

# Teaching Law in the GenAI Era:

Reflections with  
Literature Review



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# Three Main Points

1. Legal Education and AI from early 2000s to 2025
2. GenAI's Expanding Role in Law Schools
3. What Remains Essential in Legal Education

# 1. Tracing the Evolution: Legal Education and AI From the early 2000s to 2025

Snapshot From  
the Early 2000s

(Oskamp &  
Lauritsen, 2002)  
– described the  
state of AI in law  
as  
**“embarrassing”**

**No real examples** of AI systems being  
fully embedded in legal practice



**Limited deployment**, mostly  
**experimental tools** used in **government**  
or **niche commercial applications.**



Examples included:

Westlaw’s natural  
language search (WIN)

Early document  
assembly tools

Systems like DealProof  
that offered auto-  
proofing features

But in the early 2000s,  
the problem wasn't just  
'technological'  
- it was 'cultural' and  
'structural'

Law is complex and highly context-sensitive field – thus resisted automation



Lawyers were reluctant to adopt tools they didn't trust or understand.



Many legal firms were focused on IT infrastructure, not innovation.



There was a disconnect between AI researchers and legal practitioners with little cross-pollination

So back then, the main question wasn't whether the tech was capable, but **whether the profession was ready to engage with it meaningfully**. And, frankly, the answer was **'NO'**

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*“Unless **practicing lawyers** see **clear and immediate benefits**, and **unless they understand** what AI can and cannot do, they will neither use nor ask for the right tools.” (Oskamp & Lauritsen, 2002)*

## Legal education mirrored the same limitations seen in practice:

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**Law schools weren't preparing students to understand or shape AI tools, let alone to work effectively alongside them.**

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Even though **AI and Law seminars** have been taught regularly at institutions like Harvard and Stanford **since the late 1980s**, these **remained elective and niche**, not part of a broader curricular shift. (Ashley, 2012)

## Fast forward to 2021, and that gap largely persisted (Eliot, 2021):

- Most lawyers have never taken a formal class on AI and law, even among recent graduates.

*“...the chances of formally learning about AI and the law is considered as remote a possibility as taking a trip to Mars.”*

- AI topics were often left out because they weren't seen as relevant to core legal exams like the bar; therefore, students who cared often **self-taught**

### **Faculty familiarity/readiness also limited integration:**

- Few legal academics were equipped to teach AI and law as a standalone topic.
- Coverage, if any, depended on individual faculty initiative to weave it into existing subjects – an optional, effort-intensive task.

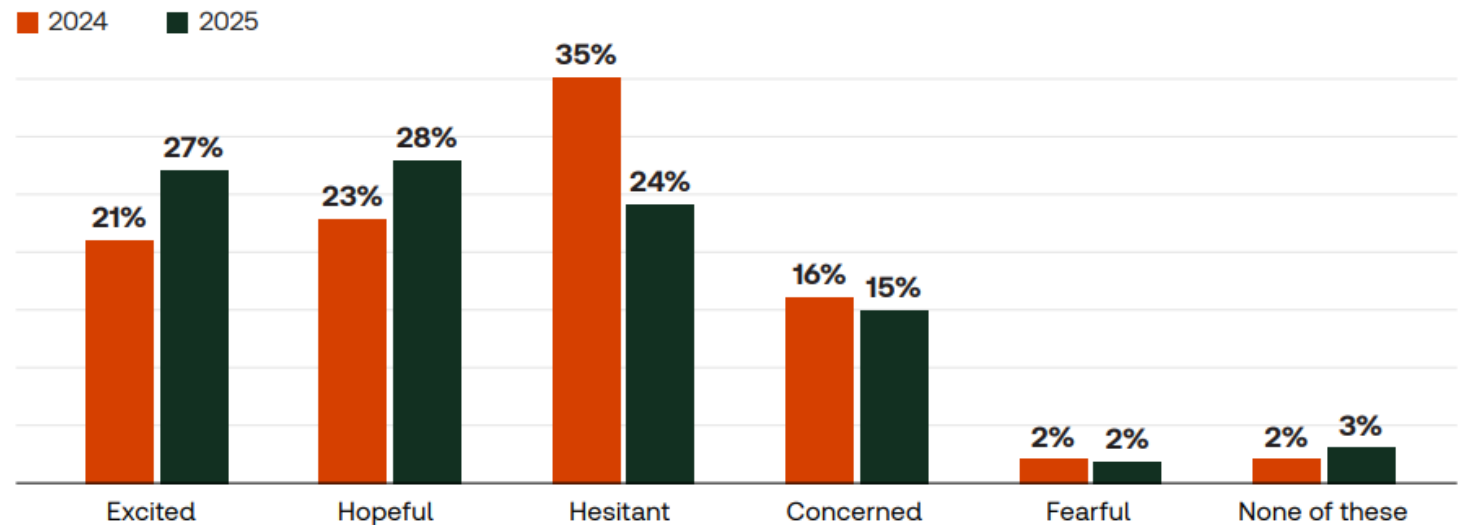
## According to the **2025 Thomson Reuters Report (ft. 1702 respondents)**:

