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Baker & Hostetler Helps Georgia Law School Create Legal Tech-Driven Course

By Thomas Spigolon
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What You Need to Know

- Baker & Hostetler helped create one of the nation's first legal process engineering courses at Georgia State University.
- The course focuses on available technology's use in the legal profession.
- It gives tools that help a lawyer be more efficient in such areas as contract analysis, a firm leader said.

As the legal industry grapples with rapid technological changes, Am Law 100 firm Baker & Hostetler has partnered with a Georgia law school to offer a legal tech course designed to give the school's graduates a competitive edge.

And through the partnership, Baker & Hostetler gains a better understanding of teaching these legal tech skills to its own workforce. The Ohio-based national firm, which has about 100 in Atlanta, partnered with Georgia State University's College of Law earlier this year to create one of the nation's first legal process engineering courses that focuses on the use of available technology in the legal profession.

The program now is among the few in the U.S. to prepare law students for attorney and non-attorney legal technology jobs, said Baker & Hostetler spokesperson Courtney B. Smith.

"This partnership is one of the only examples of a private law firm contributing directly to law school curriculum," Smith said.

She said the first course was offered in the spring 2023 semester and proved popular enough to be offered again in the spring 2024 semester.

Lawyers and professionals from the firm helped create the course and taught portions of it as well during its introduction in this year's spring semester at the Atlanta university, she said.

Courtesy photo

Georgia State University College of Law students listen during a course in legal technology.

In particular, Baker & Hostetler attorneys and legal technology professionals—including chief information officer Katherine Lowry, senior innovation manager Leigh Zeiser and project manager Shelia Neely—worked with GSU law school faculty to design, implement and help teach the course.

The course the firm helped develop is part of GSU's legal analytics and innovation certificate program, which law students can include in their law degree work.

The firm already had hired a former GSU student who took courses in the program and worked as a legal processing engineer, Lowry said.

Lowry leads the firm's 14-person IncuBaker team that "helps lawyers and clients understand and navigate the intersection of digital business, emerging technologies and the law," according to the firm.

She said the firm sees benefits in collaborating with GSU on the course because it is teaching future

lawyers—who one day could land at Baker & Hostetler—how to use available technology to serve their clients more efficiently.

"We are envisioning that our attorney workforce is going to be adopting and integrating technology into their services. We do today and, as technology advances, we will tomorrow," Lowry said.

"We've seen that full understanding of how to utilize technology, how to identify when and what tools to select, and being greater adopters of technology as a real benefit for us," she said. "(Use of technology) is pervasive across the legal industry, and the more prepared they are the better the outcome we will have in client service delivery at our firm."

Overall, Lowry said collaboration with GSU benefits the firm in an intangible way "that can turn tangible."

Lowry said it gives a law student or graduate a better understanding of technology and how it can be used to "accelerate things that they're doing for clients or accelerating their role in working with clients."

"That's where we found a lot of value because, if you think about it, it's really in our interest to really have students coming out of GSU law school who are well-prepared to be able to adapt to technology and integrate it into a practice, be able to mitigate risk faster, or see other opportunities as technology advances," she said.

Baker & Hostetler also can collaborate with GSU on integrating such new technologies as generative AI into the curriculum, Lowry said.

"Our firm is making a lot of yardage in our understanding of what (generative AI) can do, its capabilities, its risks and so on," she said. "It's a different form of technology—you have to be able to adapt and understand how to problem-solve through it."

Career Skills

The Legal Process Engineering course includes instruction in skills that mirror the qualifications needed to fill Baker & Hosteler's legal process engineer position, Lowry said.

The course focuses on how legal organizations can develop technologies and processes to help create competitive advantages and reduce overhead in their operations, she said.

According to a course description, its seminar-styled structure "will allow the use of legal project management and process improvement concepts to help students develop problem-solving, product evaluation and technology implementation skills." Among projects students developed was an app that will allow small and midsized firms to set litigation alerts in local docketing systems, according to the law school.

"Students will explore opportunities in intelligent automation, R&D in emerging technology, integrating technology into legal services, and technology projects which support digital strategies for law firms, courts, and legal clients."

The partnership began after GSU Legal Technologies Librarian Michelle Dewey saw an ad for applicants for Baker & Hosteler's legal process engineer position and wanted to create a capstone course that would prepare law students for such a technology-related job.

Dewey, a former Baker & Hostetler legal research manager, said she consulted with former colleague Lowry to see if the coursework included the instruction needed for a tech-related law role. The request led to an offer by the firm to collaborate with GSU on designing and implementing the course, she said.

"I said, 'Would you mind looking at this?' Katherine and Leigh, who works for Katherine, were just like, 'We won't just look at this. We'll collaborate with you. We're going to come and help develop the curriculum.'"

The course includes such topics as practical applications of document automation, project management, data management and application interfacing, Lowry said.

"(It's) a variety of technology that could be used at any one point in time for any practice area," she said. "That's what I think is so important."

Lowry said the technology skills the course is designed around allow a lawyer to know which tools are best for such jobs as, for example, parsing out and extracting clauses while analyzing a contract, she said.

"Those are some of the skills that I think this course helps us build," Lowry said.

Dewey said it also gives law students the extra option of learning skills that could allow them to fill roles in the legal profession—such as law librarian—as an alternative to the traditional role of a practicing attorney.

Kristina Niedringhaus, GSU's associate dean for Law Library, Information Services, Legal Technology & Innovation, said another aspect of the program is it gives law school students the technology skills which are "really important in creating efficiencies." It will help them create a better work-life balance, creating time to see additional clients or even "not work," she said.

Lowry said the law firm also sees benefits in collaborating with other GSU law school initiatives, such as its Center for Access to Justice which "promotes meaningful access to the courts and equal treatment in the civil and criminal justice systems" by conducting research and hosting community legal education programs in Atlanta.

"To us, that is just a compelling and worthwhile investment in time," she said.

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