

A Message to Our Students

Classroom Electronics, Academic Assessment, and Technological Competency in the Age of AI

To: Students, University of Georgia School of Law

From: Dean Usha Rodrigues, on behalf of the Faculty and the Faculty AI Committee (Professor Christian Turner, Chair); Professor Laura Phillips-Sawyer, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

Re: Classroom Electronics Policy; Assessment; Technological Competency Requirement

Date: August 13, 2026

I write to welcome both our incoming and returning students to UGA Law, and to share an update on changes to our law school policies. We are living through the early years of a technological revolution—a period that is reshaping legal education and the legal profession alongside it. This memo describes what our faculty has decided, after a great deal of thought and discussion, about how we will meet this moment together.

Our thinking began with our foundational commitments. We believe that professionalism in law rests on three things: a deep and accurate knowledge of legal doctrine and process, the critical thinking skills to apply that knowledge under pressure and uncertainty, and an unwavering commitment to honesty and integrity. Everything below is in service of those three pillars of professionalism. We want you to graduate ready to practice—with the judgment, the technological competence, and the character that our profession and your future clients will depend on.

We also want to be candid about the tensions that we are navigating alongside you. The legal profession increasingly expects new lawyers to be capable, responsible users of AI tools. At the same time, research increasingly shows that reaching for those tools too early—before you have built your own foundation in legal reasoning—will quietly erode the very skills that you came here to develop. We have crafted the following policies with that tension in mind. Our goal is to sequence your legal education so that you graduate with both the deep legal knowledge and sound judgment that will always be yours, as well as the technological fluency that modern practice requires.

To that end, the faculty formed a committee, charged by Dean Rodrigues, to study how the School should adapt in light of AI—always with your success as the central question. Professor Christian Turner led that effort. In spring 2026, after months of study and discussion, the faculty adopted a two-pronged approach, which is described below and reflected in the student handbook. We expect to keep learning, and we will revisit these policies as we do.

Classroom Electronics Policy. The faculty want to create classroom environments that best suit the goals of our individual courses. To ensure that ability, many of your classes, especially in the first year, will be fully analog—free of laptops, tablets, and phones, and filled instead with conversation, questions, and the kind of sustained attention that legal reasoning requires. This is now the default rule; however, individual professors may permit (and often will allow or even encourage) devices for specific purposes or courses, particularly where you will be learning to apply AI tools directly. Our policy reads as follows:

“Classroom use of electronic devices, including but not limited to laptops, tablets, and phones, is prohibited unless and to the extent specifically permitted by the instructor or by Accessibility and Testing at the University of Georgia.”

University of Georgia School of Law, Student Handbook 2026–27, Classroom Policies,
law.uga.edu/student-handbook

Many professors have already moved in this direction given the ubiquity of distractions that screens offer. The new policy reflects that shift in the classroom, and memorializes the faculty’s conviction that classroom engagement builds both individual strengths and community connection. We aim for our classroom environments to preserve what we believe is most valuable and increasingly rare: sustained attention and critical thinking. Our classrooms offer you the opportunity to practice thinking on your feet, sometimes out loud, in front of your peers, without a screen to lean on. That is a skill that the practice of law will ask of you constantly—in depositions, in court, in client meetings. Those skills are best built now.

If your casebook is digital-only, consult the syllabus for your course. Some professors have created carve outs for reference-only use in the classroom. Similarly, some faculty allow tablets for notetaking purposes. If you still have questions after consulting the syllabus, then reach out to your professor for clarification.

Academic Assessments. Although we have not made a change to the student handbook with regard to academic assessments, this is a moment to call attention to the University’s guidelines. As a rule, AI tools may not be used on any assignment, paper, or exam unless your professor has expressly permitted it, in writing. Individual professors will set their own policies for their courses, so always check the syllabus. If you still have questions, reach out to your professor.

“Never use Artificial Intelligence on an assignment unless it is explicitly authorized by your instructor before the assignment is turned in.”

University of Georgia, Academic Honesty Policy — Prohibited Conduct,
honesty.uga.edu/academic-honesty-policy/prohibited-conduct

Within that default rule, there is room for you to use AI thoughtfully at the margins, perhaps to study or to brainstorm, if it is not expressly prohibited by your professor. Yet, even in those circumstances, we urge you to try the unaided version first. Research shows that the struggle of forming your own synthesis of the assigned materials and your own judgment on hypotheticals is not wasted time. On the contrary, it is the process by which legal judgment is built.

Presenting AI-generated text as your own original work is a matter of academic dishonesty, no different in principle from submitting a classmate’s outline or a treatise passage without

attribution. Building on the policies established by the University, the School considers such actions to constitute plagiarism, which our Handbook defines as “the submission of another’s work as one’s own.” Every student is expected to know the plagiarism policy.

Technological Competency Requirement. We want you to graduate genuinely prepared to work with AI tools—able to use these tools well, understand their limits, and meet the professional responsibility standards that govern their use in practice. Building that technological competency requires the same intentional, sequenced instruction that has shaped all UGA Law curricular choices.

Beginning with the class entering in fall 2026 (i.e., Class of 2029), every J.D. student must complete a course that satisfies the new technological competence requirement. This will be in addition to the AI training already built into the first-year legal research course. A published list of qualifying courses will be available before each registration period, beginning with registration for fall 2027. We anticipate that these classes will be open to all upper-level J.D. students.

“All students must successfully complete a course that fulfills the technological competence requirement. A list of qualifying courses will be published prior to each registration period.”

University of Georgia School of Law, Student Handbook 2026–27, Technological Competence Requirement, law.uga.edu/student-handbook

Qualifying courses will generally do one of two things: provide you with a substantive grounding in what this technology is and what it might mean for society and the profession, or teach you to use it within a specific area of practice, alongside the professional standards that govern that use. Our faculty is building on our existing Law and AI offerings, as well as the ways in which AI is already being woven into many of our clinics and seminars. Our goal is to make sure there is a good option for every student.

We will confront these challenges as a community, prioritizing academic rigor, professionalism, and integrity. We assure you, every policy addressed herein was made with your long-term interests in mind. And our faculty will continue learning, listening, and adjusting as we confront both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.