

# GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WITH A HUMAN TOUCH: BUILDING HANA

Conrad A. Johnson\*

## ABSTRACT

This Essay examines how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) can be integrated into legal education and public interest law practice in a way that meaningfully enhances—rather than diminishes—human judgment, professional responsibility, and access to justice. Drawing on the experience of Columbia Law School’s Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic, the Essay situates GenAI within an experiential pedagogy that emphasizes competence, ethical awareness, and collaborative problem-solving. It argues that law students and lawyers must move beyond a passive or uncritical use of GenAI tools; toward a deeper understanding of how these systems operate, the risks they pose, and the opportunities they present for improving legal services when thoughtfully designed and implemented.

By illustration, the Essay offers a detailed case study of HANA—the Housing Access Navigator Assistant—a custom, closed GenAI tool developed by the Clinic in close partnership with The Legal Aid Society to support its Housing Justice Helpline. Designed around three core principles—maintaining a human touch, ensuring expert oversight, and protecting data privacy—HANA demonstrates how GenAI can be deployed to support frontline legal advocates rather than replace them. By streamlining complex legal analysis, facilitating supervisor consultation, and generating accurate, multilingual follow-up communications, HANA reduced call times while assisting advocates in providing enhanced, customized service to tenants facing eviction.

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\* Edward Ross Aranow Clinical Professor Emeritus of Law, Columbia Law School. The author is especially grateful to Barbara “Basia” Michalska for her many collaborative contributions, including her participation in a recent presentation that significantly informed and enriched the development of this Essay. Moreover, her tireless efforts in helping to create HANA, the GenAI tool that is the subject of this Essay, were inspirational and a shining example of true commitment to public interest lawyering at the highest level.

Finally, the Essay distills lessons learned from both the educational and practice-based dimensions of the project. It contends that teaching GenAI through supervised, real-world experience is a particularly potent way of preparing students for contemporary law practice and meeting lawyers' ethical obligations. At the same time, it offers practical guidance for legal organizations seeking to integrate GenAI responsibly; emphasizing iterative design, human oversight, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and scalability. Together, these insights suggest a model for leveraging GenAI as a tool for educational and institutional capacity-building while expanding access to justice—one that keeps lawyers firmly in the loop at a pivotal moment for legal education and the profession.

## INTRODUCTION

Experience is a great teacher. Clinical professors structure our pedagogy around the power of experience to deepen learning about the law and lawyering. For a raft of reasons discussed later, in Columbia Law School's Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic (the Clinic), we also leverage experience to help students gain proficiency with the use of emerging technologies like Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in law practice.<sup>1</sup>

On April 21, 2025, the Robin Hood Foundation awarded one of our clinic clients, The Legal Aid Society (LAS), \$1.1 million dollars for winning Robin Hood's AI Poverty Challenge.<sup>2</sup> Clinic students created the winning GenAI tool,<sup>3</sup> working in close collaboration with a cadre of dedicated, innovation-minded housing attorneys, paralegals and

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1. *Lawyering in the Digital Age*, COLUM. L. SCH., <https://www.law.columbia.edu/academics/courses/33343> [<https://perma.cc/7KFU-R5QB>] (last visited Nov. 10, 2025).

2. See Columbia Law School, LINKEDIN, [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/columbia-law-school\\_in-2024-students-from-columbia-law-school-activity-7320183313950789635-1z5a/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/columbia-law-school_in-2024-students-from-columbia-law-school-activity-7320183313950789635-1z5a/) [<https://perma.cc/CQ8U-5MLB>] (last visited Sept. 30, 2025); *Three Best-in-Class Solutions Win Robin Hood's AI Poverty Challenge*, ROBIN HOOD (Apr. 21, 2025) [hereinafter *Robin Hood's AI Poverty Challenge*], <https://robinhood.org/news/three-best-in-class-solutions-win-robin-hoods-ai-poverty-challenge/> [<https://perma.cc/6QRC-CVZV>].

3. No project of this scope is accomplished by any one person. The author enthusiastically acknowledges contributions from Kaley Mi, a student in the Advanced Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic section who helped develop an early prototype, as well as Elif Nazil Hamutcu and Evan Michael Christopher Falk, the clinic students who led the technological design, testing and implementation effort. Basem Aly, Assistant Director of Instructional Technology at the Law School, provided expertise and steadfast support that continues to be invaluable.

administrators at LAS.<sup>4</sup>

This Essay begins with a brief overview of the Clinic to provide context, followed by a basic introduction to GenAI as we used it—a description of the problem our client asked us to address and screenshots of the award-winning tool we created to meet this challenge. The Essay ends with lessons learned regarding why we should teach about GenAI in law school and how practicing lawyers can begin and sustain initiatives to integrate GenAI to enhance law practice and expand access to justice.

## I. CLINIC BACKGROUND

Columbia’s Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic began in January 2001.<sup>5</sup> In the Clinic, we explore the impact of technology on law practice and the profession. The Clinic was the first in the nation with this exploration as its exclusive focus and stands alone as the longest continually run project of its type. Our clients are public interest legal organizations, court systems, and individual judges with a sincere interest in integrating technology into their work and expanding access to justice. Students become familiar with client needs through direct participation in, and close observation of our clients at work. These experiences, in addition to the seminar component, weekly supervision sessions, simulations, rounds and exercises—give students an outlet to hone core lawyering skills and habits of mind as they apply and test the theory that we provide to help them understand and effectively use technology in law practice.

Public service and self-interest combine as motivation for students who have seen the impact of technology in their everyday lives and understand that technology is shaping the practice and profession they are about to

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4. We could not have asked for a more creative, knowledgeable, and hard-working cadre of clients at LAS. Under the forward-thinking leadership of Adriene Holder, Attorney-in-Charge, Civil Practice, the core LAS team consisted of Housing Justice Helpline Supervising Attorney Barbara “Basia” Michalska, Jean Marie Miranda, Director of Civil Practice Intake, and Maria Santiago, Program Manager.

5. The Clinic was founded, and for the majority of its history, co-directed by Professors Mary Marsh Zulack, Conrad A. Johnson, and Brian Donnelly, the Law School’s first Director of Educational Technology and a Lecturer in Law. Beginning in 2023, the Clinic continued under the direction of the author. The author will often use “we” when describing what happens in the Clinic. Sometimes, that is a reference to collaborative work with students. Often, it refers to the foundational work done with Professor Mary Marsh Zulack and Brian Donnelly.

enter. Student comfort with technology, regardless of their technological expertise, provides them with a perspective that is coveted by clients who come to us hoping to leverage that comfort and expertise to address systemic and often seemingly intractable problems. We don't just observe and discuss our clients' problems, we construct solutions, often using technologies that the clients already have or can access freely.

