



Cuesta Campos

**The Impact of Artificial
Intelligence on the
Development of Young
Lawyers:**

**Growth Opportunity or
Professional Risk?**

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1. Are we training lawyers... or advanced AI users?

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence arrived like few innovations in modern history: without asking permission, without much announcement, and at a speed that left professors, students, and law firms without a clear framework to absorb it. Overnight, future lawyers discovered they could obtain case law summaries in seconds, structure full pleadings with a click, analyze complex contracts without opening a book, and ask an algorithm to explain topics that for decades had been the nightmare of the average student.

This article examines, critically and from the experience of a young lawyer practicing law, how AI has begun to shape contemporary legal education and what this implies for the quality of the legal profession of the future. The intent is not to demonize technology, to discredit the practice of the profession, or to celebrate AI naïvely. The real challenge is to understand the magnitude of the change: we are not only facing a new tool, but a new ecosystem of learning and professional practice that demands rethinking what it means to be a lawyer.

2. How AI is rewriting the way law is learned in practice

The scene repeats itself in universities around the world: students who once filled notebooks with notes now transcribe, on their laptops, entire dialogues with legal chatbots. AI is consulted to prepare exams, to draft essays, to simplify legal articles, to “understand quickly” subjects that normally require weeks of study. In legal practice, AI is used to prepare draft filings, analyze clauses, simplify complicated criteria, answer emails, etc.

The revolution is not scandalous, but its effect is profound: it is changing the mental way in which new lawyers approach legal knowledge. But, in light of this, can this be considered a true “approach” to legal knowledge?

2.1. The abandonment of deep study: instant summaries, ready-made answers, and the temptation of immediacy

AI tools have solved one of law’s great traditional obstacles: its density. Before, understanding a judicial criterion or breaking down a complex clause implied hour of reading, comparison, highlighting, and reflection. Today, by contrast, it is enough to paste a fragment into a generative model to obtain, in seconds, a structured summary, a plausible interpretation, or even a proposal for alternative drafting.

Technical ease, however, has brought with it a collateral effect that few anticipated. Not only are students abandoning deep study; interns and young lawyers have also begun to replace detailed reading with the comfort of automated summaries. It is no longer that they cannot read a complete document: it is that they no longer consider it necessary. Immediacy begins to operate as an irresistible shortcut in a profession historically built on meticulous analysis.

In law firms, the phenomenon is evident. Where before a junior lawyer dedicated an entire afternoon to reviewing a fifty-page contract, now they limit themselves to asking AI for a list of risks, a synthesis, or suggested modifications. And although the efficiency is undeniable, the risk is

The temptation of immediacy is, perhaps, the greatest hidden enemy of professional reasoning. With each quick query, a bit of intellectual patience is eroded, that willingness to go into the text, to reconstruct the logic behind a clause, to compare sources, to ask why a court decided a case in a certain way and not another.

Law has never been a discipline of instant answers; it is a craft that demands analytical vertigo, and that vertigo is developed only by directly confronting legal materials. When AI mediates excessively, that muscle weakens.

Consequently, young lawyers run the risk of becoming competent operators, yes, but not solid interpreters. Of mastering tools, but not foundations; of knowing how to produce impeccable documents, but without fully understanding the implications that underlie each word.

And therein lies the real danger: AI can summarize, but it cannot replace the cognitive process that gives life to professional judgment. It can deliver answers, but it cannot train lawyers. It can streamline practice, but it can also, if not used with discipline, empty it of depth.

2.2. The new hybrid learner

The young lawyer is no longer a traditional reader or a linear researcher; rather, they are a multitasking operator immersed in an informational ecosystem fragmented across multiple formats and platforms. Their professional day combines three-minute explanatory videos, legal podcasts listened to at increased speed, blogs that synthesize criteria, applications that generate automatic summaries, and, at the center of everything, conversational artificial intelligence tools that instantly answer any question posed.



At first glance, this hybrid learning model seems virtuous: more dynamic, more accessible, more efficient. However, it has a cost that is not perceived immediately. Constant exposure to brief content and algorithms that digest legal complexity generates a bias toward immediacy.

