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Restoring Confidence in Educational Technologies

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TALKING TECH

RESTORING CONFIDENCE IN LAW SCHOOL CLASSROOM EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES

Law librarians can modify K-12 educational technology tools to improve information delivery and enhance law student learning and assessment.

BY ARIEL NEWMAN

There is nothing novel in stating that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted nearly every aspect of our daily lives, including legal education. My third year of law school was essentially cut short by the transition to online classes when law schools closed their doors in early March 2020. Although I was comfortable with virtual learning, thanks to my extensive experience with online classes during my high school and undergraduate schooling, there was an undeniable sense of “missing out” during the final semester of my legal education.

Unfortunately, the sudden shift from in-person to virtual education has resulted in negative emotions toward educational technologies. While law schools have reopened and returned to in-person

instruction, there has not been an overwhelming desire to stick with the technology we depended on throughout the pandemic. In fact, a sizeable number of faculty members returned to pre-pandemic instruction practices and, in some instances, eliminated the use of technology in the classroom as much as possible. These attitudes necessitate a discussion about how technologies can be successfully incorporated into the law school classroom—without defaulting to the all-or-nothing approach used during the pandemic.

The Pre-Pandemic Movement

Pre-pandemic, professors were incrementally working to incorporate technology into legal education. Schoolwide adoption of learning management system (LMS) platforms like Blackboard

and Canvas allowed professors to supplement in-class instruction with asynchronous learning. The use of Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI) exercises, LexisLearn videos, and Westlaw’s On-Demand Learning modules are just a few ways professors have moved beyond traditional classroom methods. After recognizing the skill deficiencies law students have with important tools like Microsoft Word and Excel, many law schools also require students to complete technology assessments on Procertas or similar platforms. Recognition that the legal profession has seen rapid technological advancements over the past several years has forced law schools to keep pace with these new developments.

Of course, law librarians have been integrating technology into their legal research courses for

quite some time. While doctrinal professors were delivering lectures about torts and criminal law, students in legal research courses were getting hands-on experience with online databases and materials. Law librarians have often led the way when it comes to incorporating technology into the classroom. There is no reason that should change now.

Beyond the general motivation that law librarians possess to improve legal education, there are several ethical responsibilities requiring such practices. Both the [American Library Association \(ALA\) Code of Ethics](#) and [American Association of Law Libraries \(AALL\) Ethical Principles](#) guide law librarians to stay abreast of new technologies and continuously improve their own knowledge and skills. Likewise, American Bar Association (ABA) law school standards require law librarians to stay informed about technology and implement new tools where appropriate. This column reaches beyond the bare minimum of what is expected of our profession—which is to prepare students for law practice by enhancing their legal research skills on specific databases and increasing their familiarity with a variety of legal materials—and, instead, focuses on other ways law librarians can improve the delivery of information and evaluation of student understanding.

Aligning Implementation of Technologies with Teaching Philosophies

My teaching philosophy—which is not much different from that of many other law librarians—is that the best way to help students understand course material is to provide opportunities for them to engage with the material in a variety of different formats. Receiving and experiencing the same information in multiple ways forces students to approach content

differently while simultaneously ensuring that content is delivered in each student's preferred learning style at least once.

Here, it is important to put into perspective the type of students entering law school classrooms today. Members of Generation Z are often referred to as digital natives because they grew up with technology and social media. These students enjoy using technology and like to consume information digitally. Video games were a large part of their childhood and classroom games were common during their years of primary education. In many ways, technology has fundamentally impacted the way Generation Z students process and digest information. To adequately communicate new information to law students of this generation, professors need to get creative.

Thinking outside the box is something librarians are very good at. While I do monitor what technologies law schools throughout the country are employing in their curriculum, I also pay close attention to the tools implemented in K-12 schools. Some K-12 lesson formats and tools can be easily modified for law school courses, allowing professors to mix things up and improve student engagement both in and out of the classroom. Below are a few of the tools I have begun incorporating into my legal research classes:

- Flipgrid
- Mentimeter
- Nearpod

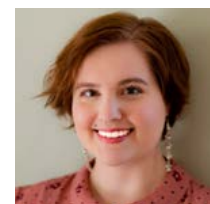
These technologies have done wonders for getting students more involved in the classroom. For example, Mentimeter is polling software that allows me to get real-time feedback from students. I have used Mentimeter to gauge how students felt about the material throughout the semester, teach Boolean operators with images of

(sometimes appalling) food combinations, and provide students with the opportunity to participate in classroom discussions anonymously. Flipgrid and Nearpod are excellent tools for visual learners. These platforms allow students to create and edit videos, draw pictures and diagrams, and engage with course material in a variety of different formats. Implementing these tools in the classroom has greatly improved my students' understanding of legal research materials and my own teaching performance.

The Bottom Line

I have advocated for these tools to be utilized outside of the legal research classroom. For example, Mentimeter has been used for workshops and oral advocacy courses. Faculty have been slow to adopt these tools for any number of reasons, but unfamiliarity and tech-aversion following the pandemic undoubtedly top the list. The possibilities of integrating new technologies in the law school classroom are limitless. I have shared only a few examples of how I have used different tools to engage my legal research students. My hope is that this column will spark more conversations about how others are switching things up in the classroom. By accumulating numerous examples of the triumphs professors have had using these tools, our profession can make a better case for why others should also make use of them in legal education. ■

 Teaching + Training



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