

AI Assistance in Legal Analysis: An Empirical Study

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Introduction

Within months of its public release in November 2022,¹ ChatGPT became the fastest-growing consumer application in history.² Legal scholars quickly embraced the trend; in the subsequent year, academic studies found that generative artificial intelligence (AI) performs well on law school exams,³ the bar exam,⁴ and other types of legal analysis.⁵ Commentators have speculated that AI tools could soon replace lawyers entirely for many tasks, potentially both broadening access to justice and eliminating many legal jobs.⁶

- 1 *Introducing ChatGPT*, OPENAI (Nov. 30, 2022), <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt>.
- 2 See Krystal Hu, *ChatGPT Sets Record for Fastest-Growing User Base*, REUTERS (Feb. 2, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/technology/chatgpt-sets-record-fastest-growing-user-base-analyst-note-2023-02-01>.
- 3 Jonathan H. Choi, Kristin E. Hickman, Amy B. Monahan & Daniel Schwarcz, *ChatGPT Goes to Law School*, 71 J. LegaL Educ. 387 (2022); Andrew Blair-Stanek et al., GPT-4's Law School Grades: Con Law C, Crim C-, Law & Econ C, Partnership Tax B, Property B-, Tax B (May 24, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors). For examples of work on the impact of ChatGPT in other fields, see Chung Kwan, *What Is the Impact of ChatGPT on Education? A Rapid Review of the Literature*, 13 EDUC. SCI. 410 (2023); David A. Wood et al., *The ChatGPT Artificial Intelligence Chatbot: How Well Does It Answer Accounting Assessment Questions?*, 2023 ISSUES ACCT. EDUC. 1; Gina Kolata, *When Doctors Use a Chatbot to Improve Their Bedside Manner*, N.Y. TIMES (June 13, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/12/health/doctors-chatgpt-artificial-intelligence.html>; Steve Lohr, *A.I. May Someday Work Medical Miracles. For Now, It Helps Do Paperwork*, N.Y. TIMES (July 26, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/26/technology/ai-health-care-documentation.html>; Harsha Nori et al., *Capabilities of GPT-4 on Medical Challenge Problems* (Apr. 12, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors); Alejandro Lopez-Lira & Yuehua Tang, *Can ChatGPT Forecast Stock Price Movements? Return Predictability and Large Language Models* (May 12, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).
- 4 Daniel Martin Katz, James Michael Bommarito, Shang Gao, & Pablo Arredondo, 2024 GPT-4 Passes the Bar Exam, 382 Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society (2024). But see Eric Martínez, *Re-evaluating GPT-4's bar exam performance. Artificial Intelligence and Law* 1 (2024) (discussing potential methodological issues with the initial finding that GPT-4 surpassed the bar exam score of 90% of human test-takers).
- 5 John Ney et al., *Large Language Models as Tax Attorneys: A Case Study in Legal Capabilities Emergence*, 381 PHIL. TRANSACTIONS ROYAL SOC'Y A (forthcoming 2023).
- 6 See, e.g., JAN HATZIUS, JOSEPH BRIGGS, DEVESH KODNANI & GIOVANNI PIERDOMENICO, GOLDMAN SACHS, *THE POTENTIALLY LARGE EFFECTS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH* (2023) (suggesting that AI could automate nearly half of all legal tasks). David De Cremer, Nicola Morini Bianzino & Ben Falk, *How Generative AI Could Disrupt Creative Work*, HARV. BUS. REV. (Apr. 13, 2023), <https://hbr.org/2023/04/how-generative-ai-could-disrupt-creative-work>; Daniel Schwarcz & Jonathan H. Choi, *AI Tools for Lawyers: A Practical Guide*, 108 MINN. L. REV.: HEADNOTES (2023); Kate Beioley & Cristina Criddle, *Allen & Overy Introduces AI Chatbot to Lawyers in Search of Efficiencies*, FIN. TIMES (Feb. 15, 2023), <https://www.ft.com/content/baf68476-5b7e-4078-9b3e-ddf6e710a6e2>; Emily Hinkley, *Mishcon de Reya Is Hiring an "Engineer" to Explore How Its Lawyers Can Use ChatGPT*, LEGAL CHEEK (Feb. 16, 2023, 8:35:00 AM), <https://www.legalcheek.com/2023/02/mishcon-de-reya-is-hiring-an-engineer-to-explore-how-its-lawyers-can-use-chatgpt>. Scholars have also commented on other legal issues relating to ChatGPT, including intellectual property issues and issues surrounding contract interpretation. See Matthew Sag, *Copyright Safety for Generative AI*, 61 HOUSTON L. REV.