The consequence is fragmented learning. It works well for remembering, but not for understanding. It allows one to memorize the “what,” but weakens the ability to understand the “why” and, above all, the “how” that connects with the rest of the legal system. In the firm’s day-to-day work, this translates into young lawyers who can explain an isolated criterion, but who have difficulty placing it within a broader analysis or anticipating its implications in a specific case.

Legal practice requires structure, method, and depth. But the hybrid professional is constantly pushed toward the immediate, toward the shortest and most digested. It is not a problem of lack of

ability, but of context: information arrives so quickly and so processed that the intellectual exercise of organizing it, relating it, and questioning it begins to look like an unnecessary effort.

In a profession where the difference between a good lawyer and an exceptional lawyer often lies in the depth of their thinking, the hybrid model, if not managed with discipline, can become a mirage: lots of information, little understanding.

3. The superpowers AI does give the modern lawyer

It would be absurd to deny the benefits that AI brings to the legal profession. In fact, most modern firms have begun to integrate it strategically. Not out of fashion, but out of efficiency and competitiveness.

3.1. Legal research in seconds

What used to take hours flipping through codes, precedents, and bibliography can now be resolved in minutes. AI tools function as hyperactive assistants willing to review thousands of sources, organize information, highlight inconsistencies, and propose analytical structures. Legal research stopped being a handcrafted task and became an accelerated and more accessible process.

3.2. Document automation

Document automation has become one of the areas where artificial intelligence has shown the most immediate and visible impact within firms. What used to require hours, or even days of handcrafted drafting, can now be generated in minutes: contracts, minutes, notices, opinion letters, risk reports, internal policies, preliminary due diligence, and even complex emails that previously took up a good portion of the junior lawyer's time.

At first glance, the tool is impeccable: consistent, fast, available at any time, and surprisingly competent at replicating legal styles. Its usefulness is unquestionable. AI does not replace the lawyer, but it does dismantle a large part of the mechanical work that historically was assigned to interns and young associates. That freed time, in theory, should be devoted to deep reasoning, critical analysis, and strategic understanding of matters.

The true virtue of automation is not to replace the lawyer, but to allow young lawyers to devote their time to what matters: thinking like lawyers. But that benefit only materializes if there is discipline to critically review what AI produces, rigor to not accept drafts without questioning them, and professional humility to remember that no algorithm, however sophisticated, understands the weight of words in a contract the way someone does who will have to defend it before a judge, an auditor, or a demanding client.

3.3 A support team 24/7

AI does not sleep, does not get tired, and does not lose patience. Its greatest virtue is that it allows working in short feedback cycles, trying alternative arguments, drafting three versions of the same text, or simulating hypothetical scenarios that were previously unfeasible for lack of time.

4. The dark side: risks that can destroy the profession from within

But not everything is progress. The speed at which AI is being inserted into legal education also brings serious risks, not only for learning, but for the reliability of the profession as a whole.

4.1. Legal hallucinations: when AI invents doctrine or case law

Generative models are not jurists; they are statistical systems trained to produce texts that “look” legal. That appearance, however, is precisely their greatest danger. In a firm, it is not unusual for an intern to request a relevant precedent and receive an invented citation; or for AI to construct “case law” with plausible language but based on nonexistent facts. Sometimes it mixes precedents with incompatible criteria, cites repealed statutes, or fabricates doctrine that was never formulated by anyone.



The problem is not that AI makes mistakes (any tool can fail), but that it does so with a rhetorical confidence capable of deceiving even someone with basic legal training. The young lawyer who does not master the real structure of a judicial criterion may end up incorporating serious errors into a memo, a due diligence, or, worse, a contract that will reach a client.

When judgment is lacking, AI hallucinations go unnoticed. And what is integrated without questioning becomes, sooner or later, a professional risk.

4.2. The erosion of legal reasoning

Legal practice has always required time, patience, and method: reading, interpreting, connecting, and arguing. But when a “good enough” answer is one click away, intellectual work loses its appeal. The temptation to accept the first draft AI offers is enormous, especially when workloads are heavy and deadlines are pressing.

The risk is to form a generation of lawyers who draft, but do not argue; who explain, but do not interpret; who can repeat concepts, but not build them. Professionals who do not distinguish between a conceptual and an interpretive rule, who do not know how to structure reasoning from scratch, who lose the ability to weave precedents into a coherent legal narrative.

