

REIMAGINING LEGAL EDUCATION: THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF LAW SCHOOLS IN MODERN SOCIETY— A VALUES-DRIVEN APPROACH TO MODERN LEGAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Our great nation, despite its flaws, was founded on the idea that the rule of law applies to everyone. The United States Constitution tells us that no person shall “be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.”¹ This principle, though not always embraced in the way it should be, remains the foundation for a just (or more just) society.²

That principle predated our Constitution. In 1770, when John Adams and other attorneys represented British soldiers after the Boston Massacre, they took clients who were reviled because they believed that everyone should be provided a proper defense.³ They took those cases despite great potential risk to their careers and reputations because they were convinced it was the right thing to do.

As John Adams famously warned: “Because power corrupts, society’s demands for moral authority and character increase as the importance of the position increases.”⁴ This remains true today, and it is the role of lawyers to protect the rights of all people and ensure that due process of law means something.

Legal education is in a profound transformation, shaped by evolving societal needs and expectations, technological advancements, and shifting student demographics.⁵ This Article explores the contemporary role and purpose of law schools

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1. U.S. CONST. amend. V; U.S. CONST. amend. XIV, § 1.

2. See *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356, 369 (1886); *Terrace v. Thompson*, 263 U.S. 197, 216 (1923).

3. John Adams, *Adams’ Argument for the Defense: 3-4 December 1770*, NAT’L ARCHIVE: FOUNDERS ONLINE, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/05-03-02-0001-0004-0016> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

4. *Top John Adams Quotes*, U.S. CONSTITUTION.NET (Apr. 30, 2024), <https://www.usconstitution.net/top-john-adams-quotes/>.

5. See generally WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN ET AL., *EDUCATING LAWYERS: PREPARATION FOR THE PROFESSION OF LAW* (2007) (stating that the book centers on the formation of legal professionals, with particular emphasis on the need for law school education that develops an understanding of legal theory, practical skills, and professional identity).

through the lens of Creighton University School of Law (my institution), highlighting the integration of service, ethics, and innovation in legal pedagogy. The law school that serves modern society will have a renewed focus on humanity, community engagement, and adaptive learning as central pillars of legal education in the 21st century.⁶

INTRODUCTION

Law school is not merely a credentialing process. It should be a transformative experience. Students should go to law school because they genuinely want to be there—not just to have a J.D. or pursue a potentially lucrative legal career. Both are good reasons to go to law school, but they are insufficient motivation on their own. If we can encourage students to pursue legal education for the purpose of legal education itself, we can foster deeper engagement and personal growth, which aligns with the broader purpose of legal education as a space for intellectual and ethical development.

Law schools have long served as gatekeepers to the legal profession, tasked with preparing students for the rigors of legal practice.⁷ Yet, in an era marked by rapid technological change, increasing demands for access to justice, and a growing emphasis on service-oriented careers, the traditional model of legal education is being reexamined and sometimes questioned.⁸

This Article argues that the law school of the future must be more than a credentialing institution; it must be a purpose- and values-driven enterprise. Specifically, modern legal education must (1) embrace mission-driven values, (2) serve as a civic anchor in its community, and (3) adapt to evolving social, demographic, and technological realities. These three commitments, taken together, can reimagine legal education as both transformative for students and responsive to society.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), and shifting cultural expectations have accelerated this reexamination, prompting law schools to reconsider their pedagogical priorities and institutional missions. At times, though, like most of our institutions, we are slow to adapt. This Article considers how law schools can—and must—evolve to meet these challenges through thoughtful innovation, a willingness to evolve, and mission-driven leadership.⁹

6. See *Report and Recommendations*, A.B.A.: TASK FORCE ON THE FUTURE OF LEGAL EDUC. 25-28 (Jan. 2014), https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/report_and_recommendations_of_aba_task_force.pdf.

7. See Deborah L. Rhode, *Access to Justice*, 69 *FORDHAM L. REV.* 1785, 1786 (2001).

8. See *Commission on the Future of Legal Education*, A.B.A. (Feb. 15, 2022), https://www.americanbar.org/groups/leadership/office_of_the_president/futureoflegaleducation/.

9. Susan Sturm & Lani Guinier, *The Law School Matrix: Reforming Legal Education in a Culture of Competition and Conformity*, 60 *VAND. L. REV.* 515, 553 (2007) (“Law schools in the reimagined position continuously ask how to create an educational infrastructure consistent with the institution’s culture and mission.”).

