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Oh No, Another ChatGPT Post: Incorporating AI-Powered Chatbots into Legal Research Exercises and Assignments

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Oh No, Another ChatGPT Post: Incorporating AI-Powered Chatbots into Legal Research Exercises and Assignments

Posted on [March 20, 2023](#) by [Olivia Smith Schlinck](#)

Since it was [launched at the end of November 2022](#), the discourse around ChatGPT and AI search tools has been unrelenting. What impact will AI-powered chatbots have on [education](#)? Will students submit [ChatGPT-written essays and homework assignments](#)? Will AI make [lawyers obsolete](#)? Look, [this chatbot just passed the bar exam](#)! Wait a minute—is this thing. . . [sentient](#)?

Despite its release barely four months ago, a flurry of scholarship on ChatGPT and legal education has already appeared on SSRN: Jonathan Choi, Kristin Hickman, Amy Monahan, and Daniel Schwarcz's [ChatGPT Goes to Law School](#) (Jan. 25, 2023); Lea Bishop's [A Computer Wrote this Paper: What ChatGPT Means for Education, Research, and Writing](#) (Jan. 26, 2023); Tammy Pettinato Oltz's [ChatGPT, Professor of Law](#) (Feb. 4, 2023); Jennifer Murphy Romig's [The Ethics of ChatGPT: A Legal Writing and Ethics Professor's Perspective](#) (Feb. 18, 2023); and Joseph Regalia's [ChatGPT and Legal Writing: The Perfect Union?](#) (Feb. 26, 2023), to name a few.

Law librarians on the RIPS Blog and elsewhere have joined the conversation, [highlighting the need to teach about this technology in legal research courses](#) as an extension of critical information literacy and algorithmic skepticism instruction.

In addition to class discussions about ChatGPT and other AI chatbots, it seems to be time to incorporate AI-assisted research and drafting into our courses. But how?

Right now, chatbot AI isn't necessarily the best when it comes to facts: when asked to provide court opinions as part of a legal research prompt, [ChatGPT sometimes provides citations to non-existent—made-up—cases](#). Sometimes it is easy enough to catch ChatGPT in a lie, like [when it told SCOTUSBlog that Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote the dissent in Obergefell v. Hodges](#). But when researching more discrete, less well-known topics, a chatbot user might not be aware of any inaccuracies. This can be leveraged in a legal research exercise or assignment by asking students to edit and confirm the accuracy of a ChatGPT-generated legal analysis or document (a la [history professor Jonathan S. Jones's exercise discussed on Twitter](#), and [Legal writing professor Dyane O'Leary's](#) similarly structured exercise where students compare their own research and writing to that of the chatbot).

Professor Andrew M. Perlman's [The Implications of ChatGPT for Legal Services and Society](#) article from late last year includes a ChatGPT-drafted legal complaint seeking damages after a car accident and a ChatGPT-written brief to submit to the Supreme Court regarding same-sex marriage, among other ChatGPT-written examples. Note that none of the AI-written language include legal citations. This is where a legal research exercise could begin: read the complaint or brief and research both to confirm accuracy and to provide citations to legal authority. This

exercise gives students the chance to practice researching while learning how ChatGPT functions by interacting with it directly.

I'm considering an exercise or assignment like this over the summer intersession, and I'm curious if others have or are planning to do something similar. Are there other ways to incorporate chatbot AI into the course materials of legal research classes?

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2 Responses to *Oh No, Another ChatGPT Post: Incorporating AI-Powered Chatbots into Legal Research Exercises and Assignments*



Sarah Gotschall says:

March 20, 2023 at 5:37 pm

There can never be too many!

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Alison says:

March 21, 2023 at 12:07 pm

In prepping for my ALR-FCIL class this semester, I tried a few of my first assignment questions in ChatGPT – as many point out, it's not very good at answering specific document-finding questions, but it does produce some decent results for short answer questions. In my first assignment, I asked students to “Locate some evidence of U.S. state practice on the current global health issues surrounding COVID-19 and consider: what types of documents are they? Where can they be found? How does it represent the views of the U.S. government?”. The point of this Q was to use sources that I taught in class (State.gov or Digest of US Practice) to find an answer. Then, in my second assignment, I provided the following prompt:

“I asked ChatGPT to answer Question 4(b) on last week’s assignment, and you can see its answer here [linked to a Google doc]. Comparing this answer to how YOU responded this question on last week’s assignment, and considering your understanding of what we learned in last week’s class [researching state practice], how would you “rate” ChatGPT’s answer? If you’re having trouble thinking of how to respond, consider your views in terms of currency, authority, accuracy, relevancy, and/or purpose of the answer compared to what you wrote. Please respond in around 250 words – there are no wrong answers!”

I found the answer that ChatGPT produced to my question was pretty good on the idea that state practice can be found in “... official government documents such as executive orders, legislation, and statements made by government officials” but lacked specifics and didn’t identify either the State Department or the Digest as sources; the students were able to pick up on this discrepancy because they could compare/contrast what they had found in their own research for the same question the week before. Some of the students with more knowledge about AI systems also noted that ChatGPT does better with more information to start from, so when creating a question keep this in mind too! I feel that this exercise was successful in getting the students to critically evaluate ChatGPT’s answer to a basic research question, and that this experience will help provide them more context if they choose to make use of ChatGPT or similar tools going forward.

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