To date, these studies have narrowly focused on the performance of AI acting alone.⁷ But at least in the near future, AI will likely *assist* humans rather than *replace* them.⁸ This is in part because AI is not yet sufficiently accurate⁹ and in part because of legal and ethical qualms about removing humans from important legal judgments.¹⁰ Existing empirical scholarship about the performance of AI models in legal analysis largely ignores the interaction between humans and machines and therefore often misses the most likely application of AI in the law.¹¹

(forthcoming 2024); David A. Hoffman & Yonathan Arbel, Generative Interpretation (July 31, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors). The potential for transformative AI tools in the legal industry is reflected in the hefty valuations of firms that roll out AI tools. See, e.g., *Thomson Reuters to Acquire Legal AI Firm Casetext for \$650 Million*, REUTERS (June 27, 2023, 1:59 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/thomson-reuters-acquire-legal-tech-provider-casetext-650-mln-2023-06-27/>; Caroline Hill, *Investment: Harvey Raises \$21m Series A and Dori Comes 'Out of Stealth Mode' with \$2m Seed Raise*, LEGAL IT INSIDER (Apr. 27, 2023), <https://legaltechnology.com/2023/04/27/investment-harvey-raises-21m-series-a-and-dori-comes-out-of-stealth-mode-with-2m-seed-raise>.

7 See *infra* Part I.

8 See, e.g., Gina Kolata, *When Doctors Use a Chatbot to Improve Their Bedside Manner*, N.Y. TIMES (June 12, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/12/health/doctors-chatgpt-artificial-intelligence.html>; Lohr, *supra* note 3; Schwarcz & Choi, *supra* note 6.

9 As one generative AI company operating in the legal space puts it, “many believe it’s too soon for lawyers to rely on ChatGPT or GPT-4 for legal practice because they hallucinate, and because they don’t access up-to-date, accurate legal data on their own.” However, “it’s not true that lawyers cannot trust generative AI for legal practice. It’s only true that they cannot trust generative AI alone—a crucial distinction.” *CoCounsel Harnesses GPT-4’s Power to Deliver Results that Legal Professionals Can Rely on*, CASETEXT (May 5, 2023), <https://casetext.com/blog/cocounsel-harnesses-gpt-4s-power-to-deliver-results-that-legal-professionals-can-rely-on>. See also Lance Eliot, *Lawyers Getting Tripped Up by Generative AI Such as ChatGPT but Who Really Is to Blame, Asks AI Ethics and AI Law*, FORBES (May 29, 2023, 8:00 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lanceeliot/2023/05/29/lawyers-getting-tripped-up-by-generative-ai-such-as-chatgpt-but-who-really-is-to-blame-asks-ai-ethics-and-ai-law/?sh=6c8cc01c3212>; Lohr, *supra* note 3. See also Hussam Alkaissi & Samy I. McFarlane, *Artificial Hallucinations in ChatGPT: Implications in Scientific Writing*, 15 CUREUS J. MED. SCI. (forthcoming 2023).

10 See generally Rebecca Crootoft, Margot E. Kaminski & W. Nicholson Price II, *Humans in the Loop*, 76 VAND. L. REV. 429 (2023) (exploring how the law already regulates the interactions of humans and AI, and how it should evolve to perform this role more effectively).

11 The need for humans to work with AI rather than to allow AI to replace them has been understood since long before ChatGPT was publicly released. See, e.g., W. Bradley Wendel, *The Promise and Limitations of Artificial Intelligence in the Practice of Law*, 72 OKLA. L. REV. 21, 24–26 (2019); Nicole Yamane, *Artificial Intelligence in the Legal Field and the Indispensable Human Element Legal Ethics Demands*, 33 GEO. J. LEGAL ETHICS 877, 889–90 (2020). Since ChatGPT’s release, the sentiment that humans must work with AI rather than simply allow AI to replace them has become broadly accepted. See, e.g., Cat Casey, *Why Human-Centered AI Is the Future of Legal: The Future Is More Ironman than Terminator, and That Is a Good Thing!*, LAW.COM (Jan. 30, 2023), <https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/2023/01/30/why-human-centered-ai-is-the-future-of-legal-the-future-is-more-ironman-than-terminator-and-that-is-a-good-thing>; Johannes Scholtes & Geoffrey Vance, *AI + Human: A Bright Future For Legal Co-Pilots*, JD SUPRA (Apr. 20, 2023), <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/ai-human-a-bright-future-for-legal-co-7452383>.

To fill this gap in the literature, we conducted an experiment to test the impact of AI assistance on legal reasoning.¹² We recruited students in two law school classes at the University of Minnesota to take a second set of final exams with the assistance of GPT-4, the best-performing large language model (LLM) available at the time.¹³ Before doing so, participants received training on how to use GPT-4 effectively on an exam. By comparing their performance on this second set of exams (in which they had access to GPT-4 and training on how to use it) with their performance on real exams (in which access to GPT-4 was banned), we explore how access to AI impacts human performance in professional work and educational settings generally and in legal contexts in particular.