I. THE JESUIT MISSION AND THE VOCATION OF LAW

Before joining Creighton University School of Law, I was a part of law schools at state institutions, such as the University of North Dakota and West Virginia University. From a curricular perspective, most law schools are quite similar. From a mission and focus perspective, schools tend to vary more.

As law schools evolve to support modern society, we need to define and embrace our respective missions so that we can maintain our focus amidst rapid change. I have had the privilege to serve as the dean at Creighton, which is a Catholic, Jesuit institution.¹⁰ There are fourteen Jesuit law schools in the United States that share the Jesuit tradition, including schools like Georgetown, Boston College, and Gonzaga.¹¹ Although the Jesuit mission cannot and will not resonate for every law school, each law school should have its own mission to use as a guide.

The Jesuit tradition emphasizes *cura personalis*—care for the whole person—and encourages students to view their legal careers as a means of serving others.¹² This perspective aligns with broader calls for lawyers to act as counselors and advocates for justice, particularly in underserved communities. At Creighton, this spirit is not confined to mission statements. We try to make sure it permeates classroom discussions, clinical work, and institutional culture. We are admittedly not always successful, but that is our goal.

Creighton University's Jesuit identity infuses our legal education program with a distinct emphasis on service, ethics, and reflection. A centuries-old tradition of intellectual rigor and moral responsibility, Jesuit pedagogy encourages students to view law not merely as a career, but as a calling—a vocation grounded in justice, compassion, and the dignity of every person. Although coming from religious origins, the Jesuit values that support our work are for everyone, regardless of whether they have a faith tradition or what that faith may be.

Like many law students, students at Jesuit institutions often approach legal studies with a philosophical and values-driven mindset, asking not only *how* the law works, but *why* it exists and *whom* it serves. This often leads to a deep engagement with the law as a tool for social transformation and not merely a mechanism for personal advancement.

A. *Cura Personalis and the Lawyer's Role*

Central to Jesuit education is the principle of *cura personalis*, or “care for the whole person.”¹³ This value encourages educators to attend to students' intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development, and it extends to the way

10. *Leader Tips: Jesuit Values*, CREIGHTON UNIV., https://www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/StudentServices/SLIC/LEAD_Center/Jesuit_Values_PDF.pdf (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

11. *See Our Member Colleges & Universities*, ASS'N OF JESUIT COLLS. & UNIVS., <https://ajcunet.edu/about/colleges-universities/> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

12. *See, e.g., School of Law Mission and History*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/law/about/mission-history> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

13. *Leader Tips: Jesuit Values*, *supra* note 10.

lawyers are trained to interact with clients. In the legal context, *cura personalis* translates into a commitment to empathy, active listening, and holistic advocacy—qualities that are essential when serving vulnerable populations.

Jesuit values are nearly 500 years old, but they are values, in other forms, that we have seen added into the curriculum in most law schools, public and private, secular and religious. The concept of *cura personalis* is, in many ways, a variation on teaching cultural competency and meeting clients where they are.

Lawyers educated with these values are being taught to see their clients not as case files or legal problems, but as individuals with complex lives and inherent worth. A person-centered philosophy is especially critical in areas such as family law, immigration, juvenile justice, and poverty law, where legal issues are deeply intertwined with personal trauma, social inequities, and systemic barriers. There is no area of the law, though, where this skillset and mindset are not valuable.

B. *Justice-Oriented Pedagogy*

Jesuit legal education also emphasizes justice as both a goal and a process. Students are encouraged to question the law and its structures and consider how legal systems can perpetuate inequality or serve as instruments of fairness and opportunity. This critical engagement can happen in classroom discussions, clinical experiences, and service-learning opportunities that challenge students to reflect on their role in advancing the common good.

It is critical that this mindset not be confined to mission statements. We must seek to have it permeate our institutional cultures. In this model, faculty integrate ethical reflection into doctrinal courses, clinics are designed to serve marginalized communities, and students are invited to explore the many moral dimensions of legal practice and the legal system. We can work to create a learning environment that cultivates not only legal competence but also moral courage.

