

ANALYSIS

# Post-Pandemic, Law Schools See Legal Tech Education Playing an Even Bigger Role



A law class in session. Photo: Diego M. Radzinski/ALM

More legal tech courses will be provided by law schools in upcoming semesters, especially those which focus on legal departments' software, law school professors say.

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**Victoria Hudgins** Reporter

Legal Education

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The pandemic forced many law school professors to finally recognize the importance of technology in the legal profession. Now, as law school students return back to the classroom, legal technology professors said the yearlong experience of remote learning and emerging career opportunities will intensify law schools' focus on legal tech.

To be sure, the pandemic accelerated an ongoing legal tech education trend, noted North Carolina Central University School of Law professor and associate dean of technology and innovation April Dawson.

"The trend prior to the pandemic and law schools having to move to remote learning was to increase legal tech education anyway," she said. "But [during] the pandemic, not only law schools but law firms, courts and all of us in the legal profession had to adapt and embrace technology. I think that has accelerated legal educators' awareness of the significance of tech, legal tech and law school students' exposure to it."

Still, after 16 months of primarily staring at a computer screen, some law students and professors want a break from remote-based legal tech courses, noted University of Miami School of Law professor Michele DeStefano. She is also the founder of LawWithoutWalls, a program of lawyers, business professionals and law and business students to create innovations in law, business and technology.

"I will admit, [during] the next year and a half there will be more focus on in-person and [remote learning] will take a back burner," DeStefano said. "I think the world is really wanting that, if for a little bit, if technology takes a little back burner. I don't think we'll be worse for the wear."

However, while the prevalence of remote courses may wane, the prominence of increasingly tech-forward corporate legal departments will push law schools to provide students with legal tech courses, DeStefano added. "I think future legal tech courses will focus on real-world use cases ... [and] focus more on the experience of the client, and how do you make sure every time they interact with you it's delightful [and] how technology can help with that," she said.

Law schools' continuing attention on tech will also be spurred by their students, noted University of California, Hastings College of the Law professor and director of applied innovation Alice Armitage. In fact, students are already shifting law schools' legal tech focus toward more in-house technology, she added.

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"First, there were courses on how to build legal tech companies," Armitage explained. "They envisioned working at a law firm and building a startup. Then over time, I still get a lot of students in that [course], but it's not the only thing I teach. It's legal ops, legal informatics and access to justice and the impact of legal tech. And there's more interest in legal ops and access to justice rather than law firm practice."

To ensure their students land jobs after graduation, Dawson believes more law schools will continue to add legal tech courses to their curriculum. "I think the emerging legal jobs are tied to technology, and all law schools are concerned about their graduates being gainfully employed."

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