We found that AI assistance had mixed results. For multiple-choice questions, it dramatically improved student results, producing a twenty-nine percentile-point improvement relative to these students' performance on the real exam. However, AI assistance had no effect on student grades in the essay components of the two exams. Thus AI assistance currently seems to be most valuable in straightforward settings like multiple-choice questions and of little average value on difficult issue-spotter questions. Behind these average results, we also found significant variation in how useful AI assistance was to students, depending on their baseline performance. The worst-performing students benefited enormously from AI, with gains of approximately forty-five percentile points. By contrast, the best-performing students received *worse* grades when given access to AI, experiencing declines of approximately twenty percentile points.

We also tested how GPT-4 performed on its own using several different well-known prompting strategies. We found substantial variation in GPT-4's performance, depending on the prompt. In a more basic law school class introducing undergraduates to legal analysis, AI alone achieved grades between B+ and A relative to a B+ median, representing performance at median or toward the top of the class. On an upper-level class covering advanced legal concepts, AI alone achieved grades between B and A- relative to a B+ median, representing solid performance but not at the top of the class. In both classes, "grounding" GPT-4 with relevant source material (in the form of instructor notes) caused it to obtain better grades than either human students alone or human students with access to GPT-4.

12 We subsequently conducted a related experiment at the University of Minnesota Law School involving the first randomized controlled trial to study the effect of AI assistance on human legal analysis. In that experiment, we randomly assigned law school students to complete realistic legal tasks either with or without the assistance of GPT-4. We then tracked how long the students took on each task and blind-graded the results. See Jonathan H. Choi, Amy B. Monahan & Daniel Schwarcz, *Lawyering in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*, 109 Minn. L. Rev. 147 (2024).

13 See *AlpacaEval Leaderboard*, GITHUB, https://tatsu-lab.github.io/alpaca_eval (last visited Aug. 5, 2023) (ranking GPT-4 as the best-performing model currently available).

These findings have important implications for the future of lawyering. They suggest that AI assistance may most benefit those at the bottom of the skill distribution, potentially acting as an equalizing force in a notoriously unequal profession. But they also suggest that AI assistance might not be particularly useful on average in complex legal reasoning tasks like essay-writing, which more closely resemble the difficult work of lawyering than multiple-choice questions. Finally, the fact that GPT-4 outperformed both humans and AI-assisted humans with optimal prompting suggests that AI might entirely remove humans from certain kinds of basic legal tasks. This may free up human lawyers for more high-impact and high-touch legal work, but it also may cause significant short-term disruption in the legal market.

I. Existing Literature and Research Questions

Since ChatGPT's release, dozens of research projects have evaluated the capacity of GPT models and other large language models (LLMs) to complete tasks traditionally performed by humans. Most have compared the performance of GPT-3.5 and humans on various exams.¹⁴ And in the vast majority of cases, these studies have used few, if any, prompt-engineering strategies to evaluate GPT-3.5's capabilities, instead simply using the content of exam questions as the prompts.¹⁵

Because of heightened public interest in the performance of modern LLMs, a significant literature already exists on the usefulness of LLM models that are even more powerful than GPT-3.5. The most important such model is GPT-4, which OpenAI publicly released in March 2023.¹⁶ Numerous recent studies

¹⁴ We co-authored the most directly relevant study on GPT-3.5's performance in law school exams. Choi et al., *supra* note 3. We used GPT-3.5 to generate answers on final exams for classes on torts, employee benefits, tax law, and constitutional law at the University of Minnesota Law School. Our study found that GPT-3.5's performance was highly uneven across different essay questions and types of multiple exam questions, but that on average it performed at the level of a C+ student. Additionally, the study found that GPT-3.5 achieved a low but passing grade in all four courses. *Id.* at *5-6. Common problems with ChatGPT-drafted exams included inaccurate, unreliable, and outdated information. *Id.* at *9-11.

See also Chung Kwan Lo, *What Is the Impact of ChatGPT on Education? A Rapid Review of the Literature*, 13 EDUC. SCI. 410 (2023) (finding that GPT-3.5 had produced "outstanding" results in economics examinations but only middling results in computer programming and medical education, and "unsatisfactory" results in such fields as mathematics and psychology); Lakshmi Varanasi, *ChatGPT Could Be a Stanford Medical Student, a Lawyer, or a Financial Analyst. Here's a List of Advanced Exams the AI Bot Has Passed So Far*, INSIDER (June 25, 2023), <https://www.businessinsider.com/list-here-are-the-exams-chatgpt-has-passed-so-far-2023-1>.