C. *Expanding Access to Justice*

Jesuit values, and other social justice and service-oriented values, directly support the expansion of access to justice. By prioritizing service, empathy, and community engagement, we can prepare graduates to work in public interest law, legal aid, urban and rural practice, and pro bono practice. In our case, Creighton's clinical programs—such as the Juvenile Justice Legal Clinic and the low-income Bankruptcy Clinic—exemplify this commitment, offering students the opportunity to serve clients who would not have legal representation if a lawyer were not provided to them.¹⁴

Moreover, the Jesuit emphasis on solidarity with the poor and marginalized reinforces the idea that legal education should not be reserved for the elite, nor should legal services be inaccessible to those in need. This perspective challenges

14. See *Juvenile Justice Legal Clinic*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/law/law-clinics-academic-opportunities/clinics/juvenile-justice-legal-clinic> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025); *Bankruptcy Clinic*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/law/law-clinics-academic-opportunities/clinics/bankruptcy-clinic> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

law schools to rethink admissions, curriculum design, and career support in ways that remove barriers and create opportunities for every person.

At no point should we compromise our pursuit of excellence, but the proxies we use to determine excellence need to expand and evolve. For example, beyond grade point average and rank in class, we could consider a portfolio of work that clearly demonstrates a student's or lawyer's skills.

D. *Formation of the Whole Lawyer*

Ultimately, Jesuit legal education seeks to form “whole lawyers”—professionals who are not only skilled in legal reasoning, but also grounded in ethical reflection, social responsibility, and human compassion. This holistic formation is essential in a legal landscape increasingly shaped by technology, complexity, and cultural diversity. As the profession evolves, the Jesuit model offers a timeless framework for cultivating lawyers who are prepared to lead with integrity and serve with empathy.

It is my goal to have our law school serve as a community anchor by fostering inclusive, family-friendly environments. The concept of family in law school may seem unusual to some, particularly those who went to law school in the 1970s and 1980s. At a Jesuit institution, it is more common. It is also probably more personal for me than most because my wife and I have been on the same law faculty for nearly twenty years.¹⁵ Law school, for us, really is about family, so that influences how I see things.¹⁶

As an example, during my first year at Creighton, three inches of slushy snow-covered Omaha, and schools and daycares across the city shut down.¹⁷ As is often the case with universities, Creighton University and our law school remained open. That left many in our community—faculty, staff, and students—scrambling to figure out how to manage their responsibilities while caring for their children.

Recalling our days of an open university with closed schools and day care, I sent a message to the law school community offering to help. I reminded them that, although I am not a licensed childcare provider, I am a father of two—an eleven-year-old daughter and a fourteen-year-old son, at that time. I am generally good with kids, so I told them I would be happy to watch some little ones if it made things easier.

Some of our faculty members allow kids in class when necessary, and some students brought their children to class. Others just stopped by to say thank you—they figured out childcare, but knowing there was an option reduced their stress.

15. *Kendra Fershee, JD*, CREIGHTON UNIV. <https://www.creighton.edu/campus-directory/fershee-kendra> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025); *Joshua Paul Fershee, JD*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/campus-directory/fershee-joshua-p> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

16. *See, e.g.*, Aspen Leading Edge Podcast with Host Patty Roberts, *Episode 79: Conversations with Deans: Josh and Kendra Fershee*, DIGITAL COMMONS AT SAINT MARY'S UNIV., at 02:00 (Aug. 14, 2024), <https://commons.stmarytx.edu/edge/49/> (on file with author) (discussing how Kendra and Joshua Fershee ended up at Creighton and how the law school serves the community).

17. Molly Ashford, *Creighton Law Dean's Hosts Daycare for a Day*, THE DAILY REC. (Jan. 30, 2020, at 05:00 ET), <https://omahadailyrecord.com/content/creighton-law-dean%E2%80%99s-hosts-daycare-day>.

In the end, I only watched two elementary-aged boys, though I was prepared for more. In that case, the faculty member was open to children in the classroom, but not on a day when first-degree murder was the discussion topic.

I should note, though, that this kind of solution does not necessarily work for every school or dean. For example, there are gender dynamics at play here. Too often, caregiving is assumed to be a woman's responsibility. I recognize that for a female dean, making a similar offer might reinforce outdated expectations. For me, it was a chance to model my kind of leadership—one rooted in community, flexibility, and care. For other deans, those same goals can be (and may need to be) reinforced through different processes and means.

It is not the “how” we reinforce our values that matters. It is about “what” values we choose to reinforce. By grounding students in values of empathy and service, law schools are positioned to act not just as training grounds for lawyers, but as community anchors advancing access to justice.