There are many additional reasons to teach about GenAI in law schools—more than we will cover here. However, chief among them is lawyer 'competence,' the formal definition of which includes the ethical requirement to understand the risks and benefits of technology generally.<sup>6</sup> More recently, regulatory bodies have issued specific additional standards regarding a lawyer's responsibilities when using GenAI.<sup>7</sup>

## II. WHAT IS GenAI?

Even before the public release of OpenAI's ChatGPT in November of 2022, artificial intelligence (AI) loomed as a force to be reckoned with in practice. AI is not new. The term was first coined at a conference at Dartmouth College in August 1955.<sup>8</sup> As the technology progressed, we began to see it integrated behind the scenes in commonly used tools, such as Google searches, as well as shopping (Amazon), video (Netflix), and music (Spotify) recommendations.<sup>9</sup> We also used AI

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6. See MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 1.1 cmt. 8 (A.B.A. 2025) [hereinafter MRPC R. 1.1]; N.Y. RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 1.1 cmt. 8 (N.Y. BAR ASS'N 2025) [hereinafter NYRPC] (stating an attorney should "keep abreast of the benefits and risks associated with technology the lawyer uses to provide services to clients or to store or transmit confidential information. . .").

7. See generally A.B.A. Comm. on Ethics & Pro. Resp., Formal Op. 512 (2024) [hereinafter ABA Formal Op. 512 (2024)]. See e.g., N.Y. STATE BAR ASS'N, REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION TASK FORCE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE 63–67 (2024), <https://nysba.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2024-April-Report-and-Recommendations-of-the-Task-Force-on-Artificial-Intelligence.pdf?srsltid=ARcRdnqR4xaB3BYQ112D7P5IJtLkjGwiQ00XLEJEIDxtuKeOGU53IQzq> [<https://perma.cc/N8XM-CSUB>]; N.Y. City Bar Ass'n, Formal Op. 2024-5 (2024) [hereinafter Formal Op. 2024-5 (2024)], <https://www.nycbar.org/reports/formal-opinion-2024-5-generative-ai-in-the-practice-of-law/> [<https://perma.cc/HJM2-XTH6>] (Generative AI in the Practice of Law).

8. See generally J. MCCARTHY ET AL., A PROPOSAL FOR THE DARTMOUTH SUMMER RESEARCH PROJECT ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (1955), <http://jmc.stanford.edu/articles/dartmouth/dartmouth.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/P3XF-LXQC>].

9. See, e.g., Deepak Raj, *AI-Driven Personalisation: How Netflix, Amazon, and Spotify Know What You Want*, MEDIUM (Sep. 18, 2024), [https://medium.com/@deepak\\_raj/ai-driven-personalisation-](https://medium.com/@deepak_raj/ai-driven-personalisation-)

when we began to interact with virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa, or when accepting next word/phrase suggestions while drafting emails and texts.

How do these older, ubiquitous uses of AI differ from GenAI? For the purposes of this Essay, think of GenAI as based on large language models (LLMs)—vast datasets that are mined for general-purpose use in an astounding array of applications. The older instances of AI mentioned above are based on smaller datasets for task-specific functions, like suggesting words and products.

Since ChatGPT's very public introduction, I routinely asked my students if they use ChatGPT. Semester after semester, without exception, everyone raises a hand. However, when I ask my students—all of whom have been selected for the Clinic based on applications that evidence a strong interest in technology—what the acronym GPT represents, I see no hands. This dissonance is telling because it illustrates the alarming gap, particularly for lawyers, between the use of GenAI and a basic understanding of how it operates.

In short, GPT means “Generative Pre-trained Transformer.”<sup>10</sup> Transformer is the underlying architecture that enables these models to handle sequences of language (like sentences) as an input (prompt) and output (response) effectively.<sup>11</sup> Today, there are many GPT-based models. Examples include OpenAI's ChatGPT, Perplexity, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, Claude, and Harvey. These models use GPT architecture that has been particularly effective for tasks involving natural language processing.<sup>12</sup> While each model may have its own specific training data and fine-tuning, they all share the same underlying GPT foundation.<sup>13</sup>

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how-netflix-amazon-and-spotify-know-what-you-want-b9eb18e7f21b [https://perma.cc/6PU7-Y6J5].

10. See Kyle Clark, *What's a GPT?*, MEDIUM (July 12, 2023), <https://medium.com/@kyle.d.clark10/whats-a-gpt-289253ffd265> [https://perma.cc/4D3H-T4LV].

11. *Id.*

12. See *id.*

13. In the context of AI, ‘models’ refer to the underlying algorithms or mathematical representations that enable a system to learn and perform specific tasks. Think of a model as a set of rules or instructions that the AI follows. These rules are learned from vast amounts of data, allowing the AI to make predictions, generate new content, or perform other complex tasks. For example, a language model like ChatGPT is trained on a massive dataset of text and code. This allows it to understand and generate human-like text, translate languages, write different kinds of creative content, and answer questions in an informative way. Conrad A. Johnson, ChatGPT-4o, “Briefly describe models in lay language.” (Aug. 14, 2024) (on file with the *Washington University Journal of Law and Policy*).

### III. THE PROBLEM THE CLIENT PRESENTED

As is the case in most clinics, our students address actual problems presented by real clients and organizations. In the Clinic, our clients present problems involving the delivery of high-quality legal services that they hope technology can help solve.

Our students interview their clients to get a sense of their needs, then work side by side with the client in the environments that gave rise to the problem. Through a process involving first-hand experience with the problem and regular meetings with the client, students, under close supervision, propose options that they believe might be useful. This is typically an iterative counseling process that involves careful listening, demonstrations of potential solutions, and constant refinement through ongoing collaboration with the client.

As mentioned earlier, our client was The Legal Aid Society.<sup>14</sup> At its root, the problem LAS presented was essentially the same one that most public interest legal service organizations face: how to use scarce resources to meet the overwhelming demand for free civil legal services. In this case, the demand was for help with housing issues, specifically for the tens of thousands of New York City tenants who face eviction proceedings each year.<sup>15</sup> To provide a sense of the magnitude, complexity, and ramifications of the problem, a bit of background is in order. New York City was the first city in the nation to provide universal access to lawyers, also known as the Right to Counsel (RTC), for tenants in housing cases.<sup>16</sup> Other municipalities and law

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14. Founded nearly 150 years ago in 1876, The Legal Aid Society is widely recognized as the oldest and “largest, most influential” provider of free legal services in New York City. *See The Largest, Most Influential Social Justice Law Firm in New York City*, THE LEGAL AID SOC’Y, <https://legalaidnyc.org/about/> [<https://perma.cc/SD3G-XTMG>] (last visited Oct. 1, 2025).