Finally, a related strand of literature has explored the possibility that LLM models like ChatGPT can operate as "smart readers" that allow individual consumers to better understand complex contracts. See Yonathan A. Arbel & Shmuel I. Becher, *Contracts in the Age of Smart Readers*, 90 GEO. WASH. L. REV. 83 (2022); Yonathan A. Arbel & Shmuel I. Becher, *How Smart Are Smart Readers? LLMs and the Future of the No-Reading Problem* (June 25, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Choi et al., *supra* note 3; Blair-Stanek et al., *supra* note 3; Katz et al., *supra* note 4.

¹⁶ See Joshua J., *What Is the Difference Between the GPT-4 Models?*, OPENAI, <https://help.openai.com/en/articles/7127966-what-is-the-difference-between-the-gpt-4-models> (last visited

have evaluated GPT-4's capabilities on medical exams,¹⁷ generally finding that it outperforms average human test-takers.¹⁸ Other studies examining GPT-4's performance have produced similar results in fields ranging from logic to engineering to psychology.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, GPT-4 has also proven proficient at legal analysis. One prominent paper found that GPT-4 passed the Uniform Bar Examination (UBE).²⁰ Another recent study found that GPT-4 outperformed GPT-3.5 on

Aug. 5, 2023) (describing GPT-4 and the different models available). GPT-4 consistently outperforms ChatGPT on most tasks. *See* GPT-4, OPENAI (Mar. 14, 2023), <https://openai.com/research/gpt-4>; OpenAI, GPT-4 Technical Report (Mar. 15, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file authors). To be sure, there are exceptions to these results. For instance, OpenAI's own studies found that GPT-4 did not outperform GPT-3.5 in certain writing-related exams, such as the GRE writing exam and AP English Language and Composition Exam. *See id.*

- 17 *See, e.g.*, Nori et al., *supra* note 3 (finding that GPT-4, without any specialized prompting, passes a range of medical exams and outperforms both ChatGPT and LLM models specifically fine-tuned on medical knowledge); John C. Lin, David N. Younessi, Sai S. Kurapati, Oliver Y. Tang, Ingrid U. Scott, *Comparison of GPT-3.5, GPT-4, and Human User Performance on a Practice Ophthalmology Written Examination*, 37 EYE 3694 (2023) ("GPT-4 but not GPT-3.5 achieved the passing threshold for a practice ophthalmology written examination"); Rohaid Ali et al., *Performance of ChatGPT and GPT-4 on Neurosurgery Written Board Examinations* (Mar. 25, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors) (finding that both GPT-4 and GPT-3.5 pass neurosurgery practice board exams at rates comparable to neurosurgery residents).
- 18 *See supra* note 16. Some of these studies also find that GPT-4 outperforms other LLM models that are specifically fine-tuned on a subject-matter-specific corpus of data, such as medical journal articles. *See* Nori et al., *supra* note 3.
- 19 *See, e.g.*, Hanmeng Liu et al., *Evaluating the Logical Reasoning Ability of ChatGPT and GPT-4* (May 5, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors); Vinay Pursnani, Yusuf Sermet & Ibrahim Demir, *Performance of ChatGPT on the US Fundamentals of Engineering Exam: Comprehensive Assessment of Proficiency and Potential Implications for Professional Environmental Engineering Practice* (Apr. 20, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).
- 20 Katz et al., *supra* note 4. This result extended both to the multiple-choice portion of the exam and to the open-ended essay components of the exam. *Id.* at *2. Although the authors did not use any prompt-engineering strategies to generate multiple-choice answers, they slightly modified essay questions by presenting each subquestion in an independent prompt, and by "lightly correcting the language" in the prompt so that it formed a complete sentence. *Id.* at *7. Additionally, the grading of the essay questions was preliminarily performed by two of the studies' authors and then validated by several additional peer reviewers who were provided with blinded samples of the essay questions. *Id.* at *7. It is not entirely clear from preliminary versions of the paper how effective these techniques may have been to avoid confirmation bias. For instance, it is unclear whether the additional reviewers were also asked to grade human-produced exams such that their grading efforts could be evaluated for consistency.

OpenAI interpreted these results to suggest that GPT-4 outperformed 90% of human test-takers, OpenAI, GPT-4 Technical Report (Mar. 27, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors); this estimate is likely inflated, as it compares the AI's performance to a population that was heavily skewed toward repeat test-takers who failed one or more prior administrations of the exam, Eric Martínez, *Re-Evaluating GPT-4's Bar Exam Performance*

several law school exams at the University of Maryland, achieving grades on six different exams in the B and C ranges.²¹ Another recent paper reported more mixed results, finding frequent rates of hallucination when GPT-3.5 was asked to answer a series of basic legal questions.²² But these studies, while specific to legal exams, did not experiment with different prompting methods and crucially did not evaluate the performance of students with AI assistance.