II. LEGAL EDUCATION AS A COMMUNITY ANCHOR

Law schools are increasingly embracing a civic mission that positions us as active participants in our local communities. Creighton University School of Law exemplifies this shift through its robust clinical programs and community partnerships. Creighton has significantly expanded its clinical offerings, increasing student placements from sixteen to sixty-four annually. These include: Milton R. Abrahams Legal Clinic, which provides free civil legal services, primarily for victims of domestic violence; the Juvenile Justice Legal Clinic, offering representation to system-involved youth in Douglas County; our Bankruptcy Clinic, serving low-income individuals who are otherwise excluded from legal aid due to lack of assets; and our new innovation, an Entrepreneurship Clinic, which seeks to help people start new businesses to create generational wealth in communities that have historically been marginalized.¹⁸

These clinics allow students to earn academic credit while gaining hands-on experience in client counseling, trial preparation, and ethical decision-making.¹⁹ They also address critical gaps in access to justice for vulnerable populations. Similarly, Creighton's unique Community Connections program complements its legal clinics by connecting youth and families with essential services such as food, housing, and education.²⁰ While not a traditional legal clinic, it teaches students empathy, interviewing skills, and the importance of holistic advocacy.²¹

18. *Law Clinics*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/law/law-clinics-academic-opportunities/clinics> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025); *Milton R. Abrahams Legal Clinic*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/law/law-clinics-academic-opportunities/clinics/abrahams-legal-clinic> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025); *Juvenile Justice Legal Clinic*, *supra* note 14; *Bankruptcy Clinic*, *supra* note 14.

19. *See Law Clinics*, *supra* note 18.

20. *See Community Connections*, CREIGHTON UNIV., <https://www.creighton.edu/law/law-clinics-academic-opportunities/clinics/community-connections> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

21. *See id.*

III. ADAPTING TO A CHANGING STUDENT BODY

In my experience, today's law students are comfortable working in digital spaces and have diverse backgrounds and expectations. They seek purpose-driven careers and value flexibility, mental health support, and experiential learning. They want more than a career; they seek meaning and purpose. Students often tell me that they chose law school for more than prestige or income. They also want to advocate for vulnerable populations and reform broken systems. Legal education must meet them where they are—intellectually, emotionally, and technologically.²² Today's students challenge us to rethink how we teach, how we provide support, and how we connect with them and the legal profession.²³ It is time for legal education to evolve to meet these students where they are—intellectually, emotionally, and technologically.

A. Purpose-Driven Learning and Career Aspirations

So many of today's students are driven by a desire to serve their communities, advocate for justice, and pursue meaningful work, all while maintaining a robust personal life. This shift toward purpose-driven careers aligns with broader societal trends emphasizing social impact and ethical leadership. Law schools must respond by embedding public interest opportunities, service-learning, and mission-driven programming into the curriculum.²⁴

B. Mental Health and Well-Being

The pressures of legal education—competitive grading, high workloads, and professional uncertainty—have contributed to elevated stress levels among students and lawyers for decades.²⁵ Today's students, though, are more vocal about their mental health needs and expect institutions to provide robust support systems.²⁶ Law schools must prioritize wellness by offering counseling services, promoting work-life balance, and fostering a culture of empathy and inclusion. I often tell our students that I can only solve problems I know about, so I want to hear from them. I never like it when we come up short, but when we do, I want to

22. K.N., *The Future of Legal Education and Its Impact on the Profession*, L. NEWS N.Y. (March 2, 2023), <https://www.lawnewsnetwork.com/the-future-of-legal-education/>.

23. *See id.*

24. Anna Titulaer, *The Future of Business Starts with Social Impact: Bold Trends to Watch*, FORBES (July 30, 2025, at 07:15 ET), <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescommunicationscouncil/2025/07/30/the-future-of-business-starts-with-social-impact-bold-trends-to-watch/> (“More than ever, employees are prioritizing purpose and meaning in their work. They seek transparency, genuine community impact, opportunities for volunteerism and ethical alignment with their personal values.”).

25. *See* Jerome M. Organ et al., *Suffering in Silence: The Survey of Law Student Well-Being and the Reluctance of Law Students to Seek Help for Substance Use and Mental Health Concerns*, 66 J. LEGAL EDUC. 116, 117 (2016).