15. JADE VASQUEZ, EVICTIONS UP, REPRESENTATION DOWN: HOW NEW YORK CITY IS UNDERMINING THE RIGHT TO COUNSEL 4 (2025), <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Evictions-Up-Representation-Down.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/54MY-8C7G>].

16. Specifics about this historic expansion of free civil legal services can be found in many sources, including in one by the Office of Civil Justice in the New York City Department of Social Services. *See OFF. OF CIV. JUST., N.Y. DEP’T OF SOC. SERVS., UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES: A REPORT ON YEAR SIX OF IMPLEMENTATION IN NEW YORK CITY* 4 (2023), [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/civiljustice/OCJ\\_UA\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/civiljustice/OCJ_UA_Annual_Report_2023.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/TZX9-PG2P>].

On August 11, 2017, New York City enacted Local Law 136 of 2017, groundbreaking legislation which made the City of New York the first city in the

makers are evaluating and emulating this innovative program.<sup>17</sup> The stakes for individuals threatened with eviction in New York City, as well as tenants and legal services providers across the country, are profoundly high.<sup>18</sup>

RTC has been a resounding success for tenants who are able to obtain full representation by counsel in eviction proceedings. In May 2025, the New York City Comptroller reported that, “[t]he program is incredibly effective: in 2024, 89% of households that were represented by an attorney remained stably housed.”<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, while the number of residential eviction proceedings brought in New York City’s Housing Court rose to 119,834 in 2024, RTC representation rates have dropped dramatically to 42% of eligible tenants as RTC providers struggle to meet the growing demand with inadequate funding.<sup>20</sup>

At the risk of stating the obvious, evictions have profound repercussions—impacting mental health, hospital visits, education, and earnings—among other consequences.<sup>21</sup> As a result, New York City expects

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United States to commit to providing access to free legal services for all tenants facing eviction in Housing Court and public housing authority termination of tenancy proceedings. This historic law, also known as the Universal Access (UA) or Right-to Counsel (RTC) law, tasks the Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) with planning and implementing programs that would provide all tenants facing eviction in New York City Housing Court whose household income is at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines with access to full legal representation in their eviction proceedings, and brief legal assistance for those making more, as well as legal services for tenants of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) facing administrative termination of tenancy proceedings. In Fiscal Year 2023, Local Law of 20 of 2023 expanded eligibility for full representation to all tenants 60 years of age and older.

*Id.* (citations omitted).

17. See VASQUEZ, *supra* note 15.

18. See OKSANA MIRONOVA ET AL., PREVENTING EVICTION IN NEW YORK STATE: A SNAPSHOT OF WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN’T 8 (2025), [https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/031825\\_AnnualSurvey2024\\_Eviction\\_report\\_V7.pdf](https://smhttp-ssl-58547.nexcesscdn.net/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/031825_AnnualSurvey2024_Eviction_report_V7.pdf) [https://perma.cc/C83J-KR9F] (explaining that since the implementation of RTC in 2017, the New York City administration limited tenants’ access to legal representation to those below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL), however, five states and seventeen municipalities still adopted similar RTC laws).

19. See VASQUEZ, *supra* note 15.

20. *Id.* at 5, 13.

21. See generally Robert Collinson et al., *Eviction and Poverty in American Cities*, 139 Q.J. ECON. 57 (2024). See Henri Cornec, *Eviction and Poverty in American Cities*, TOBIN CTR. FOR ECON. POL’Y, <https://tobin.yale.edu/research/eviction-and-povertyamericancities#:~:text=Evictions%20can%20lead%20to%20homelessness%2C%20and%20other,Correlation%20with%20other%20crises%20such%20as%20unemployment> [https://perma.cc/84C3-KAL9] (last visited Nov. 11, 2025) (research

to spend nearly \$4 billion on its shelter system.<sup>22</sup> To meet the rising demand for RTC services, LAS instituted the ‘Housing Justice Helpline’ (Helpline). The Helpline is staffed by 15 paralegals, 3 supervising attorneys and administrators. Together they fielded approximately 17,000 calls last year—many referred by courts, city agencies and 311—from tenants who lack full representation but urgently need clear legal answers and access to immediately available resources. At that volume, call backlogs and bottlenecks become inevitable.

Helpline paralegals are experienced, sharp, and dedicated. However, the problems that callers typically present are complex. In an effort to provide accurate answers, Helpline staff utilized internal resources, including an 180-page internal manual, internet resources and real-time support through a chat platform with supervising attorneys. The quest for quality often led to lengthy phone calls averaging more than 45 minutes.

With that backdrop in mind, a cadre of forward-thinking housing experts at LAS imagined, correctly as it turned out, that technology could streamline and facilitate this process, making it possible to deliver enhanced services more quickly to callers. The Clinic was honored to help explore effective options.

#### IV. KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

It did not take long to theorize that GenAI could offer efficiencies and augmented services if thoughtfully implemented. In close collaboration with our LAS partners, a set of key principles emerged to guide the construction of a viable GenAI tool named **HANA**, the Housing Access Navigator Assistant. Three key principles stand out.

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summary).

22. See N.Y.C. COUNCIL, FISCAL 2025 EXECUTIVE PLAN 1 (2024), <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2024/05/DHS-1-1.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/WE2P-FEDZ>].

*A. Human Touch*

First and foremost, HANA would be built to assist LAS paralegals and attorneys—not as a substitute for them. Helpline workers would remain in the loop at all times. Maintaining a human touch helped fulfill our professional responsibility to take ultimate ownership of the advice provided to callers.<sup>23</sup>

HANA is *not a public-facing tool*. It is built to assist Helpline staff to quickly deliver accurate information that addresses the complexity of the ‘life issues’ with a housing law component that callers need.<sup>24</sup>

*Complexity* of the issues presented, even though roughly categorized as involving housing, were frequently multifaceted. This led to the choice to craft a GenAI tool that would support advocates who have the expertise to distill the often-overlapping challenges that tenants face. Helpline staff are adept at asking questions that speedily get to the heart of the problem. Complexity is at the core of the need for the human touch.

Complexity also requires staff to be in conversation with HANA. This involves ‘Chain of Thought’ (CoT) prompting. Through CoT prompting, HANA can integrate new facts into its responses as the Helpline worker learns them from the caller.

*i. Example*

If the Helpline worker distills the caller’s question to be, “Can the landlord evict me if I keep my dog?,” she types that prompt into HANA. HANA correctly responds by citing to New York City’s Pet Law, which allows a tenant to keep a dog under certain conditions that HANA spells out.<sup>25</sup> HANA also points to exceptions for those who maintain ‘service

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23. Given the close collaboration between the Clinic and LAS, the author will use ‘our’ to reflect the shared obligation we collectively felt to create the best possible GenAI tool to serve callers.