Other recent studies have evaluated how generative AI tools perform on specific legal tasks that more closely resemble the work of real lawyers. For instance, one recent study reported that GPT-4, when provided with appropriate prompting that included specific contract-review rules, was able to review and identify issues with procurement contracts with levels of precision comparable to those of junior attorneys and contract attorneys.²³ More notably, the study found that GPT-4 accomplished these results at a fraction of the cost and time that human lawyers required.²⁴ Additionally, related work by us and an additional co-author reported the results of the first randomized controlled trial to study the effect of AI assistance on human legal analysis.²⁵ We found that access to GPT-4 only slightly and inconsistently improved the quality of participants' legal analysis but induced large and consistent increases in speed.²⁶ Moreover, AI assistance improved the quality of output unevenly—where it was useful at all, the lowest-skilled participants saw the largest improvements.²⁷

Only a handful of studies so far have evaluated how AI can improve human performance at professional writing tasks outside of the legal domain.²⁸ One study found that giving college-educated professionals access to GPT-3.5 substantially improved their performance at a variety of writing tasks, with the greatest gains going to the least-skilled workers.²⁹ A second study produced

(June 12, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

21 See Blair-Stanek et al., *supra* note 3. See also Margaret Ryznar, *Exams in the Time of ChatGPT*, 80 WASH. & LEE L. REV. ONLINE 305 (2023) (reporting mixed results).

22 See Matthew Dahl et al., *Large Legal Fictions: Profiling Legal Hallucinations in Large Language Models* (Jan. 2, 2024) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

23 Lauren Martin et al., *Better Call GPT, Comparing Large Language Models with Lawyers* (Jan. 24, 2024) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

24 See *id.*

25 See Choi, Monahan & Schwarcz, *supra* note 12.

26 *Id.*

27 *Id.*

28 Some recent papers evaluate how access to generative AI can improve professionals' ability to perform nonwriting tasks, such as computer coding. See Sida Peng et al., *The Impact of AI on Developer Productivity: Evidence from GitHub Copilot* (Feb. 13, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

29 Shakked Noy & Whitney Zhang, *Experimental Evidence on the Productivity Effects of Generative Artificial Intelligence*, 381 SCIENCE 187, 187 (2023). To reach this conclusion, the experimenters

similar results, finding that access to an AI model improved the productivity of call center employees, again with the greatest gains accruing to the least skilled.³⁰

Other empirical work has suggested that AI assistance can sometimes have negative consequences. One study found that giving professional recruiters access to high-quality AI-generated predictions actually resulted in less accurate assessments of job applications than did access to low-quality AI-generated predictions.³¹ This counterintuitive result was driven by the tendency of the human recruiters who received lower-quality AI assistance to exert greater effort to individually evaluate resumes.³² A second recent study found that giving radiologists access to AI did not improve their diagnostic accuracy, even though AI alone was a more accurate diagnostician than humans.³³ The principal explanation was that human radiologists disregarded the AI's analysis when it conflicted with their initial judgments.³⁴

This empirical work on human use of LLMs builds on an older literature on human-machine interaction. Scholars have long hypothesized that while

recruited over 400 participants in five professional categories: grant writers, consultants, data analysts, human resource professionals, and managers. Participants were then tasked with completing two short writing assignments comparable to those they would complete in their professional settings, such as drafting press releases, short reports, or e-mails. After completing the first writing assignment, half of the participants were given access to ChatGPT for the second writing assignment. The study found that participants who were provided with access to ChatGPT completed their writing tasks faster and produced higher-quality work than participants who were not provided access to this tool. Moreover, the participants who performed relatively poorly on the initial task (which took place before they were instructed on how to use ChatGPT) disproportionately benefited from access to AI, receiving both higher scores and taking decreased amounts of time to complete their writing task. By contrast, access to ChatGPT did not improve the quality of work for participants who scored well in the initial writing task, though it did increase the speed at which they could produce that work.

³⁰ Erik Brynjolfsson, Danielle Li & Lindsey R. Raymond, *Generative AI at Work* (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Rsch., Working Paper No. 31161, 2023). This study focused on a large software firm's introduction of a chatbot, which used similar technology to ChatGPT, to support the work of its customer service agents by providing suggested (but not required) responses to customer questions. It found that this technology increased the rate at which customer service agents were able to successfully resolve customer questions, with most productivity gains being experienced by the least skilled and experienced agents. By contrast, the productivity of relatively skilled and experienced agents was largely unaffected by the introduction of the generative AI technology, suggesting that its primary effect was to help lower-performing employees to operate more like their high-performing co-workers.