26. *See generally id.* (discussing how, with the increase of awareness of mental health challenges for law students, law school administrations are in the best position to act and provide measures of support for struggling students).

fix it. We are also working to make sure that we—our faculty and staff—have the tools to recognize signs of distress in our community and to respond with compassion and flexibility.²⁷

C. *Technological Integration and Digital Literacy*

Digital fluency is also essential for today's law students, who expect seamless access to learning materials, virtual collaboration tools, and legal research platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of hybrid and online learning models, and students now expect these options to remain. Faculty must embrace technology, not only as a delivery mechanism, but as a pedagogical tool—using multimedia, interactive platforms, and data-driven feedback to enhance engagement and comprehension.

Just as students bring new expectations about purpose, wellness, and flexibility, they also enter a profession transformed by technology. Law students must be prepared to navigate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and legal analytics. Preparing them for this new practice landscape requires integrating artificial intelligence and digital literacy into the curriculum while retaining the human dimensions of lawyering.

IV. EDUCATING THE HUMAN LAWYER IN THE AGE OF AI

I have watched, with curiosity, caution, and concern, the recent and rapid rise of AI in legal practice. AI can assist, but it cannot replace the counselor, the advocate, or the empathetic ear.²⁸ The tools are impressive—streamlining research, drafting briefs and contracts, and even predictive analytics—but they cannot replicate the human moments that define lawyering.²⁹

Legal education must prepare students to use AI responsibly, understand its limitations, and uphold professional ethics.³⁰ This includes training in confidentiality, oversight, and the duty to communicate effectively with clients.³¹ In our clinics and externships, we have seen students comfort clients in crisis, navigate ethical gray areas, and build trust where algorithms would offer nothing. These are the moments that remind me why we must teach not just the law, but the person who will become the lawyer.

27. *See id.* at 151.

28. *See* Dana Remus & Frank Levy, *Can Robots Be Lawyers? Computers, Lawyers, and the Practice of Law*, 30 *GEO. J. LEGAL ETHICS* 501, 545 (2017) (“We believe that the values, norms, and structures of the legal profession are necessary to address the challenges new legal technologies pose.”).

29. Hilary Gerzhoy et al., *AI and Legal Ethics: What Lawyers Need to Know*, *LEXISNEXIS 3* (Mar. 18, 2024), <https://www.lexisnexis.com/pdf/practical-guidance/ai/ai-and-legal-ethics-what-lawyers-need-to-know.pdf>.

30. *See generally* Harry Surden, *Artificial Intelligence and Law: An Overview*, 35 *GA. ST. U. L. REV.* 1305 (2019) (reviewing the developments with artificial intelligence and stressing the importance of lawyers being able to learn and evolve with these developments).

31. *Ethical Uses of Generative AI in the Practice of Law*, *THOMSON REUTERS: LEGAL* (Aug. 8, 2025), <https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/blog/ethical-uses-of-generative-ai-in-the-practice-of-law/>.

A. *The Limits of Automation*

While AI excels at pattern recognition, data processing, and rule-based decision-making, it lacks the capacity for moral reasoning, emotional intelligence, and contextual understanding.³² Legal practice often involves navigating ambiguity, interpreting human behavior, and making value-laden judgments—tasks that require more than computational power.³³ Lawyers are not merely technicians; they are counselors, advocates, and helpers. As Kendra Fershée explains, “AI may be able to provide technical information, but it can never replace the humanity that a lawyer can provide to a client.”³⁴

Clients typically seek legal counsel during moments of vulnerability—divorce, criminal charges, immigration issues, or financial distress. In these contexts, the lawyer’s ability to listen, empathize, and guide is as critical as their legal acumen. No algorithm can replicate the trust-building and emotional support that define the lawyer-client relationship.

B. *Ethical Responsibilities in an AI-Enhanced Practice*

The integration of AI into legal practice introduces a host of ethical responsibilities that extend beyond traditional professional norms. AI tools are becoming more embedded in legal workflows, so lawyers must be vigilant stewards of both technology and ethics. This requires a nuanced understanding of how AI systems operate, the risks they pose, and the safeguards necessary to protect clients and uphold the integrity of the profession.

Confidentiality is a foundational obligation.³⁵ Lawyers must ensure that any AI tools used in practice comply with strict confidentiality standards. This includes vetting vendors for data security protocols, understanding how client data is stored and processed, and ensuring compliance with privacy laws. AI systems must be configured to prevent unauthorized access, and lawyers must remain accountable for any breaches that occur on their watch.

