

Introduction

Legal Education in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has created both opportunities and challenges for the field of law. While it offers efficient access to legal information, it simultaneously raises questions about the nature of legal reasoning, professional competence, and academic integrity. Large language models (LLMs)—such as ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Gemini, Claude, and Copilot—promise unprecedented efficiency in tasks like research and drafting. Yet they struggle with the normative reasoning, ethical judgment, and contextual interpretation that are foundational to legal thought. This tension forms the central inquiry of this special volume: how can the legal profession and legal education responsibly harness GenAI’s capabilities while safeguarding the core values of authenticity, integrity, critical thinking, and professional accountability?

The articles in this special volume on *Legal Education in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence* address this fundamental challenge across pedagogical, empirical, and regulatory dimensions. Together, they establish theoretical and practical frameworks for ‘responsible legal augmentation’ that transform GenAI’s known limitations into resources for developing advanced human judgment.

From Prohibition to Adoption

The judgment of the High Court of England and Wales in *Ayinde* provides an essential regulatory foundation. The court held that lawyers remain professionally accountable for AI-generated content, requiring verification, transparency, and competence in its use. In my article, *Responsible Legal Augmentation: Integrating Generative AI into Legal Practice*, I review the judgment in *Ayinde* and argue that it marks a jurisprudential shift in the legal profession’s engagement with GenAI. The decision reframes the debate from whether GenAI should be permitted at all to how it should be used. At its core, the judgment establishes a model of ‘responsible legal augmentation’: GenAI may be employed to enhance efficiency and access, but never at the expense of the law’s foundational values of transparency, integrity, and authenticity.

Tamarakemiebi Koroye and Donald Sikpi’s article, *GenAI as Whetstone: A Socratic Framework for Sharpening Critical Thinking in Legal Education*, highlights the finding that students complete tasks significantly faster with the use of GenAI but perform poorly on cross-doctrinal synthesis. This finding captures the paradox precisely: efficiency without understanding is pedagogically worthless. It resonates with Choi et al.’s randomised controlled trial showing that students utilising GenAI assistance completed legal tasks considerably faster, yet showed only slight and inconsistent improvements in quality, with particularly weak performance on tasks requiring cross-doctrinal synthesis and independent reasoning.¹

¹ Choi, “Lawyering in the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” 147.



In her article, *Early PLT Student Perceptions of the Integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Legal Education*, **Nicole Landy** shows that students, despite reporting increased GenAI literacy, remained appropriately skeptical, rating the likelihood of using GenAI for legal research at only 46/100. In their article, *Testing the Frontier: Generative AI in Legal Education and Beyond*, **Cari Hyde-Vaamonde** and **Anat Keller** find that students, when asked to evaluate AI-generated essays, consistently identified superficiality, lack of argumentative flow, and absence of originality—the very qualities they valued most. This student discernment is particularly noteworthy given Magesh et al.'s finding that leading GenAI legal research tools (including Lexis+ GenAI and Westlaw GenAI-Assisted Research) exhibited hallucination rates between 17% and 33% when tested in isolation.²

The Pedagogical Turn: From Detection to Integration

An important contribution across the articles in this special volume is the shift from a prohibition model to an integration model. Rather than investing resources in AI detection software (which is unreliable), the authors advocate for structured engagement with AI outputs as core pedagogical practice. This approach seeks to mitigate what may be termed 'critical thinking capacity atrophy': the gradual erosion of cognitive abilities that occurs when learners become excessively reliant on automated reasoning systems. Empirical research of Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University by Lee et al. demonstrates measurable declines in higher-order thinking among knowledge workers who regularly use GenAI tools.³ Similarly, MIT research by Kosmyrna et al. examining brain function during ChatGPT-assisted essay writing found that such use can adversely affect cognitive development, critical thinking, and intellectual independence.⁴

In response to the criticism that GenAI adversely affects critical thinking abilities, Koroye and Sikpi's article proposes a 'Socratic-GenAI framework' that operationalises countermeasures through three mechanisms: structured contention (deliberately juxtaposing AI and human reasoning), critical interrogation protocols, and epistemological transparency. Their concept of 'productive friction'—the cognitive resistance necessary for intellectual development—reframes AI's struggles with normative reasoning as teaching moments rather than technical failures. This builds on Bliss's analysis revealing valuable pedagogical benefits from leveraging GenAI's weaknesses as tools for teaching better legal reasoning by requiring students to compare, question, and explain both human and machine logic.⁵ Koroye and Sikpi argue that GenAI can enhance rather than erode critical thinking in legal education, but only when deliberately positioned as a whetstone sharpening analytical capacities rather than a solution engine replacing intellectual struggle. Hyde-Vaamonde and Keller's empirical study supports this argument, demonstrating that critical engagement with AI tools enhances rather than diminishes academic standards.