³¹ Fabrizio Dell'Acqua, *Falling Asleep at the Wheel: Human/AI Collaboration in a Field Experiment on HR 1* (Dec. 2, 2021) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

³² *Id.*

³³ Nikhil Agarwal, Alex Moehring, Pranav Rajpurkar & Tobias Salz, *Combining Human Expertise with Artificial Intelligence: Experimental Evidence from Radiology 1* (Nat'l Bureau of Econ. Rsch., Working Paper No. 31422, 2023).

³⁴ *Id.*

humans might outperform machines at some tasks and machines might outperform humans at others, we should generally expect the best performance of all from a combination of human and machine.³⁵ For example, human chess players generally outperformed computers until Deep Blue famously defeated world chess champion Gary Kasparov in 1997;³⁶ today, even the strongest human players cannot compete with machines.³⁷ But machine chess programs managed by humans still outperform both humans and machines.³⁸

The literatures described above leave some substantial unanswered questions. Most notably, these studies (with the exception of our own related work) fail to answer the most salient question, namely how useful AI will be at helping humans rather than replacing them. The studies that have evaluated the benefits of AI assistance to humans have not focused on the legal setting, and they have often studied GPT-3.5, a prior generation of LLM that is qualitatively different and substantially less useful than GPT-4. Additionally, scholars studying how well AI models tackle legal analysis have generally not employed different prompting techniques, potentially leading them to underestimate AI's potential.

In this article, we add to this existing literature by focusing on the following unanswered research questions. How well do humans, AI, and AI-assisted humans conduct legal analysis? Does their performance vary by type of analysis, and does the benefit of AI assistance vary depending on baseline human performance? Does the answer depend on whether we consider the quality of output or speed of output, and are these related? And how much does prompting matter in determining the performance of AI in conducting legal analysis?

II. Data and Methods

To answer these questions, we recruited students from two different law school classes to participate in an experiment. This part describes these study participants in more detail. It also describes our basic experimental design, as well as the training that we provided to prepare students to effectively use AI

35 See, e.g., Michael A. Peshkin, J. Edward Colgate, Witaya Wannasuphoprasit, Carl A. Moore, R. Brent Gillespie & Prasad Akella, *Cobot Architecture*, 17 IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON ROBOTICS & AUTOMATION 377, 377-90 (2001) (proposing a framework for human-robot collaboration); Shirine El Zaatari, Mohamed Marei, Weidong Li & Zahid Usman, *Cobot Programming for Collaborative Industrial Tasks: An Overview*, 116 ROBOTS & AUTONOMOUS SYS. 162, 162-80 (2019) (surveying attempts at human-robot collaboration).

36 George Johnson, *Deep, Deeper, Deepest Blue*, N.Y. TIMES, May 18, 1997, at A6.

37 H. Jaap van den Herik, *Computer Chess: From Idea to Deepmind*, 40 J. INT'L COMPUT. GAMES ASS'N 160, 174 (2018).

38 See Martin Fischer, *Better than an Engine: Leonardo Ljubicic*, CHESSNEWS (Feb. 21, 2016), <https://en.chessbase.com/post/better-than-an-engine-leonardo-ljubicic-1-2> (interviewing one correspondence chess player who uses chess AI to outplay AI on its own).

to complete the required tasks.³⁹ Finally, it describes the prompting methods we used to evaluate GPT-4's performance on its own.

A. Study Design

We conducted our study using real examinations from two classes at the University of Minnesota Law School taught by one of the co-authors. The University of Minnesota Law School is one of the nation's highly regarded public law schools.⁴⁰ The two courses we studied were Introduction to American Law and Legal Reasoning, and Insurance Law. Introduction to American Law and Legal Reasoning is an introductory class offered to undergraduates at the University of Minnesota, covering selected topics in contract law, tort law, criminal law, civil procedure, property law and constitutional law. Although the class is geared toward undergraduates, it is taught in much the same ways as a typical law school class and is principally intended to develop students' basic legal reasoning skills. Insurance Law is a more typical law school class that is taught principally to upper-level 2L and 3L University of Minnesota Law students.⁴¹

To evaluate the effect of access to AI on student exam performance, we recruited students who were taking either of these classes in the spring of 2023. Sixteen out of fifty-two students taking Insurance Law (roughly 31%) completed the study, while thirty-two out of 128 students taking Introduction to American Law (roughly 23%) completed the study.⁴²

To participate in the study, students first completed a one-hour online training course that we developed and taught on how to use GPT-4 effectively in legal analysis.⁴³ The course drew heavily on our previous work, *AI Tools for*

39 This experiment received approval from the University of Minnesota's institutional review board. IRB #STUDY00019012.

40 *2023 Best Law Schools*, U.S. NEWS, <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/law-rankings> (last visited Aug. 5, 2023).

