SHERRY KARABIN

LAW SCHOOLS 3.0

Technology is revolutionizing the practice of law. We take a look at some innovative law schools leading the way.

MyCase, Clio, Nextpoint, LawGives, LawPay, LawPal and many more—these are the new tools of the trade that many lawyers are wielding, and legal experts say they are just the tip of the technological iceberg.

The American Bar Association recently updated its Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Comment 8 of Rule 1.1 now states that lawyers should "keep abreast of changes in the law and its practice, including the benefits and risks associated with relevant technology."

Those already practicing may have to study up or find someone to tackle the technology end of the work for them. But what are law schools doing to make sure that tomorrow's lawyer can hit the ground running?

THE NEED TO EDUCATE

"Most law schools have had classes that discuss the legal aspects of technology as it pertains to intellectual property, defamation, and Internet policy for years," said Richard Granat, codirector of the Center for Law Practice Technology at Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville and cochair of the ABA Law Practice Division's eLawyering Task Force. "This is not true when it comes to the use of technology in law practice."

The legal education community needs to step up. "Schools must address this deficiency," added Granat, who is also founder and CEO of the virtual law firm platform provider DirectLaw, Inc. and LawMediaLabs, Inc., a digital legal solutions and interactive law apps provider. "The delivery of legal services, especially to consumers and small businesses, is becoming much more dependent on the under-

standing of legal technology," he said. "The platform is shifting from one-to-one service to the Internet itself."

As society becomes increasingly plugged in, it's only natural that this tech-savvy population will expect to be able to resolve legal issues through the ease of their smartphones or laptops. "As the millennial generation starts to encounter legal problems, they are going to want to handle their problems online, as they are used to doing in other aspects of their lives," he said.

In July, the University of Missouri—Kansas City School of Law hosted a Law Schools, Technology, and Access to Justice conference focusing on how the use of technology in the legal field could help clients who cannot afford an attorney and don't qualify for legal aid, Granat said.

He said the conference will continue to virtually promote ideas about teaching law practice technology to students to increase access to law. "Follow-up projects are being explored through a website titled Law and Technology for Access to Justice and hosted through LegalHackathon. org," Granat said.

THE PUSH FOR CHANGE

While many schools are behind the eight ball when it comes to teaching legal technology tools, Marc Lauritsen, president of Capstone Practice

Systems and Legal Systematics, and an adjunct professor at Suffolk University Law School in Boston, said there has been a recent push to catch up.

"At least a dozen law schools are offering courses and the numbers are growing," said Lauritsen, also a cochair of the ABA's eLawyering Task Force. "However, for the most part, the tools that lawyers are using in practice are not being taught."

He said many students are not prepared for their new competition either. "The marketplace is rapidly changing. Companies like Rocket Lawyer and LegalZoom are contributing to lawyer underemployment by providing a more cost-effective and consumer-friendly way for people to receive services," Lauritsen said.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Suffolk University Law School added a Legal Technology and Innovation Concentration in 2013. Run out of the Institute on Law Practice Technology & Innovation, which opened the same year, the program offers courses like automated document assembly, expert systems, legal project management, process improvement, and virtual lawyering.

Lauritsen teaches the courses Decision Making and Choice Management, which focuses on using technology to inform decision making, and Lawyering in an Age of Smart Machines, aimed at giving students a chance to write their own software.

"I think students need to understand what can be done with software and how software works," Lauritsen said. "There is nothing better than hands-on experience."

Regina Holloway said during her time in Lauritsen's smart machines

class, she used the document automation software HotDocs to create a template that may be used in the Suffolk University Law School Housing Discrimination Testing Program. "The program I created is still in its early stages, but I got a lot accomplished and it looks like it might actually be used in the future," said Holloway, an evening student who will graduate this month.

"I want to work with start-ups and technology will help me to do that," Holloway said. "In today's world, more and more companies are coming out with technology that could possibly make the lawyer obsolete. We need to work smarter and be more helpful to the community if we want to sustain our careers."

Stephanie Kimbro, codirector of the Center for Law Practice Technology at Florida Coastal School of Law has been working with Granat to develop curriculum for the center for about a year (at press time). The center began in August 2013, but classes did not start until January 2014.

"We are offering classes that teach students how to create a virtual law firm, automate documents, produce business plans, and use social media to market themselves—skills that they will need if they are to be successful in today's marketplace," said Kimbro, an adjunct professor at the school.

Students can choose individual classes or get a certificate in Legal Technology and Law Practice Management.

"The majority of students graduating today will not find jobs at a traditional firm, especially if they are from a lower-tier law school," she said. "Many will need to become solo practitioners or find different roles for themselves in the legal profession. We teach very practical skills like how to budget, use a spreadsheet, create a business, things you don't get in many law schools."

At some point, the paper-based legal office will fade away and those not up on technology will not be able to compete.

The classes are all taught online via Skype, video conferencing, and an online distance-learning platform with calendars, communication features, and other tools. "This forces students to use the technology while they learn about it," Kimbro said.