Fast forward to 2025, while education may have lagged, **practice moved forward**, and we're not just talking about "AI-enabled search tools" anymore:

- **Over 70%** of legal professionals using GenAI do so weekly – many daily.
- **Use cases include** document review (74%), summarisation (72%), research (73%), and drafting (51%).
- **59% of law firms and 57% of corporate legal departments** believe it should be applied to their work
- **Client expectations are changing: 59% of corporate legal clients and 44% of government legal clients** want their firms to use GenAI

The shift isn't just in tools – it's also in mindset and market demand. We've moved from legal AI being 'nice-to-have' to being professionally expected.

FIGURE 1:  
Sentiment on the future of GenAI



Source: Thomson Reuters 2025

## Key Trends (Thomson Reuters Institute, 2025):

Tools like e-discovery using machine learning are already standard in big firms, and will likely become mandatory under professional standards of care.

### The near future involves:

- **Agentic AI** – systems that work with minimal human intervention and ‘check their own work before giving it back to the legal professional for final review’
- **Augmenting Attorney Judgement** – ‘with tools that can quickly access, analyse, and synthesise vast corpus of legal authority that underlies our legal system’ (e.g., CoCounsel)
- **Client-facing AI** – chatbots like Lisa and Billy acting as ‘robot lawyers’ for simple legal queries or document generation (Van Eck, 2020: 47)



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**But the challenge isn't just capability – it's preparedness.**

The 2025 *Thomson Reuters* report **also** shows:

- **64%** of professionals have received ***no*** GenAI training
- **Only 20%** of firms measure GenAI ROI
- **Yet 95%** expect it to become **central** to their daily workflow **in 5 years**

## 2. GenAI's Expanding Role in Law Schools

# Things we now know (both through literature and experience)

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## For Higher Education in General (Koh et al., 2023)

- **GenAI tools like ChatGPT has disrupted Higher Ed.**, raising concerns around plagiarism and the student–teacher dynamic
- Generative AI (e.g., GPT-4/5) has **passed professional exams** (law, medicine, engineering) prompting a rethinking of assessment and engagement
- Educators are urged to **work with GenAI, not against it**, to enhance student learning outcomes, irrespective of the discipline

## For Law Schools (Ugar, 2023)

- Legal education is being **disrupted by Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies**: AI, robotics, and Information Communication Technologies.
- Law educators must **adapt their teaching** and **upskill themselves** to remain relevant.

**Lawyers and Law students don't need to become programmers – but they do need to *understand* how modern tools like NLP and ML are shaping legal practice.**

(Ashley, 2012).



## From My Own Teaching and Practice: Use of GenAI in low-risk, formative learning settings:



Integrated a **GenAI-enabled conversation tool** into an elective law subject to **replace static discussion boards**.



Students used the tool to **engage with weekly reflection questions**, clarify their understanding, and receive **instant feedback (like a 24/7 virtual tutor)**



In a **first-year foundational law subject**, I piloted GenAI as a **simulated client** in a **Lawyer-Client Interview exercise**, enabling consistent yet individualised student experiences.

