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## LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

# Training Tomorrow's Lawyer: The Evolution of Legal Education

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*Special to the Legal*

“There’s math and technology involved? Count me out, that’s why I went to law school.” The attorneys in the room nod at each other, smiling at this joke that more than a few of us have told at one point in our careers.

But it looks like this joke has finally run its course. The practice of law is not immune to technological advances, especially in the areas of research methodologies and, of course, electronic discovery. Furthermore, clients are continuing to focus on value, whether that is in seeking alternative fee arrangements or evaluating outside counsel on their efficient delivery of legal services. For example, a former in-house attorney, Casey Flaherty, and the Institute on Law Practice Technology and Innovation at Suffolk University jointly developed the Legal Tech Assessment, a benchmarking test that evaluates attorneys and other timekeepers on their knowledge of basic technology that most use in the practice of law, such as word processing and spreadsheets. There might not be any math on this test, but the effective



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use of technology is measured in one simple metric: time.

Firms are certainly devoting many resources to technology to gain a competitive advantage. Entire departments, such as knowledge management or practice innovation, are tasked to identify areas for improvement and implement solutions by infusing technology or processes. For example, legal project management tools have been paired up with a document automation workflow. Some firms are extensively using document automation programs, which enable attorneys to create “TurboTax”-style

questionnaires with logical decision trees on the back end to quickly produce a document. Those firms that have the right people with both technological understanding and legal knowledge will certainly have a competitive advantage with the implementation of such automation tools.

In addition, there is an ongoing discussion about the ethical duties attorneys have with respect to technology. There seems to be a consensus that the ethical rules regarding competency do include a duty to ensure efficient use of technology, but it is unclear how far it should extend. I would venture to say that the basic skills on word processing and spreadsheets tested in the aforementioned Legal Tech Assessment should be part of today’s attorneys’ skill set.

It is clear that technology has affected and should affect the way attorneys practice law, and law schools have evolved to incorporate tech education beyond the basic skills. Typically, these courses fall under “law practice technology” and offer students the opportunity to learn about document automation, legal reasoning systems, e-discovery tools and data analysis, among other things.

The focus is on training the attorneys on the theory but also teaching the practical skills that could make them more marketable to prospective employers. Michigan State University's ReInvent Law program; CodeX, of the Stanford Law School Center for Legal Informatics; and Georgetown University's Iron Tech competition and related courses are notable tech initiatives that have received a lot of traction and interest.

Some schools are even taking it a step further by offering a "legal residency" program focusing on legal technology. To continue to bridge the knowledge gap and offer an opportunity for law students to take a different career path, four law schools (Emory University, University of Miami, Ohio State University and Vanderbilt University) have teamed up with UnitedLex, a legal services outsourcing provider, to create the residency program. The partnership with the University of Miami began in late 2013, with Ohio State following the year after. Emory and Vanderbilt signed on earlier this year, and UnitedLex continues to seek and grow partnerships with other law schools.

The two-year residency is a full-time paid program at UnitedLex. It is similar to a medical residency program and ensures that new graduates understand how to apply their legal education in combination with real significant technology to help solve problems for actual clients.

In addition to practical and technical skills, residents gain project management experience, which will help build foundational skills relevant to their future careers. According to Joe Dearing, UnitedLex's executive vice president of global legal solutions and head of the UnitedLex academic group, which manages the development of the law

school partnerships across the United States, most of UnitedLex's clients are corporate law departments and some of the worst problems that a general counsel faces involve huge amounts of data and managing small armies of lawyers. Having a junior lawyer who understands project management, how large companies store data, and where to find data is critical. The trend within corporate law departments is to hire legal operations directors and managers whose teams focus on matter management, outside counsel relationships, and technology implementation.

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The residency program also offers an opportunity to educate law students about alternative careers. Most law students are not aware of different career paths in firms or law departments; promoting the type of work that UnitedLex offers to its clients to law students creates an awareness and interest in pursuing the path toward such a career. During the program, residents rotate through various areas such as cybersecurity, litigation management and e-discovery, and the program also offers placement in overseas offices to service international clients. The residency program recruits on campus like other prospective employers and works closely with participating law schools' career services offices. Each round of hires could be anywhere from three to 10, depending on UnitedLex's need.

The residency program also allows all participants an opportunity to expand their network. Recent law grads get valuable exposure and access to clients by working with them directly. UnitedLex continues to educate law students on alternative career paths and recruit its future leaders. The law schools themselves are able to expand their curriculums and increase job prospects and placement.

At the end of the program, residents either stay with UnitedLex as permanent hires or seek employment at corporate law departments or firms. They are armed with plenty of practical experience, bridging the knowledge gap from recent law grads to junior attorneys or project managers. Because of their direct working relationships with UnitedLex's clients, the residents also have a foot in the door when they are considered as prospective hires.

It is obvious that the legal market is changing very rapidly and legal education must follow. I foresee that more law schools will either offer their own clinicals in technical training or partner with outside vendors for some sort of a residency program. For law students, this is an exciting time, with new programs being created that can introduce them to alternative career paths within the legal landscape.

**Joe Dearing**, executive vice president of UnitedLex's global legal solutions, and **Jennifer Ogle**, director of UnitedLex's global litigation services group, provided information about the residency program. •