41 Master's students and undergraduates who complete Law 3000 are also able to take Insurance Law with the instructor's permission. One study participant for Insurance Law was an undergraduate, though the rest were upper-level law students. The main results in this study remain unchanged when this single undergraduate is excluded from the sample.

42 Attrition between recruitment and experiment completion was relatively low for both classes. In Insurance Law, eighteen students responded to recruiting e-mails, and sixteen in fact completed the study. For Introduction to American Law and Legal Reasoning, thirty-nine students indicated they would be part of the study, and thirty-two students ultimately completed the study.

43 In addition, participants in the Introduction to American Law class completed a second forty-five-minute training module on how to use GPT-4 to answer multiple-choice questions, which also drew on our prior work and tasked participants to practice their AI-skills using sample questions. With respect to the multiple-choice questions, we reminded students that GPT-4 can hallucinate, crowd out independent thinking, and employ knowledge or sources that were outside of the scope of the class. We then encouraged participants to (1) ask GPT-4 what the right answer to the question is, assuming the question is not entirely dependent on the specific way that the class was taught; (2) while GPT-4 generates an answer, attempt to answer the question on their own without looking at the GPT-4 answer; (3) if their answer

Lawyers: A Practical Guide.⁴⁴ It focused on how to apply active lawyering skills while using AI, rather than mechanically relying on the output of GPT-4. For example, we instructed participants to structure essays on their own and to identify the best answers to multiple-choice questions while waiting for GPT-4 to generate answers.⁴⁵ We also provided participants with some training on basic prompting techniques, such as encouraging them to ask the AI questions that break down legal analysis into pieces (somewhat analogous to chain-of-thought prompting, discussed below) and encouraging them to supply GPT-4 with relevant legal rules (analogous to grounded prompting, discussed below).⁴⁶ Additionally, the training required participants to practice these skills by using GPT-4 to answer sample problems. After participants completed this training on how to use AI effectively, they also spent one hour reviewing the substantive material from the class.⁴⁷

After their training and review, study participants used GPT-4 to help them take a portion of the real exams that were administered in the same classes in the prior year (spring 2022).⁴⁸ These exams were not publicly available and

and GPT-4's answer match, move on; (4) if they gave a different answer than GPT-4's answer, evaluate whether GPT-4's answer is likely to be correct by asking GPT-4 why the answer they chose is incorrect and assessing their own confidence in their own answer; and (5) keep track of time and not let use of GPT-4 slow them down too much!

44 Schwarcz & Choi, *supra* note 6.

45 More specifically, the key points that we emphasized in this training video were that AIs can hallucinate, will not know the scope of material covered in class, and can crowd out independent thinking. For these reasons, we encouraged participants to consider the following tips: (1) First read the essay question and generate your own basic outline of issues; (2) Ask GPT-4 to identify all relevant issues raised by the fact pattern; if the essay identifies specific issues to address in its prompt, see if GPT-4 can break down those issues into subissues or identify any additional issues; (3) For each issue, ask GPT-4 to analyze that issue by applying the relevant legal rule to the facts. To the extent that you can easily access and identify the relevant rules provided in class, provide those rules to GPT-4; (4) Ask GPT-4 to provide the best arguments on both sides of the relevant issue so you can use this material to generate counterarguments; (5) Ask GPT-4 to analogize to relevant cases to the extent you can identify such cases and copy/paste brief explanations of those cases into the prompt; (6) Repeat steps 3-5 for each subsequent issue; (7) Assemble material produced above into a final essay question, remembering to keep track of time and to focus on the goal of producing a good essay question that uses an IRAC-style structure, precise rules, and thesis sentences while highlighting key facts from the problem and making strong counterarguments. Ultimately, we emphasized that the goal was for students to use GPT-4 as a tool to help them draft an excellent answer.

46 See Schwarcz & Choi, *supra* note 6.

47 To replicate the conditions in the real classes, we specifically instructed participants in the Introduction to American Law class to review the materials on property law and civil procedure, which would be tested in the essay question on their exam.

48 Most people can access GPT-4 by creating a paid ChatGPT Plus account on the OpenAI website. However, it was not administratively possible to create such an account for each study participant without requiring participants to outlay cash on the subscriptions themselves. We instead created a central ChatGPT "clone" website using the GPT-4 API and gave students access to that website. This clone website had a nearly identical user

had not been previously provided to students in the spring 2023 versions of their classes. The exams tested different specific material than that covered on the students' real 2023 exams. However, the tested material was covered in the 2023 classes at a comparable level of depth as the material tested on the real 2023 exam. We required all study participants to complete the experiment within two weeks after they finished their actual final exam in their classes, to minimize memory decay of the course material.⁴⁹

In addition to producing AI-assisted human exams, we also generated four exams that were produced by AI alone. Each of these four AI-only exams was produced using one of four distinct prompting methods described in the following section.⁵⁰

Exams produced by AI-assisted humans and by AIs alone were then mixed with exams written by real students in 2022 without AI assistance, and blindly graded.⁵¹ Blind grading helped to ensure that our preconceptions would not affect the results of the study.⁵² In addition to the grading data that we produced after participants' completion of the experiment, we also collected data on student-participants' performance on their actual final exams in 2023 as well as the exam performance of all students who took the 2022 exams.