Furthermore, the legal profession has long recognized the need for oversight.³⁶ Whether it is a judge’s clerk, a new associate, a paralegal, or a law student, lawyers know that if a document goes out with their name on it, they are responsible for it. The use of technology does not change this; if anything, it heightens the responsibility. Human oversight is absolutely essential to prevent errors, bias, and misinterpretation in AI-generated outputs. Lawyers must critically

32. Robert Cook, *Decoding the Divide: 6 Reasons Why AI Isn’t EI*, TRUE COLORS (Jan. 4, 2024, at 00:00 ET), <https://www.truecolorsintl.com/tciblog/decoding-the-divide-five-reasons-why-ai-isnt-ei>.

33. Debarati Das et al., *LawFlow: Collecting and Simulating Lawyers’ Thought Processes on Business Formation Case Studies*, CONF. ON LANGUAGE MODELING (COLM) 1 (2025), <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2504.18942v2>.

34. Aspen Leading Edge Podcast with Host Patty Roberts, *supra* note 16, at 25:58.

35. See MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 1.6(a), (c) (A.B.A., 1983) (establishing that lawyers must not reveal client information without consent and must take reasonable steps to protect client information).

36. See MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 5.1-5.3 (A.B.A., 1983).

evaluate the results produced by AI tools, cross-check citations, and ensure that legal reasoning aligns with ethical and professional standards. Delegating tasks to AI does not absolve lawyers of responsibility; rather, it demands heightened vigilance.

Transparency, for example, is important in any place AI is used. Clients have a right to know when AI tools are being used in their cases when “the client would need to know its use to make an informed decision.”³⁷ Lawyers should disclose the role of AI in legal processes, explain its benefits and limitations, and obtain informed consent where appropriate. Transparency fosters trust and empowers clients to make decisions about their representation.

Accountability is also important. Ultimately, lawyers must take full responsibility for the outcomes of AI-assisted work, as they must for all of the work produced under their name.³⁸ This includes acknowledging errors, correcting misinformation, and ensuring that technology serves the client’s best interests. Ethical practice demands that lawyers remain the final arbiters of judgment, even in a tech-enhanced environment.

Legal education must, therefore, embed these principles into the curriculum. Courses in professional responsibility should include modules on AI ethics, algorithmic bias, and data governance. Clinics and experiential programs should expose students to real-world scenarios involving AI tools, encouraging them to grapple with ethical dilemmas and develop sound decision-making frameworks.

As AI continues to automate routine legal tasks, the human dimensions of lawyering becomes even more critical. Legal education must prioritize the development of interpersonal, ethical, and cultural competencies that distinguish lawyers from machines.

Empathy and counseling remain core functions of being counselors at law. Lawyers often serve clients during moments of crisis—divorce, eviction, criminal charges, or immigration challenges. In these contexts, empathy is not optional; it is essential. Law schools must train students to listen actively, respond compassionately, and build trust. Role-playing exercises, client simulations, and trauma-informed pedagogy can help students cultivate these skills. The current generation of law students often demonstrates exceptional instincts in these areas, but we need to help them hone their understanding of how use empathy within a professional setting.

Creating connections and understanding how humans are motivated are also lawyering skills that will always have value. The ability to craft compelling narratives is central to advocacy. Whether persuading a judge, negotiating a settlement, or counseling a client, lawyers must translate complex facts into human stories. Law schools should continue to teach narrative techniques, drawing from disciplines such as literature, psychology, and journalism to enrich legal writing and oral advocacy. Well-rounded students become a well-rounded lawyers.

37. *Generative AI: Ethical Best Practices for Lawyers and Judges*, SUP. CT. OF ARIZ.: STEERING COMM. ON A.I. & THE CTS. 3 (Nov. 14, 2024), https://www.azcourts.gov/Portals/0/74/AISC%20Ethical%20Best%20Practices%20Guidance_For%20Publication.pdf.

38. See MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 1.1, 1.4, 5.1-5.3 (A.B.A., 1983).

Similarly, a moral and ethical foundation remains a critical part of practicing law. Legal practice is rife with moral ambiguity. The addition of AI and other technologies expands the ways in which these problems reveal themselves. Students must learn to navigate these ethical dilemmas with integrity, balancing competing interests and values. Case studies, debates, and reflective writing can foster ethical awareness and principled decision-making.

