

AI Boosts Performance for Low-Achieving Law Students, But Hinders Top Performers, Study Reveals

New research from the University of Minnesota has unveiled a surprising impact of artificial intelligence tools on the academic performance of law students, suggesting a significant shift in the dynamics of legal education. The study, conducted with 48 high-achieving law students, has demonstrated that while AI can be a game-changer for lower-performing individuals, it may have unintended consequences for those at the top of their class.

In the experiment, students were tasked with writing a final paper, first without AI assistance. After completing this initial assignment, they underwent prompt training and were given a second paper to write, this time with GPT-4, OpenAI's latest and most advanced AI model.

The results were both surprising and thought-provoking. On average, students using AI tools scored 29% higher than their unassisted counterparts. This substantial improvement was even more pronounced among lower-performing students, who experienced a remarkable 45% increase in their scores. However, for high-achieving students accustomed to leading their classes, the introduction of AI led to an unexpected 20% drop in their scores. These findings challenge conventional wisdom about the benefits of AI in education.

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While AI demonstrated its prowess in enhancing multiple-choice test scores, it fell short when evaluating essay writing. The professors behind the research, Choi and Schwarcz, highlighted the significance of these results in their paper, suggesting that "GPT-4's impact depended heavily on the student's starting skill level." This conclusion implies that AI may play a role in equalizing the legal profession by narrowing the performance gap between elite and non-elite lawyers.

This study aligns with recent observations in the legal industry, which suggest that AI could reshape the traditional qualifications and roles within the profession. Legal Cheek reported earlier this month that AI's increasing presence will likely shift more legal work towards individuals with expertise in computing and coding rather than just those with traditional legal qualifications.

Many law firms have begun integrating technological solutions, such as document review, to streamline administrative processes. This saves time and enables human professionals to focus on more complex legal issues, leveraging the power of AI to enhance their overall productivity.

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As AI continues to disrupt the legal landscape, it is becoming clear that its effects are multifaceted, challenging established norms and fostering opportunities for individuals with diverse skill sets. The University of Minnesota's research underscores the need for ongoing exploration of AI's role in education and the legal profession.