24. For an illuminating discussion of how those who might benefit from civil legal services experience ‘life issues’—not ‘legal issues’—see INT. ON LAW. ACCT. FUND OF THE STATE OF N.Y., JUSTICE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT: REPORT ON PHASE 1 ACTIVITIES 1, 7, 8, 10–12 (2024), <https://www.iola.org/all-documents/about-iola/justice-infrastructure-project/326-jip-report-of-phase-1-activities/file> [<https://perma.cc/4NMX-CAXH>] (elaborating on the importance of understanding the need for legal services as generated by “life issues” that may have legal components but are not necessarily viewed by many as problems that would benefit those if they had a lawyer).

25. See Conrad A. Johnson, ChatGPT-4o HANA, “Can the landlord evict me if I keep a dog?” (Dec. 16, 2025), [<https://perma.cc/WP77-DUAP>].

animals.’ If, later in the conversation, it becomes clear that the caller is a tenant in a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) building, the paralegal can continue the conversation by asking, “What are the rules for NYCHA tenants?” HANA will provide a more detailed response outlining NYCHA’s policy which allows tenants to have one small dog (under 25 pounds) so long as it is not a prohibited breed and the tenant registers the dog with NYCHA.<sup>26</sup>

### ii. Note, “Contextual vs. Persistent” Memory

When HANA engages in CoT prompting, HANA retains the context of the prior prompt—in this case, the more general question about circumstances in which the tenant might be evicted for having a dog. By retaining ‘contextual memory,’ i.e., ‘remembering’ earlier prompts within the *same session*, HANA can answer the more specific prompt about the rules that apply in NYCHA housing without the paralegal having to restate the original premise. However, it is important to note that the platform on which HANA is built, ChatGPT-4o, allowed us to prohibit HANA from retaining memory of earlier prompts from *prior sessions*, i.e., HANA does not possess ‘persistent memory’ after a session ends unless we explicitly enable that function, which we did not.

### iii. The Right Question

Finally, the ability of advocates to ask the right questions is what makes our paralegals and attorneys an indispensable part of the Helpline. It is why maintaining a ‘Human Touch’ is one of our key principles.

## B. Expert Oversight

Expert Oversight emerged as a second key principle in shaping the tool. HANA relies solely on a closed reserve of knowledge about housing issues in New York City that was created and approved by LAS. The organization’s housing experts review the tool’s accuracy on a weekly basis. This rigorous due diligence, combined with continual

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26. See Conrad A. Johnson, ChatGPT-4o HANA, “What are the rules for NYCHA tenants?” (Dec. 16, 2025), [<https://perma.cc/38LQ-Y3UJ>].

refinement and testing, has greatly reduced the very valid concerns that LAS and, indeed, all lawyers should have about hallucinations and bias that can flow from the uncritical use of GenAI when, in the ordinary case, the user has little or no idea about the basis for the GPT's response.

HANA is built on OpenAI's ChatGPT-4o which provides a stable platform for constructing a *customized, password-protected* resource. HANA is constructed around two core features: 1) a *customized 'knowledge base'* that contains only those materials that have been created or approved by LAS housing experts and 2) the ability to create *custom 'system prompts.'* Think of system prompts as a set of detailed instructions that govern the way HANA operates. Our customized system prompts allowed us to sculpt HANA to meet LAS Helpline workers' needs. Examples of some of HANA's system prompts are:

- Generate precise advice about legal housing issues in New York City from only your knowledge base. Don't use any knowledge beyond what is provided in the uploaded files.
- Only address legal issues.
- Consult the table in the 'Legal Helpline Resource Guide' to see if any resources are helpful and give me those links.
- Determine if I should contact my supervisor based on 'Supervisor Triggers v3.docx.' If I should contact my supervisor, then tell me so using BOLD text.
- When writing an email summary to the Caller, include the disclaimer in "Email Signature.docx" at the end verbatim.
- STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:
  1. Tell me the relevant legal issues. Label this section in BOLD.
  2. Reword your response so it is under 100 words. Label this section "Concise Advice" in BOLD.

### *C. Data Privacy*

Data Privacy is the third key principle. Helpline staff never use ‘personally identifiable information’ when interacting with HANA. All prompts are written in general terms ensuring that no confidential information is shared with third parties. This requirement is built into our instructions for using HANA and is a prominent component of our training. In addition, we do not allow OpenAI to use conversation data from HANA to improve OpenAI’s models. Moreover, we are mindful of the ethical rules that apply to lawyers and legal workers when using GenAI.<sup>27</sup>

### V. HERE’S HANA

As mentioned above, HANA is password-protected for use by LAS Helpline advocates. Therefore, you cannot experiment with HANA on your own. However, describing technology without other aids or supplements is usually a losing battle. Consequently, the best way to help you visualize HANA is through a series of five screenshots which are displayed below with captions that highlight important features. Note, these screenshots show portions of what would appear as a scrolling image to Helpline workers.

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27. See generally MRPC r. 1.1, *supra* note 6; NYRPC, *supra* note 6; ABA Formal Op. 512 (2024), *supra* note 7; N.Y. STATE BAR ASS’N, *supra* note 7; Formal Op. 2024-5 (2024), *supra* note 7.

FIGURE 1.