"The material encourages us to think outside the box," said Annie Rodriguez, 34, who started at Florida Coastal in the spring of 2013. "The software allows for efficiency and maybe even a brand-new business model in which we deliver our services online," she said.

PIONEERS

While some schools are just adding legal technology to their curricula, the Illinois Institute of Technology Chicago-Kent College of Law has been ahead of the curve for years.

"The school first got involved in document assembly in 1978 using a mainframe computer and dial-up lines," said Ronald Staudt, professor of law and director of the law school's Center for Access to Justice & Technology (CAJT).

In 1984, the school created the Center for Law and Computers. "From the late '80s through the '90s, we taught all students how to use computers for case briefing, outlining their first-year courses, and for databases of authorities for research papers," said Staudt. "The center developed electronic versions of popular first-year case books and supported

Technology is having a significant impact on legal aid.

an experimental first-year section, the 'E section,' in which all students had laptops with all their case books converted to electronic form."

Then in 1999, the school started the CAJT, providing students with the opportunity to use the Internet and build web tools to help legal aid attorneys and pro bono volunteers reach more people. Projects also make it easier for people without a lawyer to better represent themselves.

One such endeavor is the Self-Help Web Center at the Circuit Court of Cook County in the Richard J. Daley Center, where law students teach unrepresented litigants to use the technology tools developed by those at CAJT.

Chicago-Kent College of Law also offers a large number of courses aimed at getting students up to speed on legal technology, including Internet law and computer law. "I have always been convinced that technology was a fertile area that could help to make what lawyers do more effective," said Staudt, former vice president for technology development at LexisNexis Inc. "At some point, the paper-based legal office will fade away and those not up on technology will not be able to compete."

This semester, Staudt joined with former students, Andrew Baker and David Bonebrake, and others, to teach a brand-new course on practice and professionalism. The class addresses how technology is affecting law firm operations and how students can prepare to ethically deliver services based on these changes.

Bonebrake, who serves as program counsel for the nonprofit Legal Services Corporation in Washington, D.C., said the legal aid component is a critical development. "Technology is having a significant impact on legal aid," said Bonebrake, a 2007 graduate from Chicago-Kent College of Law. "Because of lack of funding, legal aid organizations are unable to provide services to everyone in

need so it's key that we come up with innovative ways to reach this large group.

"Web-based applications like TurboTax have simplified the filing process for millions and legal document automation programs can do the same for unrepresented litigants who need to file paperwork with the court," Bonebrake said.

Chicago-Kent College of Law is not the only school to get a jump on technology education. In 2001, Columbia Law School created its Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic. Developed by Brian Donnelly, director of educational technology and lecturer in law, and law professors Conrad Johnson and Mary Zulack, the one-semester program combines teaching and fieldwork.

"We decided that simply offering technology courses was not enough," said Donnelly. "By weaving technology into real-life scenarios, students get a much better understanding of how it can be used."

Donnelly said students are taught and use web-based tools to build websites and complex databases for public-interest organizations and judges that help the general public gain access to information and do some of their own legal footwork.

Students have helped create two of the Access to Justice self-help programs in the New York City Housing Court, enabling tenants to serve as their own advocates, for example.

Columbia Law School graduate J. Mendy Fisch used his training at the clinic to come up with tools to streamline the intake process at Brooklyn Legal Services in New York. "The group designed a website using WordPress," said Fisch. "The website contained surveys that would help guide client interviews during intake at Brooklyn Legal Services."

Fisch, who graduated in May, is a clerk for Judge Margaret Ryan in the US Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces. "There is always room to improve legal services through the use of technology," he said.

Hofstra University's Maurice A. Deane School of Law takes a different type of approach to teaching legal technology. In 2009, it opened its Law, Logic & Technology Research Laboratory, which is headed by Professor Vern Walker.

"The lab is modeled after a science laboratory," said Walker. "Our students try to systematically solve real-world problems and their education is the byproduct of the work they do."

One of the biggest projects being tackled right now is the automation of argumentation mining of legal documents, Walker said. "We have software that can cull documents for ediscovery, but there is nothing available that can go through those documents and pull out the rules and legal reasoning behind the decisions," he said.

Hofstra law school graduate Karina Vazirova used what she learned in the lab to secure a job as a legal knowledge engineer at Neota Logic Inc. "We provide a platform that allows building expert systems capable of automating business and legal decision making," said Vazirova.

"I don't know if I would have been exposed to the concept of legal technology as a regular law student," she said. "Being a part of the program allowed me to go to conferences and meet people in the field."

Students who work on projects not only learn how to use the tools, but also have the chance to work with Walker to publish articles, which he said gives them an entirely different layer of understanding.

"Students entering the field today are at the beginning of the technology learning curve so we not only have to give them the skills to hit the ground running, we have to teach them how to stay in the race," said Walker. "The only way to do this is to ensure that they understand the principles behind the technology as opposed to just how to use it." ∎

SHERRY KARABIN (sherry.karabin@yahoo.com) is a freelance reporter and writer in New York City.

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