

Are Law Graduates Prepared For E-Practice In An E-World?



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About this series

The faculty of the new Drexel University College of Law is collaborating on a series of brief informational essays designed to spur discussion about topics of interest to the legal field.

As technologies such as electronic court filing and e-discovery are integrated into practice, do tomorrow's attorneys have the skills necessary to be effective in this new reality? The technological proficiency of law students and the increasing use of technology in law schools suggest the answer is "yes."

The average age of law students is twenty-five, and most are part of what is known as the Millennial Generation or Generation Y (defined as those born in or after 1982). Studies of the effects of generational differences on education note that today's law students grew up exposed to visual and auditory stimulation from diverse sources, and learned to communicate in a variety of ways. Millennials are even less accustomed than their predecessors to using print resources found in traditional law libraries. Printed materials such as hornbooks, encyclopedias, digests and reporters, which served as the vehicles for teaching legal research and were a new associate's primary tools, have been replaced by Google and other Internet and electronic databases. Legal education is increasingly embracing the technologies students are comfortable with and will likely use as lawyers.

At Drexel Law and many other schools, admitted students engage in online chats with faculty even before coming to campus. The overwhelming majority of students take their class notes and even exams on laptops. Wireless Internet access has made in-classroom electronic research easy.

Reflecting the best practices of legal research and writing teachers, students are taught how to conduct research both electronically and using traditional print resources. Students learn proper bluebook citation format by completing online exercises, the results of which the professor receives via e-mail. Professors create Web sites for their classes that are used to post copies of assignments and provide opportunities for online discussions between students and faculty. Of course, Internet access can also facilitate shoe shopping in class and other substitutes for the time-honored "crossword puzzle behind the casebook" technique.

Gone are the days of sliding papers under the professor's door. Students submit written assignments through class Web sites or e-mail directly to the professor. In turn, professors provide detailed written feedback to students by embedding comments in the electronic document and e-mailing it to the student. E-mail has just about erased the traditional hesitance of students to contact law professors outside of class.

By incorporating technologies that Millennial students are comfortable with into the educational process, law professors not only better educate these students, but also better prepare them for the changing reality of practice. Legal education has changed; by recognizing the generational realities surrounding students' learning and future practice, we can make it a change for the better.

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