Landy's finding that the specialised 'Big Interview' tool (rather than generic ChatGPT) most effectively improved student understanding suggests an important refinement: the quality and specificity of AI tools matter significantly for pedagogical outcomes. Students need exposure to both generic and domain-specific applications to develop sophisticated evaluation skills. However, this finding should be interpreted cautiously in light of Munir et al.'s comparative analysis, which found that while law-specific tools (tested against ChatGPT-4, Copilot, DeepSeek, Lexis+ AI, and Llama 3) performed better than generic applications, they still produced inaccuracies, incomplete responses, and hallucinations.⁶

Co-Creation Imperative

A recurring theme across these articles is the centrality of student voice in navigating technological transformation. Hyde-Vaamonde and Keller's co-created guidelines, Landy's survey feedback, and the student recommendations embedded throughout these articles demonstrate that students can be sophisticated partners in navigating technological change—not passive recipients of institutional policy.

This collaborative approach reflects what Bovill et al. term 'co-creation' in higher education: a meaningful collaboration between students and staff, with students becoming more active participants in the learning process, constructing understanding and resources with academic staff.⁷ Cook-Sather et al. describe this approach as students as partners: 'a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.'⁸

² Magesh, "Hallucination-Free?" 216.

³ Lee, "The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking."

⁴ Kosmyrna, "Your Brain on ChatGPT."

⁵ Bliss, "Teaching Law in the Age of Generative AI," 111.

⁶ Munir, "Evaluating AI in Legal Operations."

⁷ Bovill, "Addressing Potential Challenges."

⁸ Cook-Sather, "Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching," 6-7.

Research by Chan and Hu on students' voices regarding GenAI confirms that student input helps institutions better navigate the challenges and opportunities of GenAI, with students reporting that hands-on experience enhanced understanding and fostered responsible usage attitudes.⁹ Yusuf et al. further emphasise that when one notes the different cultural dimensions of how GenAI use is perceived, engagement with diverse student bodies becomes crucial, making collaborative approaches central to formulating effective policies and strategies.¹⁰

Way Forward

Legal education's response to GenAI will determine whether the next generation of lawyers views technology as augmenting critical thinking and professional judgment or as undermining integrity, transparency, accountability, and authenticity—the core values that define legal practice. As Sir Geoffrey Vos, Master of the Rolls, observed in his February 2025 speech, it is vital to build bridges between GenAI skeptics and GenAI enthusiasts, since adoption by the legal profession is inevitable, though it must proceed cautiously and with due responsibility.¹¹ He identified three compelling reasons for lawyers and judges to adopt GenAI: it is already widely deployed in sectors the legal profession serves; many future disputes will concern AI, requiring lawyers to be adept at understanding its capabilities and weaknesses; and AI can reduce cost, time, and effort in dispute resolution.

The convergence across these articles—from theoretical frameworks to empirical studies, from judicial precedent to student voices—demonstrates that the path forward requires neither prohibition nor uncritical adoption, but rather what might be termed 'responsible legal augmentation.' This approach positions GenAI as a whetstone: a tool that sharpens human analytical capacities precisely through critical examination of its limitations.

The future of legal education lies not in rejecting GenAI but in reframing it—as a whetstone that sharpens rather than supplants human judgment. Institutions that embed critical AI literacy in curricula and co-create frameworks with students will prepare lawyers who wield technology not as a substitute for judgment, but as a catalyst for the critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and professional accountability that define excellence in legal practice.

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⁹ Chan, "Students' Voices on Generative AI."

¹⁰ Yusuf, "Generative AI and the Future of Higher Education."

¹¹ Vos, "Speech by the Master of the Rolls at the LawtechUK Generative AI Event."

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