Without that mental rigor, the lawyer becomes dependent on generated text, incapable of defending it solidly in a negotiation, in a legal audit, or before a partner who demands depth.

4.3. Intellectual dependence

Every generation has had transformative tools: typewriters, calculators, search engines, databases, word processors. But until now none had replaced the process of thinking like a lawyer.

Today there is a real danger that AI becomes an excessively dominant co-pilot: it drafts, synthesizes, proposes strategies, suggests clauses, analyzes risks, evaluates contracts. The young lawyer runs the risk of falling into a merely executing role, a “reviewer” of others’ ideas.

When the tool thinks first, the lawyer thinks after, and less. Over time, legal creativity atrophies, professional intuition weakens, and the capacity to face a new problem without technological support becomes exceptional, not natural.

Dependence does not arise from incapacity, but from comfort: if AI seems to know everything, why reconstruct the problem from its foundations?

4.4. Ethical and confidentiality risks

In the fast-paced environment of a firm, the line between efficiency and negligence can become dangerously thin. Uploading sensitive contracts, client databases, litigation files, or confidential information to insecure platforms is a risk that many young lawyers do not fully grasp. For them, AI is a natural extension of the desk, without understanding that every data point they share can compromise professional secrets, procedural strategies, or regulated information.

This is compounded by another danger: the uncritical reproduction of bias. Generative models are trained on information that contains cultural, economic, or even ideological leanings. When a young lawyer accepts AI output without scrutiny, they may also be replicating those biases in a contract, a risk criterion, or a regulatory analysis.

In ethics, AI does not eliminate the lawyer’s responsibility; it multiplies it.

5. The non-negotiable core: critical thinking, legal judgment, and professional ethics

Against this backdrop, a central question arises: what makes a lawyer valuable in a world where AI drafts better, faster, and with fewer formal errors?

The answer is simple, but profound: the lawyer is not valuable for what they write, but for what they think.

5.1. The formation of judgment

Law has always been a craft of interpretation, not repetition. A competent lawyer is not the one who can recite statutes, but the one who understands why they exist, how they relate to one another, and what effects they produce in a specific case. That “legal instinct,” which we usually call judgment, is not acquired by accumulating data, but by constant exposure to complexity.

Judgment is born from direct contact with the rule: reading the complete text and not only the highlighted part; reviewing case law carefully; understanding the history behind an isolated precedent; recognizing that two apparently contradictory provisions can coexist under a logic that

only reveals itself when one understands the system as a whole.

In practice, that process requires discomfort: long readings, doubts, silences, rereading, discussions with colleagues, handwritten notes, methodological mistakes, and late discoveries. It is there, on that winding path, where legal judgment is formed.

AI, by contrast, offers comfort. It produces answers that appear complete, articulated, and definitive. But real judgment, the judgment that allows you to identify errors, anticipate risks, or design solutions, only emerges when the lawyer is intellectually involved, not when they delegate reasoning to a system that, by definition, does not understand what it says.

That is why the contemporary challenge for interns and young lawyers is not to learn faster, but to learn more consciously. To resist the temptation of the shortcut and preserve the mental exercise that turns information into knowledge and knowledge into judgment.

5.2. Detecting AI errors as a new professional competency

As has been discussed, the emergence of generative AI does not eliminate the lawyer; it reconfigures their functions. What used to be mechanical work, searching precedents, synthesizing criteria, drafting, can now be done in seconds. However, a new indispensable task emerges: verifying.

Far from reducing intellectual demands, AI raises the level of control the professional must exercise. Frequently, the model delivers responses that look correct, but are defective in substance: nonexistent case law, poorly constructed citations, conclusions misaligned with the applicable legal regime, or reasoning that sounds plausible but lacks legal support.

Detecting these errors will not be an optional skill; it will be a basic competency. And to identify a legal hallucination, one must know enough to recognize what is out of place. The lawyer who never read the full statute will not discover when AI is inventing an article. The intern who never reviewed a court criterion directly will hardly notice when a citation is false. The ability to supervise AI depends, paradoxically, on the same deep knowledge that some believe can be replaced.

