



The legal AI revolution has started - but why now?



Race to the cloud: the state of the legal DMS market



Winning the battle to teach legal technology and innovation at law schools

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BY CHRISTY BURKE



A small group of pioneers are working to establish technology and innovation programs at US law schools. Some are succeeding brilliantly, though perhaps not easily.

One might expect that every law school would want to train its students to succeed in the legal profession. Logically, this should include learning technology and innovation skills. However, many law schools are not yet convinced that this kind of practical non-theoretical education is their responsibility. Or there may be faculty members or administrators at the school who see the value of technology

training but do not have the power to bring about change.

The American Bar Association (ABA) is encouraging law schools to change. In January 2014, the ABA Task Force on the Future of Legal Education released a [report](#) calling upon law schools, bar associations, regulators and others to redesign their financial model and revise law school accreditation to permit more

experimentation and innovation. In regards to law schools teaching legal technology, the report noted: ‘although changes in the delivery of legal services have made competence in the use and management of law-related technology important, only a modest number of law schools currently include developing this competence as part of the curriculum.’

In August 2016, the ABA launched its [Center for Innovation](#) based on a recommendation from the ABA’s Commission on the Future of Legal Services. The Center urged lawyers and law schools to break new ground in response to the modern evolution of law practice. But even with encouragement from the ABA, many law schools have been reluctant to add new curricula focused on technology and innovation.

A battle that has already lasted for many years

This struggle seems recent, but it’s not new. Twenty years ago in 1997, [Andy Adkins](#) established the Legal Technology Institute at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. He has seen the battle for technology training at law schools waged for many years. ‘At UF Levin College of Law, we started teaching a no-credit law practice management and technology course in 2000,’ he says. ‘Few schools were teaching technology then and the number has grown, but slowly. The

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major challenge is to convince deans, faculty and administrators – many of whom believe their job is to teach law students only about the theory, not the practice, of law – that students must learn about technology and actual law practice before they graduate in order to become successful.’

Daniel W. Linna Jr., Director of [LegalRnD – The Center for Legal Services Innovation](#) and Professor of Law in Residence at Michigan State University College of Law, says that only a handful of law schools are teaching substantial courses focused on technology and innovation. ‘These include process improvement, project management, metrics and data analytics, automation, entrepreneurship and legal operations,’ he says. ‘More law schools are talking about the business of law and the

evolution of legal service delivery, but many of those are still not teaching law students about technology and how it is transforming legal service delivery.’

Linna believes law schools should provide the whole scope of legal education, including technology education. ‘Law students will definitely need technology skills after they graduate,’ he says. ‘Technology is critical to serving clients at all levels, from legal aid to complex work for corporations. Clients are disaggregating legal matters, asking what needs to be done by a lawyer, what can be done by others and what can be automated.’

Technology education cannot be relegated to the business or technical colleges, he adds. ‘Lawyers must understand innovation and technology to work with experts in other disciplines on improving legal services. Law students and lawyers both need to embrace technology while also demonstrating how they can provide tremendous value for clients and society. Law schools should be at the forefront of preparing lawyers to succeed in the 21st century.’

In addition to teaching law students about innovation and technology, Linna says LegalRnD is addressing real-world problems. ‘Our students complete process automation projects,’ he says. ‘We are part of the Corporate Legal Operations Consortium and its leaders have spoken to our students. We’re working with the Michigan Bar Foundation and courts and legal aid organizations on process improvement and other projects. We’re working on data analytics projects with the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois and several legal aid organizations. These projects help expand access to legal services in their ▶



communities and provide our students with hands-on experience.'

Margaret Hagan, Director of the [Legal Design Lab at Stanford Law School](#), has studied law school education in depth. 'Inertia is the number one factor stopping law schools from innovating,' she says. 'Today's law firms need a different type of student. The students know things need to change but they're not sure how to make it better. Our goal is to get students literate enough to determine when technology is the solution. Law students equipped with technology tools have an edge; there is a more visible benefit in their portfolios.'

To create innovation, Hagan has reached outside Stanford Law to forge collaborations with other graduate programs within Stanford, including design, business and engineering. She has also connected with other law schools and established labs, R&D groups and demonstrations to test the efficacy of Stanford's teaching. Hagan says her best strategy for catalyzing change is to involve a wider group of stakeholders, including faculty and administration but also students, alumni, law firms and other non-academic professionals to advocate for new ideas.