## Observations/Reflections:



The AI-driven format supported **differentiated learnings**: students followed unique conversation paths, but all completed a comparable task.



Improved **student engagement, curiosity**, and helped students **refine their reasoning** through structured, low-pressure dialogue.

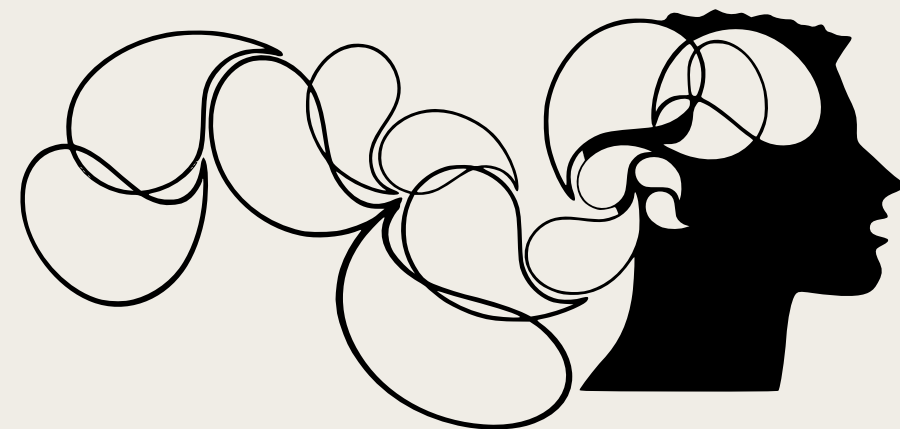


The approach aligns well with **authentic assessment principles**, allowing students to apply legal knowledge in **simulated, real-world contexts**.

## How the literature supports this shift:

- Koh et al. (2023) argue that GenAI should not be viewed as a threat but as a **teaching partner** that can enhance learning if used responsibly.
- Njotini & Mpedi (2020) Urges educators to **leverage AI and ICT** to enrich legal education, especially amid automation in legal services.
- Millard & Loots (2020) show how tools like **Blackboard Learn**, when combined with analytics, can **identify students at risk** – but GenAI can **extend this by providing ongoing, personalised dialogue and support.**
- Louw (2020) **argues that** legal educators must **adapt teaching methods** (e.g., blended learning) for different generations:
  - **Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y** have varying levels of tech exposure and comfort.
  - Calls for **inclusive teaching strategies** that accommodate generational tech gaps.

In my understanding, the broader message is clear: **the traditional legal education is evolving**, and GenAI offers a meaningful way to support student learning, build practical skills, and maintain curriculum relevance in a changing legal landscape.



# Enduring Foundations: What Remains Essential in Legal Education

Legal Reasoning  
and Ethics -  
**Irreplaceable  
Human Elements,**  
Koh Et Al (2023)  
on the **Student-  
Teacher  
Relationship:**

## **Human-Centric Ethical Judgment**

Ethical judgment requires empathy and nuanced understanding that AI cannot replicate (yet), highlighting human exclusivity.

## **Legal Reasoning as a Human Skill**

Legal reasoning involves complex interpretation and contextual awareness, skills unique to human cognition.

## **Student-Teacher Relationship Importance**

The student-teacher dynamic fosters critical thinking and ethical development essential for learning legal reasoning.

**Ugar (2022) on Trust, Scrutiny, and Oversight - Tech is **not value-neutral**; requires **contextualisation** to local conditions and student diversity:**

## **Maintaining Trust**

Ensuring trust is fundamental when integrating AI tools into professional legal and educational practices

## **Professional Oversight**

Oversight mechanisms guarantee accountability, preserving high standards.

# Conclusion: Embracing AI While Upholding Legal Education's Core Values

## Why this matters for the curriculum now:

- Moves beyond “knowing the rule” to **supervising AI tools**, a **practice-ready competency**.
- Changing role of the **‘teacher’** to **‘guide’** students to critically analyse AI’s societal impact, fostering informed and ethical technology engagement.