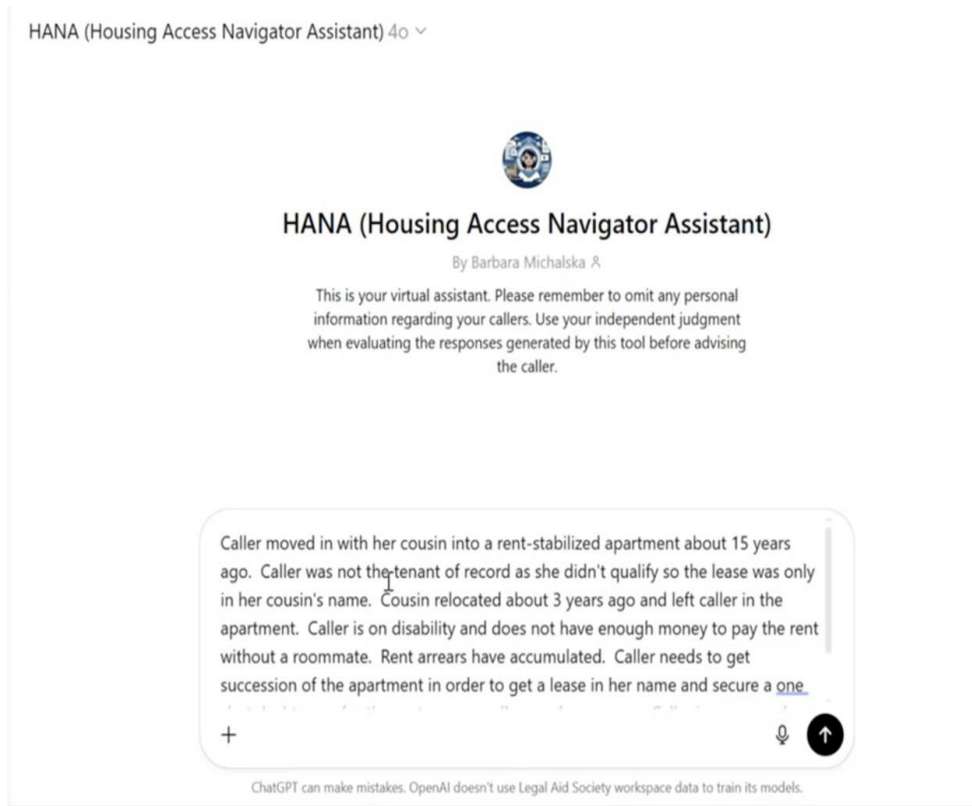
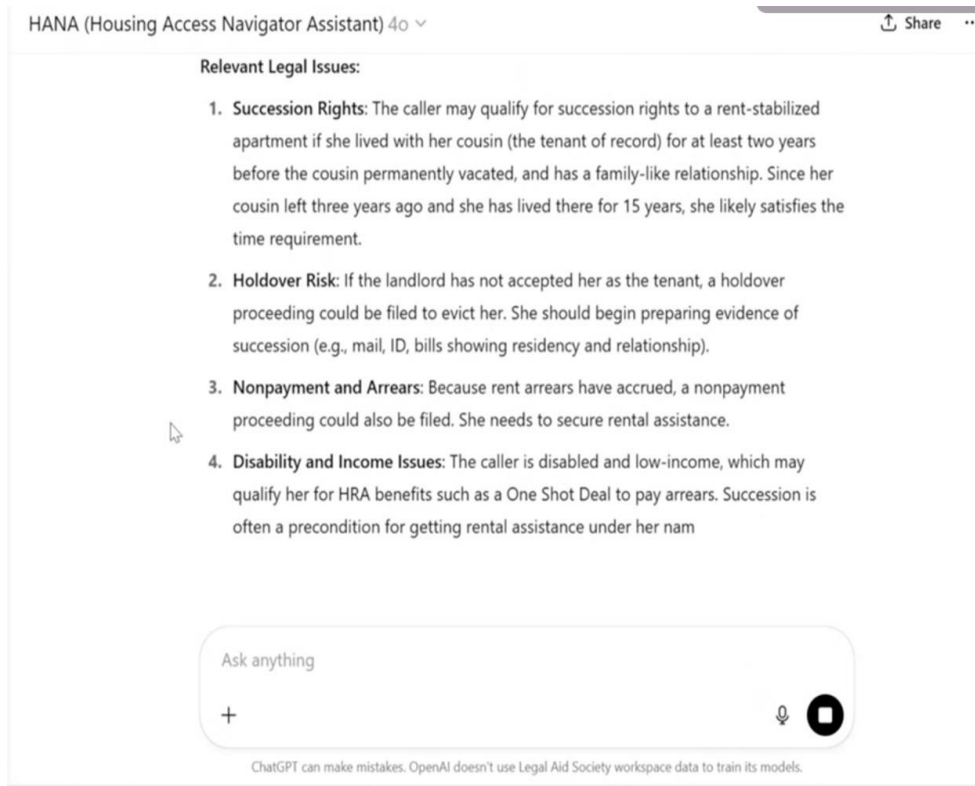


Figure 1 above is a screenshot of HANA's home page which includes a warning against using personally identifiable information and the requirement that the user exercise their independent judgment when evaluating HANA's response before advising the caller. HANA is a closed, custom, easy-to-navigate GPT that allows Helpline workers to answer callers' questions faster than ever. Helpline staff listen carefully to the caller's description of the problem and distill it into a 'prompt,' i.e., a question or request containing the relevant facts in plain language. HANA has been trained to interpret commonly used housing-related acronyms and

ignores misspellings, syntax, and punctuation errors.

FIGURE 2.



Once the paralegal enters the prompt, HANA searches its closed, custom 'knowledge base' to identify relevant legal issues following the 'system prompts' outlined earlier. In Figure 2, HANA identified "Relevant Legal Issues" that are important to consider when advising the caller. Here, HANA identified "Succession Rights," "Holdover Risk," "Nonpayment Arrears," and "Disability and Income Issues." Notably, HANA not only identifies relevant issues, but correctly *applies* the caller's facts to those issues.

FIGURE 3.

In Figure 3 below, HANA completes the list of “Relevant Legal Issues,” then summarizes them into a single paragraph response under one hundred words labeled “Concise Advice,” per our custom system’s prompt instructions. This screenshot illustrates a few significant features:

- First, certain housing issues are particularly nuanced. HANA recognizes this by identifying a “Supervisor Trigger” from the ‘Supervisor Triggers v3.docx,’ a document that LAS housing experts created, contained in HANA’s custom ‘knowledge base.’ The document highlights issues that require paralegals to consult a supervising attorney before dispensing advice. In this case, the paralegal’s prompt raised an overlapping disability issue. Disability is one of the ‘trigger issues’ listed in ‘Supervisor Triggers v3.docx.’
- Second, HANA lists and links to resources from its knowledge base that paralegals should forward to the caller as additional, helpful material for future reference. In this example, LAS maintains resource guides related to “Succession Rights,” “Holdover,” and “Nonpayment” proceedings—and “One Shot Deal[s]” that eligible tenants generally, and this caller specifically, might access to pay rent arrears and avoid eviction.
- Finally, paralegals often find the “Concise Advice” component useful in summarizing and communicating advice generated from a complex set of facts.

HANA (Housing Access Navigator Assistant) 40 ▾

often a precondition for getting rental assistance under her name.

5. **Supervisor Trigger:** The caller **mentioned eviction concerns and is disabled**, so you **must contact your supervisor** per the "Supervisor Triggers" policy.

**Concise Advice:**

Caller may qualify for succession rights to the rent-stabilized apartment if she lived there with her cousin in a family-like relationship for at least 2 years before the cousin moved out. Advise her to gather proof of that relationship and co-residency. She should also apply for a One Shot Deal to cover rent arrears and may need to file a holdover answer if served. **Contact your supervisor due to mention of eviction and disability.** Send her the succession resource from Legal Aid: [Succession Rights - Legal Aid NYC](#) and the Holdover and Nonpayment guides:

- [Holdover Guide](#)
- [Nonpayment Guide](#)
- [One Shot Deal Info](#)

FIGURE 4.