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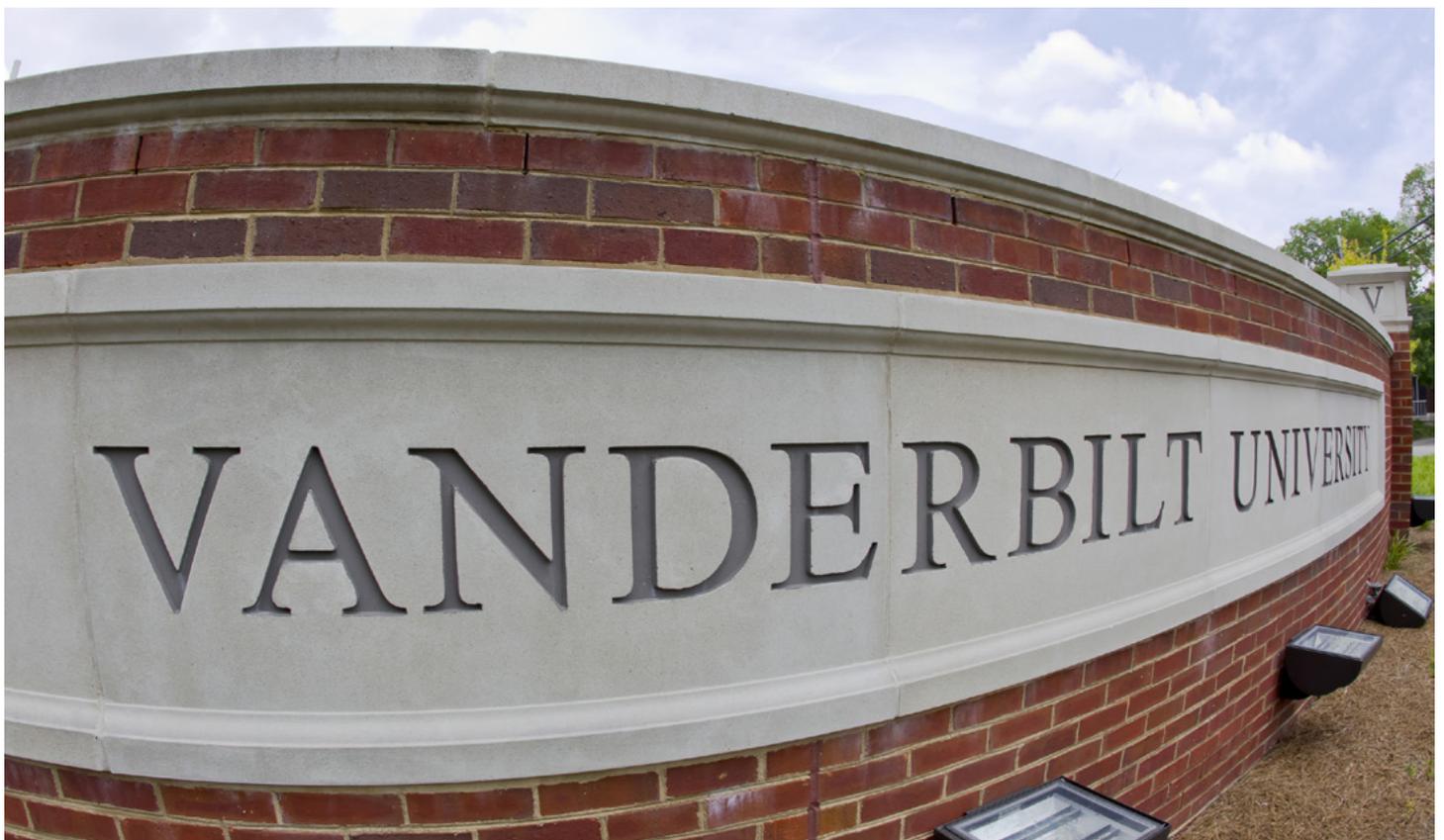
One of the Fellows on Hagan's team at Stanford Law is Jose Fernando Torres, an attorney from Colombia who founded Latin America's first center for legal innovation, the [Center for Innovation in Law](#), at the Sergio Arboleda University in Bogotá, Colombia in 2013. Torres believes that technology classes should be mandatory – not simply offered as electives. 'Law students need to be taught basic skills like proficiency in Word, Excel, PowerPoint and then move to more sophisticated topics such as cybersecurity, blockchain and artificial intelligence in order to use technology to become a better lawyer,' he says.