Further, lawyers must be committed to cultural competence, which is necessary to be a good human, but is also essential to be a good lawyer. Lawyers serve diverse populations with varied cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Lawyers also encounter opposing counsel and parties with varied backgrounds and motivations. Cultural competence involves understanding these differences, avoiding bias, and advocating with sensitivity. Law schools should continue to integrate cultural competence training, community engagement, and cross-cultural communication into the curriculum because that is how we train good lawyers.

By emphasizing these human dimensions, legal education can ensure that future lawyers are not only technologically proficient, but also deeply attuned to the needs of their clients and communities. These competencies are not ancillary; they are central to the lawyer's role in society, and they are central to our collective humanity. By reinforcing them, legal education can ensure that future lawyers are not only technologically adept, but also deeply human in their approach to justice.

C. *A Balanced Future*

The future of law is not a choice between humans and machines—it is a partnership that should help machines help humans.³⁹ AI can enhance legal practice by handling routine tasks, uncovering insights, and expanding access, but it must be guided by human values, judgment, and care. Legal education must strike this balance, equipping students to harness technology while preserving the soul of the profession.

V. AI LITERACY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN LEGAL EDUCATION

As we watch AI begin to reshape the legal profession, law schools face a critical moment. Integrating AI into legal practice is no longer speculative—it is happening now.⁴⁰ It is our job to prepare students for this evolving landscape, and legal education must prioritize AI literacy, ethical competence, and practical fluency. This section argues that law schools can properly prepare students by equipping them to use AI tools ethically and effectively, positioning them to serve as reverse mentors to experienced attorneys. This dual-learning dynamic, in which new lawyers teach experienced lawyers how to use AI, while also learning legal

39. See Remus & Levy, *supra* note 28, at 505.

40. See Marjorie Richter, *How AI Is Transforming the Legal Profession*, THOMSON REUTERS: LEGAL (Aug. 18, 2025), <https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/blog/how-ai-is-transforming-the-legal-profession/#heading-1>.

practice skills from the experienced lawyers, offers a competitive advantage for students and a strategic opportunity for law firms.

We know that AI is transforming how many legal professionals conduct research, draft documents, manage cases, and interact with clients. Tools like natural language processing, predictive analytics, and machine learning are streamlining traditionally labor-intensive tasks.⁴¹ As these technologies become more accessible, the legal profession must adapt—and legal education must lead the way.

AI literacy in legal education needs to help students understand how AI tools function and their limitations, how to evaluate the reliability and bias of AI-generated outputs, and how to navigate ethical concerns such as confidentiality, transparency, and accountability. Anyone who has used AI search engines knows that the first explanation is often wrong.⁴² But how do students know to assess what is wrong in areas that are entirely new to them? This is where law schools come in. We need to embed AI education across the curriculum, including legal research and writing, professional responsibility, clinical programs, and electives exploring legal tech and data privacy.

By educating our students to be fluent in AI tools, our graduates will be able to help law firms modernize their practices.⁴³ This can create a reverse mentorship model that will allow students to teach experienced attorneys how to use AI tools, while attorneys impart practical legal wisdom and professional judgment.⁴⁴ This model can facilitate efficiency gains for firms, develop confidence and leadership development for students, and create collaborative learning environments that bridge generational gaps.⁴⁵

Much of what we see in the press about the perils of AI in legal practice centers on things like hallucinations, situations where AI makes up cases and/or facts.⁴⁶ This is not helpful for the AI user, but this also does not present a new issue. That is, going back 100 years, if you let someone else do your work for you,

41. *Id.*

42. See Eileen Guo, *Why You Shouldn't Trust AI Search Engines*, MIT Tech. Rev. (Feb. 14, 2023), <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/02/14/1068498/why-you-shouldnt-trust-ai-search-engines/> (explaining that AI-powered search engines often produce inaccurate or misleading responses, including conspiracy theories and “presenting falsehoods as facts”).

43. Ian Morris, *7 Ways Artificial Intelligence Is Already Changing Law School and Legal Careers*, THE COLLS. OF L. (Mar. 24, 2025), <https://www.collegesoflaw.edu/blog/2025/03/24/7-ways-artificial-intelligence-is-already-changing-law-school-and-legal-careers/>.

44. See Jennifer Jordan & Michael Sorell, *Why Reverse Mentoring Works and How to Do It Right*, HARV. BUS. REV. (Oct. 3, 2019), <https://hbr.org/2019/10/why-reverse-mentoring-works-and-how-to-do-it-right> (“Reverse mentoring pairs younger employees with executive team members to mentor them on various topics of strategic and cultural relevance.”).