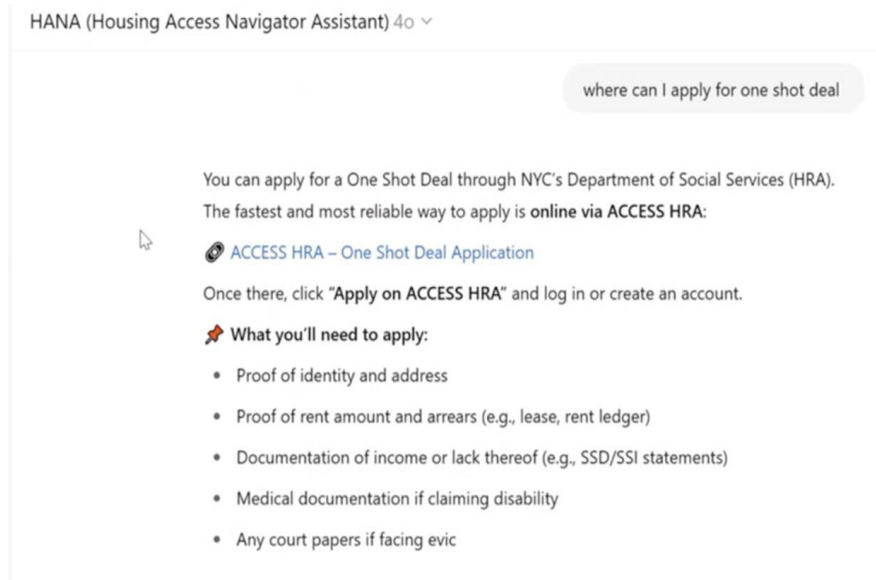


Figure 4 illustrates the ability to be in conversation with HANA through CoT prompting, described earlier. In this example, the paralegal poses a follow up prompt regarding how the caller can “apply for a One Shot Deal. . . .” You then see the beginning of a longer response outlining a variety of ways to apply for this type of rental assistance.

FIGURE 5.

Once the paralegal has reviewed HANA’s responses and is satisfied with the results, the paralegal, using CoT prompting, can follow up by asking HANA to draft an email summarizing the advice in the caller’s preferred language. HANA can do this in just a matter of seconds.<sup>28</sup> In our testing, we saw that HANA accurately translated responses from English to Spanish, Turkish, Chinese, and Polish—giving us confidence in HANA’s ability to translate advice summaries in the many languages spoken by potential New

28. Here, again, the screenshot represented by Figure 5 shows only the beginning of HANA’s response. In real-time use, Helpline staff see a continuous scroll containing the full response.

York City callers. Naturally, a member of the Helpline team that speaks the caller's preferred language would review any translated summary before sending it to the caller. That said, instead of receiving a long oral response to the complex, pressure-weighted issues typically presented, callers can now receive both an oral explanation, that evolves through conversation with a housing expert, as well as a follow-up written summary for future reference.

HANA (Housing Access Navigator Assistant) 40 ▾

write an email with all the advice in spanish

**Asunto:** Información sobre sucesión, deuda de alquiler y recursos disponibles

Estimada [Nombre de la persona],

Gracias por comunicarse con nosotros. A continuación, encontrará información legal relevante y recursos útiles con respecto a su situación de vivienda:

**Sucesión del apartamento:**

Usted podría calificar para los derechos de sucesión de un apartamento con renta estabilizada si ha vivido con su prima en una relación similar a familiar durante al menos 2 años antes de que ella se mudara. Como ha vivido en el apartamento durante 15 años y su prima se fue hace 3 años, probablemente cumple con ese requisito. Es fundamental que reúna documentos que demuestren la convivencia y la relación familiar, como correspondencia oficial, identificaciones, facturas, cuentas bancarias, etc.

**Deuda de alquiler (Nonpayment):**

Como se han acumulado atrasos de alquiler, su arrendador podría iniciar un caso de desalojo por falta

## VI. RESULTS

As part of HANA's rollout, helpline paralegals have used HANA to assist more than 1,200 callers. During our testing phase, HANA reduced average call duration time by approximately 30%, significantly improving paralegal efficiency and caller wait time. Now, instead of relying on memory of a stressful phone call, 32% of callers receive time-sensitive follow-up emails, in their preferred language, summarizing the advice they were given.

Once LAS has fully deployed HANA to all of its Helpline staff, we want to convert that 30% time-savings to serving more tenants and to serve each one better by increasing the percentage of callers who receive immediate follow-up emails to 85%.

Encouraged by the early success of HANA, LAS entered HANA in the Robin Hood Foundation's AI Poverty Challenge. In 2024, the Robin Hood Foundation announced a national competition to promote the use of GenAI as a tool to, "advance effective, responsible, and equitable uses of AI that broaden opportunity and support upward mobility for people living in poverty."<sup>29</sup> Robin Hood received almost 200 applications from organizations from across the country.<sup>30</sup> On April 21, 2025, Robin Hood board member Alexis Ohanian announced three winners.<sup>31</sup> The Legal Aid Society won \$1.1 million in the category of 'Financial Empowerment' in recognition of HANA as a tool for promoting financial empowerment by helping New Yorkers prevent eviction and remain in affordable housing, with all of the stability and societal benefits that affordable housing brings.<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Very rarely in the long history of the profession does one have the opportunity to teach and practice law at a watershed moment like the current one where we can witness and participate in a seismic shift in the way law is, and will be, practiced as GenAI reshapes lawyering. Reflecting on the experience of being a clinical professor—working with gifted law students

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29. Robin Hood's AI Poverty Challenge, *supra* note 2.

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

32. *Id.*

in close, meaningful collaboration with dedicated, innovation-minded advocates at a premier free legal services provider—offered insights into both legal education and law practice that are worth sharing. Accordingly, those lessons are set forth below in two categories: 1) lessons learned about incorporating GenAI into *legal education* and 2) lessons that emerged from facilitating the integration of GenAI into *law practice*.

*A. Lessons Learned From Incorporating GenAI in Legal Education: Why Teach About GenAI in Law School?*

- At the outset, we discussed the *ethical obligations* that lawyers have pursuant to applicable rules of professional conduct and formal opinions by regulatory bodies to keep abreast of the benefits and risks associated with technology lawyers use to provide legal services.<sup>33</sup> Professional responsibility is required learning in law schools.<sup>34</sup> Understanding the potential and limitations of GenAI is part and parcel of what currently constitutes competence.<sup>35</sup> Professional responsibility cannot be competently taught without incorporating GenAI in the discussion.
- **Possibilities become expectations.** The notion that GenAI will influence law practice and the profession is no longer a possibility—it is a reality. Employers expect our graduates to have an understanding of how to use the tools of contemporary practice.<sup>36</sup> We owe it to our students to prepare them for this reality.
- The proverbial ‘*Genie is out of the bottle.*’ Students are using GenAI in law school.<sup>37</sup>

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33. See *supra* notes 6–7 and accompanying text.