'Having good legal skills is no longer enough. At Stanford, we encourage law students to branch out and take courses in design thinking, business, entrepreneurship and legal informatics.'

High-level involvement helps to drive change

When a push for innovation comes from a law school's dean rather than faculty level, the results can be extraordinary. Larry Bridgesmith, Adjunct Professor of Law at Vanderbilt Law School, notes that Chris Guthrie, Dean and John Wade-Kent Syverud Professor of Law at the school, established the [Program on Law & Innovation](#) which includes a focus on legal technologies including document review, predicting liabilities and litigation outcomes, using computer algorithms and other skillsets.

'Dean Guthrie launched Law & Innovation and under his leadership, the program has created an ethos of innovation at the law school,' says Bridgesmith. 'The program has received a significant amount of university attention and has attracted top-notch students who are choosing Vanderbilt Law because of it. We offer conferences that bring lawyers, students, technologists and academics together. Our next event on April 7th focuses on [Blockchain and the Law](#) and



people are coming from all over the world to present, learn and participate in vibrant discussions. Law schools need to step up and get creative to provide more than a theoretical exercise for students.'

One example of academia meeting the practice of law and technology solutions available to promote access to justice is the Technology in Legal Practice class taught by Marc Jenkins, Adjunct Professor of Law at Vanderbilt. 'Jenkins' classes provide law students with the use of technology to address problems being faced by non-profit providers of legal and other civic services,' says Bridgesmith. 'This year seven Tennessee non-profits will receive the benefit of legal technology apps built by Vanderbilt Law students to help deliver their services better, faster and at less cost to the service providers.'

Another success story for dean involvement is at The University of Oklahoma College of Law (OU Law), where Darin K. Fox, Associate Dean, Director of the Law Library and Professor of Law, launched a Digital Initiative project in 2014 requiring law practice technology training for all students. Upping the ante, Fox recently provided an opportunity for all students to achieve LTC4¹ certification.

'The University of Oklahoma College of Law is dedicated to producing practice-

ready lawyers who are proficient working in the digital environment,' Fox says. 'OU Law's Digital Initiative project focuses on training our entire student body in law practice technology. OU Law provides more than 50 training sessions to students each year on a variety of topics, including legal documents, courtroom presentation and case management systems. LTC4 certification is an essential part of our training effort, allowing our graduates to demonstrate their technology proficiency to employers.'

OU Law is the first law school actively to offer LTC4 certification to its students, according to LTC4 Chairman and Founding Member Bonnie L. Beuth who is an IS Systems Trainer at law firm FordHarrison. 'When law students achieve LTC4 certification, law firms hiring them can be assured that the students' technology qualifications meet an industry standard,' she says. 'Hiring a law student certified with LTC4 industry standard competence saves a firm time and money in technical training, since those new hires will need less time to adapt to the firm's technology.'

Technology and innovation can be successfully added to today's law school curricula without sacrificing a school's integrity or appeal to prospective students. In fact, law schools that provide more innovative, practical

education and technology skills can leverage this to differentiate themselves, attracting discerning students who value experiential opportunities that can help to prepare them for a successful career. The battle to add technology and innovation courses at law schools can be won, and hopefully these victories will inspire other institutions to act.

Christy Burke is president and founder of Burke & Company, a New York-based PR and marketing consulting firm. She is a prolific writer, having published columns in Legal IT Today, Legal IT Professionals, Law.com, Legal Tech (now Cybersecurity Law & Strategy), the ABA's Law Practice Today, Intellectual Property Today, Attorney at Work, Peer to Peer and Marketing the Law Firm. For more information, visit burke-company.com or follow Christy on Twitter: [@ChristyBurkePR](https://twitter.com/ChristyBurkePR). ■

¹ LTC4 (Legal Technology Core Competencies Certification Coalition) is a non-profit organization that has established industry standard legal technology core competency learning plans and certification for law students, law firms and corporate legal departments.