This ability to question, cross-check, and correct will be the next great professional differentiator. The more models circulate, the more integrated they become into firms, courts, notaries, and companies, the more valuable will be those who can see what others overlook. AI produces drafts; the lawyer with judgment produces solutions.

The legal practice of the immediate future will not belong to those who operate tools best, but to those who control them best. And controlling means thinking: checking sources, applying healthy skepticism, verifying the logic of what is asserted, evaluating assumptions, identifying inconsistencies.

6. From user to strategist: turning AI into a real competitive advantage

The future of law will not be analog, but neither will it be fully automated. The key is not resisting technology, but mastering it from a strategic position.

6.1. Necessary technological competencies

The legal profession can no longer be sustained solely on mastery of codes and precedents. Today, any lawyer who ignores how generative models work operates at a structural disadvantage. It is not about becoming an engineer, but about understanding the minimum fundamentals: what data feeds an AI, how it processes patterns, what biases it carries, why it can invent information, and what its epistemological limits are.

This technical understanding is not decorative. It is the difference between a lawyer who treats AI like a magic box and one who manages it as a strategic tool. Knowing how to write precise instructions, segment queries, request cross-checks, distinguish between linguistic prediction and real legal knowledge, interpret the risk levels of an answer: all of that will become part of the modern lawyer's basic repertoire.

6.2. Hybrid training models

Law schools face a challenge that will not be solved by adding an optional "legal technology" course. The transformation is deeper: it must reconcile two dimensions historically incompatible, the reflective slowness of traditional legal study and the operational immediacy of digital tools.

That implies redesigning pedagogical processes. Deep reading, yes, but complemented with exercises to verify AI-generated answers. Seminars in doctrinal analysis, accompanied by automated simulations that help visualize complex scenarios.



The goal is not to replace one model with another, but to integrate them intelligently. For the student or intern to learn to think without machines and with machines. To understand when they must advance alone and when it is convenient to rely on support. To not renounce complexity, but also not to despise efficiency.

The lawyer trained under a hybrid scheme will have a structural advantage: they will know how to navigate both the world of primary sources and that of automated systems. In an environment where technology evolves every six months, that adaptability will be invaluable.

6.3. The lawyer of the future: more analytical, more technical, and more human

Despite the technological vertigo, the essence of the legal profession will not disappear; it will be redefined. And it will do so around qualities AI cannot replicate. Empathy will be one of them: the ability to read a client's emotional state, understand the human context behind a conflict,

anticipate reactions, mediate tensions. No generative model can replace that kind of sensitivity.

Intuition will also remain: that fine perception that allows one to spot a contractual risk that is not obvious, or to suspect that an apparently strong case has a hidden weak point. That intuition is born of human experience, not statistical computation.

Ethics will be another non-transferable pillar. Deciding when to disclose, when to remain silent, when to negotiate, when to escalate a conflict: those judgments cannot be automated without dehumanizing the law.

And, above all, judgment will continue to be the central compass. Even when AI drafts, summarizes, or analyzes, it will be the lawyer who must decide what to use, what to discard, and how to interpret. That mix of legal rationality, human sensitivity, and technical skill will shape the lawyer of the future.

In an environment saturated with intelligent tools, the lawyer's humanity will not be an accessory: it will be their clearest competitive advantage.

7. Conclusion: AI will not destroy the lawyer, but it will destroy those who do not learn how to use it

Artificial intelligence is not the existential threat some imagine. The legal profession will not disappear, nor will the need for lawyers be replaced. What it will do, what it is already doing, is redefine the minimum standard of competence.

Lawyers who limit themselves to consuming AI-generated information without questioning it will quickly become obsolete. But those who learn to combine critical thinking, technical mastery, and professional judgment will have an extraordinary advantage. AI will expand their capabilities, multiply their efficiency, and amplify their impact.

The true transformation is not to replace the lawyer, but to elevate them. But to achieve that, one must first understand that AI is not a professor, nor a judge, nor a firm partner. It is simply a tool. Powerful, yes, but a tool nonetheless. And the lawyer of the future will be the one who, despite the technological noise, still puts the brain before the algorithm.

Authors

Rafael Sánchez

rsanchez@cuestacampos.com

Jorge González

jgonzalez@cuestacampos.com

Rodrigo De la Torre

rdelatorre@cuestacampos.com