNLJ](#)

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A Call to Action—For Tech in the Classroom

We all know the stereotype of a law class. A [Professor Kingsfield-type](#) stands at a lectern, droning on while students live in dread of being cold called. **So is that really the best way to teach law? And is that even what happens in today's law classrooms?**

To probe at those questions, I rang up [Marcia McCormick](#), a professor at **Saint Louis University School of Law** whose [recent article on harnessing technology](#) caught my eye. **McCormick's article talks about how she provides podcasts to reinforce her lecture lessons and uses [online](#) quizzes to help students apply the law and become accustomed to the way law school exam questions work.** I wanted to know more about her specific techniques, but also how she thinks the legal academy is doing as a whole at embracing technology in the classroom.

Let me take up the second question first. It's a mixed bag out there, according to McCormick. **Perhaps the most mainstream experiment in the legal academy is the so-called "flipped classroom,"** where professors record lectures or present them on power point or other programs before class then use class time exclusively for discussions, analysis, [application](#) or projects. But despite a fair bit of discussion and interest in the flipped classroom model, relatively few professors use it on an ongoing basis, McCormick told me. And other professors, McCormick included, are using different technology in classroom, but they are in the minority.

McCormick said she doesn't know of many other professors producing class-based podcasts like hers, though her project is the outgrowth of an earlier push by the **Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction** (better known as CALI) to have law professors record their lectures. **For each class, McCormick produces a podcast of about 20 minutes covering the main points of her lecture.** (She also makes the podcast script available for students who prefer to read rather than listen.) Here are the benefits:

- ▶▶ Students get an easily digestible overview of the lesson
- ▶▶ They can listen to the podcast when it's convenient for them, be it while driving in to school or walking the dog
- ▶▶ Writing out the podcast gives McCormick the chance to hone her lesson plan.

Now, McCormick said she expects some in the legal academy to be skeptical of this method. "I think some professors might hesitate to do the kind of podcast I do because they think it's too much spoon-feeding," she told me. "Pedagogically, they might disagree with [podcasts]. I started as a legal writing professor, and the one lesson I learned is that it is not possible to make things too easy—students still have to do the hard work to understand, even if they're given a rule. I have not found that it has not been a crutch for my students. Mostly they are grateful."

But she acknowledged that the time it takes to produce a good post-class podcast is a drawback. She typically spends about eight hours on each one, between mapping out topics, writing a script, and recording it. The online quizzes she uses are less time-intensive, typically taking about two hours to put together.

And online quizzes are easier to offer than ever for legal academics, given that textbook publishers have begun developing their own assessment products. (The development was precipitated by the **American Bar Association** adding student learning outcomes to its standard, meaning schools have to state what they aim to teach law students and how well they are doing at meeting that goal.)

My thoughts: I don't think every law professor should rush out and start recording podcasts or create online quizzes, and McCormick doesn't either. Her article is more of a wider call to legal academics to experiment with their teaching methods and figure out how to use tech in the classroom. (In case you missed [last week's newsletter looking at Gen Z law students](#), the Cliffs Notes version is that they are accustomed to technology in nearly every aspect of their lives.) McCormick sums it up nicely:

"There are so many tools and technology out there that people are experimenting with. They are experimenting with Twitter in the classroom; with various ways to use clickers; with drafting together on a Google [document](#). All kinds of things. I think the biggest hurdle is feeling like it has to be perfect the first time you use it. It doesn't. Trial and error is OK."

Hello, Undergrads!

The **State University of New York at Buffalo Law School** is [branching out into undergraduate education](#), with the university's first-ever minor in law. The minor launched this fall, with law faculty teaching a variety of law courses for undergrads, including **Introduction to the American Legal System**, **Sports Law and Federal Law**.

Buffalo isn't the first law school to expand into undergraduate education. Recall the **University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law** in 2014 [launched a Bachelor of Arts in Law](#)—a first-of-its-kind that differs from the more general pre-law major in that it closely resembles the law school curriculum and is taught by law professors. And I've heard of plenty of law schools farming out faculty to teach undergraduate courses in recent years as enrollments drooped and some professors found themselves with some spare time.

Buffalo hopes to begin offering an undergraduate major in 2019, and is awaiting approval from the ABA and state university officials. There is apparently demand on campus. More than 70 undergrads signed up for this semester's Introduction to the American Legal System. Here's **law professor James Gardner**, who is teaching that class:

"The students have been enthusiastic and engaged. Many of the students in the class are already interested in a career in law, and many others are intrigued by and open to the idea."

The takeaway: Gardner's comment nails why I think this is a smart move. It gets law school on the radar of the undergraduates whom you hope to eventually bring in. Sure, some will take a class or two and decide law is boring, but others will discover they're really into it and may go on to apply to law school when they wouldn't have otherwise.



A \$10,000 Discount? Yes, Please!

Good news out of Kansas: **Nonresident students at the Sunflower state's flagship law school will soon pay about \$10,000 less per year.** That's a big chunk off the \$38,726 current list price for nonresident students and will bring the annual cost with about \$7,000 of the lower price resident students pay. So why the big price drop? **Kansas Law is clearly hoping to recruit a larger number of high-credentialed applicants from out of state.** (Kansas is a strong school, but has slipped nine spots in the most recent **U.S. News & World Report rankings** to land at No. 74.)

Reducing the price will hopefully get more non-residents interested in the school, while also freeing up more scholarship money to direct to Kansans, according to [this story](#) on the university's website. **Law Dean Stephen Mazza** said the adjustment to out-of-state tuition will bring the law school more in line with peer schools, while also emphasizing that the in-state tuition of \$22,562 is relatively low. The **Kansas Board of Regents** has signed off on the plan to reduce non-resident tuition, but the school has yet to iron out the exact cost for the upcoming school year.

Extra Credit Reading

- ▶ The **University of Michigan** has [landed a \\$33 million donation](#) from alumni real estate developer **Chris Jeffries**. It plans to use the money for scholarships.
- ▶ **Columbia Law School's Human Rights Clinic** is [partnering with the Clooney Foundation for Justice](#)—as in **George and Amal Clooney**—to launch **TrialWatch**, a program where volunteers will monitor trials around the globe for human rights violations.
- ▶ High profile law professor **Ian Samuel**, who helped spur the law student movement against mandatory arbitration in Big Law by disclosing one such agreement on Twitter, [is being investigated by Indiana University for potential Title IX violations](#).
- ▶ Meanwhile, here is a look at other law professors to [come under the microscope](#) amid the **#MeToo** movement. And women's groups at top law schools are [joining together](#) to **fight mandatory arbitration in Big Law**.

Thanks for reading Ahead of the Curve. Sign up for the newsletter and check out past issues [here](#).
I'll be back next week with more news and updates on the future of legal education. Until then, keep in touch at ksloan@alm.com