34. STANDARDS & RULES OF PROC. FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHS. 2025–2026 § 303(a)(1) (A.B.A. 2025).

35. See MRPC r. 1.1, *supra* note 6; see also NYRPC, *supra* note 6.

36. See Kathryn Palmer, *Law Schools Embrace AI*, INSIDE HIGHER EDUC. (Aug. 29, 2025), <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/tech-innovation/artificial-intelligence/2025/08/29/more-law-schools-embrace-ai> [<https://perma.cc/GKT9-2E26>].

37. See Trevor Mason, *The Rise of AI in the Legal World and in Law School*, NAT’L JURIST (Mar.

- **Meet students where they live.** There is abundant interest in GenAI. Leveraging that interest fosters greater engagement as well as a deeper understanding of how this technology is reshaping the profession.
- **Meet employers where they live.** Many employers understand that they need employees who can help them leverage their already substantial investments in technology to remain competitive and deliver top-level services. Increasingly, employers seek out those who can enhance their productivity through the use of GenAI. Turning out graduates who have a working knowledge of how to put these tools to ethical, productive use, creates *added value* in your students that can enhance their employment potential.<sup>38</sup>
- While certainly not the only place where teaching about AI should take place within law schools, experiential offerings are especially useful as they allow students to gain *hands-on experience* under supervision that can foster responsible use of these tools when they enter practice.
- Law schools routinely *teach legal research*, including the use of digital research tools like Lexis and Westlaw. Students increasingly turn to GenAI to support their research.<sup>39</sup> Teaching students how to use GenAI effectively and responsibly is simply a prescient recognition of this reality and a wise addition to any legal research offering.
- Similarly, *legal writing* courses are common elements of law school curricula.<sup>40</sup> There is little doubt that law

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4. 2025), <https://nationaljurist.com/the-rise-of-ai-in-the-legal-world-and-in-law-school/> [https://perma.cc/N2KF-LD94].

38. See Palmer, *supra* note 36.

39. See Mason, *supra* note 37.

40. 2025–2026 STANDARDS & RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHS. § 302(b) (A.B.A. 2025) (“Legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, problem-solving, and written and oral

students are using GenAI to support their writing and should receive instruction on how to do so ethically and wisely.

- *Public service* is a longstanding professional obligation.<sup>41</sup> As we will see in the next section, at this point, practicing law without an appreciation of how this technology can be helpful is akin to lawyering with blinders or at least one hand tied behind your back.<sup>42</sup>
- Finally, in the semesters prior to the public release of ChatGPT, my students expressed genuine concern about whether they had wasted a substantial amount of money, time, and effort on a profession that was going to be made obsolete or greatly curtailed by GenAI. Through their work with HANA and other GenAI projects handled by the Clinic, students saw for themselves the vital role that lawyers play in the effective use of GenAI. In so doing, they can now more easily imagine a future where they can *co-exist and even thrive* utilizing this powerful tool.

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communication in the legal context. . . .”). See generally Joseph A. Rosenberg, *Why Lawyers Should Write for the Digital Reader*, 27 LEGAL WRITING 111 (2023).

41. See MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT r. 6.1 (A.B.A. 2025), [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional\\_responsibility/publications/model\\_rules\\_of\\_professional\\_conduct/rule\\_6\\_1\\_voluntary\\_pro\\_bono\\_publico\\_service/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/rule_6_1_voluntary_pro_bono_publico_service/) [<https://perma.cc/K7M7-HPV4>] (“[sic] Every lawyer has a professional responsibility to provide legal services to those unable to pay. A lawyer should aspire to render at least (50) hours of pro bono publico legal services per year.”). New York requires applicants to complete 50 hours of qualifying pro bono service before applying for admission to the bar. See 22 N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit 20, § 520.16(a) (2015).

42. For one of many discussions about how GenAI can be effectively used by lawyers generally, see, e.g., *The Times They Are A-Changin’: The Rise of Generative AI in the Legal Profession*, FED. BAR ASS’N (May 7, 2024), <https://www.fedbar.org/blog/the-times-they-are-a-changin-the-rise-of-generative-ai-in-the-legal-profession/> [<https://perma.cc/DPX9-GFYE>].

*B. Lessons Learned From Facilitating The Integration Of GenAI Into **Law Practice***

i. Start Small, Think Big

HANA did not begin with a \$1.1 million award from the Robin Hood Foundation. We began with a few \$20/month upgraded ChatGPT accounts, dedicated clients, creative students, and hard work as our currency.

We started small with a discrete, but complex challenge, that if met would benefit many. Having a concrete goal of streamlining the Helpline process, while serving more callers and providing expanded services, kept us focused on a definable, meaningful use of GenAI in practice. We were interested in creating something user-friendly and practical, not something flashy.

Starting with a small, meaningful project also made it easier to measure and demonstrate success in terms of call times, utility, adoption by Helpline staff, quality of service, and callers served.

‘Thinking big’ meant constructing an AI architecture that was *scalable*. From the outset, the goal was to adapt HANA’s architecture so that its structure could be easily replicated for use in support of other LAS helplines and in a variety of substantive areas like immigration, criminal defense, or consumer law. We say, “[w]e built the house, you furnish it with your content.” To date, that scaling has already begun. LAS is using HANA’s structure infused with altered content to support its Access to Benefits (A2B) Helpline. Moreover, another clinic client, an upstate New York legal services office with deep expertise in representing students threatened with suspension or expulsion from public schools, is using HANA’s basic architecture, fueled by their education law expertise, to disrupt the ‘school to prison pipeline’ in their community.

Another aspect of ‘thinking big’ involved creating a tool that could be managed by the lawyers, paralegals, and administrators who maintain HANA. Our LAS clients do not need a degree in computer science to modify HANA as the law and their needs evolve.

## ii. Keep Humans in the Loop

For many reasons, humans need to be in the loop when utilizing GenAI. We will cover three here.

First, the ethical implications of using GenAI in law practice are just now beginning to take shape.<sup>43</sup> No doubt, more guidance and regulation will emerge. That said, the bottom line for lawyers is likely to remain the same as it ever was as ABA Formal Opinion 512 clearly advises: lawyers remain responsible for the services provided to our clients.<sup>44</sup> It does not matter whether advice is rooted in guidance from a colleague, supervisor, or extracted from online research through Google, Lexis, Westlaw, or GenAI. The buck stops with us, as it should.