45. See Wendy Marcinkus Murphy, *Reverse Mentoring at Work: Fostering Cross-Generational Learning and Developing Millennial Leaders*, 51 HUM. RES. MGMT. 549, 560-65 (2012) (explaining that reverse mentoring can enhance organizational efficiency, develop junior employees’ leadership skills, and facilitate cross-generational collaboration).

46. Khari Johnson, *California Issues Historic Fine over Lawyer’s ChatGPT Fabrications*, CALMATTERS: TECH. (Sep. 22, 2025), <https://calmatters.org/economy/technology/2025/09/chatgpt-lawyer-fine-ai-regulation/> (discussing a \$10,000 fine issued to a lawyer who submitted a brief in which twenty-one of twenty-three quotes were fake).

failing to check the work is done at your peril. Westlaw and LexisNexis have, for many years, had the ability to upload a document to check the validity of a citation, and such tools would have quickly and efficiently caught the false cases.⁴⁷ Ronald Reagan was known for his oft-repeated phrase, “Trust but verify.”⁴⁸ With AI, it’s not “trust but verify”—it’s “verify, then maybe, and only maybe, trust.” If law schools prepare our student correctly, newer attorneys will help bring appropriate levels of skepticism to the more established attorneys in their orbit.

Beyond ingraining healthy AI skepticism, law schools must also prepare students to navigate bias and fairness in AI algorithms. Similarly, data privacy and security in cloud-based legal tools and compliance with emerging regulations on AI use in legal services will be issues facing lawyers, new and old. We must make sure that our students understand not just how to use AI, but how to use it responsibly. Developing AI-focused courses and modules, partnering with tech companies and legal startups for experiential learning, creating interdisciplinary programs with computer science and data ethics, supporting faculty development in legal technology, and encouraging student-led innovation and research in legal AI are other areas law schools should be exploring.

Law schools have a unique opportunity to shape the future of legal practice. By prioritizing AI literacy and ethical competence, we can empower students to become both skilled practitioners and agents of change. We can help ensure that the next generation of lawyers is not just prepared for the future—they are leading it. And, in doing so, we can provide the sense of purpose they are seeking.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A PURPOSE-DRIVEN LEGAL EDUCATION

Legal education stands at a crossroads. The rapid advancement of technology, shifting student demographics, and evolving societal expectations demand a reimagining of the law school experience. Yet, amidst this transformation, the core purpose of legal education remains unchanged: to prepare lawyers who serve justice with competence, compassion, and integrity.

By uniting mission, community, and adaptation, law schools can fulfill their highest calling: preparing whole lawyers who not only know the law, but live its values—seeking justice with competence, compassion, and courage in an era of rapid change.

Law schools, therefore, must embrace a purpose-driven model that integrates service, ethics, and innovation. The Jesuit tradition, with its emphasis on *cura personalis*, offers a powerful framework for educating “whole lawyers”—professionals who are not only skilled in legal reasoning but also grounded in empathy, reflection, and social responsibility. This model is not limited to religious

47. *Lexis+ Brief Analysis*, LEXISNEXIS, <https://www.lexisnexis.com/supp/lawschool/resources/brief-analysis-lexis-plus.pdf> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025); *Legal Briefs*, THOMSON REUTERS, <https://legal.thomsonreuters.com/en/products/westlaw/briefs> (last visited Dec. 18, 2025).

48. See Bernard Gwertzman, *Reagan and Gorbachev Sign Nuclear Weapons Treaty*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 9, 1987, at A1 (reporting that President Reagan frequently used the Russian proverb “Trust but verify” during arms control negotiations with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev).

institutions; its values resonate across the legal academy and can inform secular approaches to holistic education.

At the same time, law schools must adapt to the realities of a digital age. AI literacy is no longer optional—it will soon be essential to remain competitive. Students must be equipped to use AI tools ethically and effectively, serving as reverse mentors to seasoned attorneys and bridging generational gaps in legal practice. But technology must never eclipse humanity. The irreplaceable qualities of empathy, judgment, and moral courage must remain at the heart of legal education.

The future of legal education is not about choosing between tradition and innovation, or between rigor and compassion. It is about integrating these elements into a cohesive, adaptive, and humane model of learning. In doing so, law schools can fulfill their highest calling: to educate lawyers who not only know the law, but also live its values—serving clients, communities, and the common good, seeking justice with wisdom and heart.