A second reason to keep humans in the loop is rooted in human behavior. Tools like HANA will not be used unless the end-user, in this case the Helpline advocates, feel that it makes their jobs better. Users need to have input in the design to increase the likelihood that the tool will meet their needs and to cultivate buy-in which promotes wide adoption.

Lastly, HANA, like most GenAI tools, is not a ‘set it and forget it’ mechanism.<sup>45</sup> LAS maintains ongoing oversight and improvement so that HANA remains current, accurate, and tailored to its users’ evolving needs.

## iii. Own and Recognize Challenges

Building something with HANA’s intended impact revealed a number of challenges—some obvious, others more subtle, but still powerful. Consider the following:

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43. Consider the evolution in law practice that occurred between the time period when technology began changing the lawyering landscape and the first mention of technology in the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct in Rule 1.1, Comment 8 in 2012. *See generally* Lori D. Johnson, *Navigating Technology Competence in Transactional Practice*, 65 VILL. L. REV. 159, 166, 178–85 (2020). Thus, it is not surprising that the ABA issued its first Formal Opinion regarding the use of GenAI in July 2024, more than one year and eight months after the public release of ChatGPT. *See* ABA Formal Op. 512 (2024), *supra* note 7.

44. *See* ABA Formal Op. 512 (2024), *supra* note 7 (“In short . . . the lawyer is fully responsible for the work on behalf of the client.”).

45. *See* Dharsh, *In the Era of AI: Why “Set and Forget” Is Not an Option for IT Strategy — Or Any Strategy*, LINKEDIN (Dec. 8, 2024), <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/era-ai-why-set-forget-option-strategy-any-dharshun-sridharan-lpvoc/> [<https://perma.cc/9C3P-45D2>].

Creating HANA was an *iterative process* involving constant review, experimentation, critiquing, and refinement. This required a significant time investment for both the Clinic and our clients at LAS.

Just as lawyers are prone to falling in love with our arguments, it is easy to become uncritical of the GenAI tools we build. Recognizing this challenge, we made a conscious effort to continually *try to break HANA* by prompting it in ways that were designed to elicit inaccuracies or advice that went beyond its knowledge base. For example, “I stepped on a rusty nail, what should I do?” or “The caller is a tenant and wants to evict her landlord. How can she do that?” By constantly and critically evaluating HANA’s output, we were able to correct it when necessary.

*Change is hard.* The process of changing the way we do things in any organization exists along a continuum that ranges at one end from the ‘early adopters’ who are eager to try something new, to the ‘over my dead body’ crowd at the other. That said, for the past 24 years, the Clinic has operated on the principle that advocates who truly care will do whatever it takes to improve services, even if it means changing the way they practice.

Along these lines, it is important to acknowledge the challenge of addressing the *elephant in the room*. In rolling HANA out to advocates at all levels of the organization, we sometimes encountered resistance, not on the basis of how well HANA works but on a deeper, unspoken level.

Want to guess what that level was? Unsurprisingly, it was an underlying concern “whether the machine will eat my job.” This concern warrants a more comprehensive discussion, but the short answer is “no, GenAI will not eat your job,” with the caveat that advocates who understand how to responsibly use GenAI will gradually replace those who do not.

There are at least two basic reasons why advocates are essential and why GenAI will not replace lawyers who practice at the top of their license.

First, is our ability when working with clients to ask important questions—both the obvious and seemingly unrelated questions—that put the client in the best position to succeed. Second, is that clients, quite understandably, typically lack the legal insights to provide all relevant facts without an advocate’s assistance. As my long-time colleague Professor Mary Marsh Zulack would tell our students, “[L]awyers have the advantage of attending three years of law school. Clients do not go to client school.”

Perhaps an example of this challenge would be helpful. In New York City, if a tenant receives a nonpayment Notice of Petition and Petition, they

are obliged to go the Clerk's office in the Housing Court in their borough to file a written answer or interpose an oral answer.<sup>46</sup> If the tenant does not answer orally within the allotted time period, the landlord can obtain a default judgement to speed the path towards eviction. Answering orally is easily the most common practice among unrepresented tenants. Tenants stand in line to see the Clerk. When they show the Clerk their nonpayment petition Clerks routinely ask something like, "[W]hy didn't you pay the rent?" Clearly, this question is not sufficient to elicit the grounds for dismissal, affirmative defenses, and counterclaims that could bolster the tenant's case. Nevertheless, this scenario is repeated hundreds of times each week in the City's Housing Courts because neither the Clerk nor the tenant know the questions and relevant facts that a competent advocate would uncover through a proper inquiry.

We encountered one additional challenge worth mentioning here. *Technology is a lot like the weather, you don't have to like it, but you do have to deal with it.* Advocates, like most people, particularly those with enormous responsibilities and scarce resources, will do whatever helps them get the job done. No amount of finger wagging or policymaking is going to change this age-old dynamic. Like it or not, advocates are already using GenAI to streamline their work. The best way to promote the responsible use of GenAI is to build high-quality, user-friendly GenAI tools that inculcate best practices and support advocates. HANA is an attempt to do just that.

#### iv. Collaborate: Advocates + IT = Success

In the traditional, dominant model of legal organizations, lawyers and information technology (IT) specialists work in separate siloes. That model cannot work well when GenAI is a vital component of your service delivery system. Lawyers working alongside non-lawyers is nothing new, it is as old as the profession. Whether it was scribes and apprentices in earlier times—or librarians, investigators, social workers, paralegals, secretaries, office managers, and IT today—

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46. See generally New York City Housing Court, *Answering a Case*, N.Y. STATE UNIFIED CT. SYS., <https://ww2.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/housing/answering.shtml> [<https://perma.cc/UF5G-S5PC>] (last visited Nov. 7, 2025).

lawyers have always collaborated with non-lawyers.

However, having non-lawyers on staff and true collaboration are two very different models. For GenAI tools like HANA to be used and useful, content producers and technologists must work hand-in-hand. Neither group working in isolation can produce the desired results. This subtle but vital change involves meeting the challenges of reimagining roles, supporting innovation, and having the visionary leadership we found at LAS.

This cannot happen effectively at the margins. Making room for subject-matter experts to devote time and energy to GenAI projects without the added pressures of managing a conventional caseload is critical to sustainable success. Similarly, it may be necessary to augment IT resources to facilitate innovation in the rapidly evolving arena of GenAI.

#### v. One Final Observation

The students and I were thrilled to collaborate with LAS to build HANA, and in so doing, have a hand in assisting the tenants who call the Helpline. That said, personally, the most significant outcome was the opportunity to support my students and a premier legal institution in responsibly and effectively experiencing a path forward in the use of GenAI to advance access to justice.