By regrading old essay exams from 2022, we were able to measure consistency of grading between years and correct for any discrepancies.⁵³ The correlation

interface and used the same system prompt as the real ChatGPT Plus.

49 Memory decay is a cognitive process by which information stored in the brain is lost over time because of a lack of use or retrieval. Although the precise speed of memory decay can vary greatly over time, research suggests that even a spaced review of the underlying material can significantly counteract memory decay. See Siddharth Reddy, Igor Labutov, Siddhartha Banerjee & Thorsten Joachims, *Unbounded Human Learning: Optimal Scheduling for Spaced Repetition*, in PROCEEDINGS OF THE 22ND ACM SIGKDD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON KNOWLEDGE DISCOVERY AND DATA MINING 1815 (2016).

50 See *infra* Section II.B.

51 For Introduction to American Law, as with the real class, upper-level law students did the grading. In particular, they blindly graded a mix of thirty-two real human exams from 2022, thirty-two exams written by humans with AI assistance as part of our study, and four AI-only exams. To do so, they used the same rubric that teaching assistants employed to grade the 2022 essay, which they first reviewed and applied to sample answers with the assistance of the instructor (as in the real class). For Insurance Law, the instructor blindly graded a mix of sixteen exams produced by humans only in 2022, sixteen exams written by humans with AI assistance as part of our study, and four exams written solely by AI.

52 See Andrea A. Curcio, Gregory Todd Jones & Tanya M. Washington, *Does Practice Make Perfect? An Empirical Examination of the Impact of Practice Essays on Essay Exam Performance*, 35 FLA. ST. U. L. REV. 271, 291 (2008) (relying on blind grading of exams by instructors to empirically study the result of different pedagogical innovations in law school).

53 The multiple-choice component of the Introduction to American Law exam was graded mechanically and therefore required no regrading. Prior empirical research on law school exams has similarly used blind regrading of prior exams to ensure consistency. See Carol Springer Sargent & Andrea A. Curcio, *Empirical Evidence That Formative Assessments Improve Final Exams*, 61 J. LEGAL EDUC. 379, 389 (2012).

between grades assigned on these exams in 2022 (as part of the real classes) and in 2023 (as part of our experiment) for Introduction to American Law was 0.77, moderately high. For Insurance Law, this correlation was much higher, at 0.94.⁵⁴ This discrepancy was likely attributable to the fact that a different subset of teaching assistants graded the real Introduction to American Law exams in 2022 than did the research assistants who regraded them as part of our experiment. By contrast, all of the Insurance Law exams in both 2022 and 2023 were graded by the same professor, who teaches the class. We then calculated the average difference between the regraded essays year over year and applied this as a “correction factor” to account for systematically harsher or more lenient grading in 2023 as compared with 2022. The correction factor for Introduction to American Law essays was -1.42 points out of 53 points, and for Insurance Law it was +1.375 points out of 50 points.⁵⁵

B. Prompting Techniques

As described in Part I, the existing literature evaluating AI performance on exams uses basic prompts, essentially taking an exam question and feeding it directly to a tool like ChatGPT.⁵⁶ However, the computer science literature has developed several prompt-engineering techniques that might substantially improve the performance of tools like GPT-4.⁵⁷ We applied several such techniques in our study, both to test the performance of AI acting alone and to better understand how human variation in prompting strategies can impact results. Specifically, we evaluated the performance of basic prompting, “chain-of-thought” prompting, “few-shot” prompting, and “grounded” prompting.

The basic prompt we used was simply copying and pasting the exam question directly from the exam.⁵⁸ This is the simplest prompting technique, consistent with those used in past studies.⁵⁹ A chain-of-thought prompt asks

54 Both correlations are Spearman’s correlation coefficient.

55 Note that the magnitude of the correction factor is orthogonal to the magnitude of the correlation because Spearman’s correlation measures only whether rank-order is consistent between regradings. For example, if upon regrading each exam received a score exactly 5 points higher, correlation would still be perfect.

56 See *supra* Section I.A.

57 See, e.g., Dils, *How to Use ChatGPT: Advanced Prompt Engineering*, WGMI MEDIA (Jan. 31, 2023), <https://wgmiimedia.com/how-to-use-chatgpt-advanced-prompt-engineering>; *Awesome ChatGPT Prompts*, GITHUB, <https://github.com/f/awesome-chatgpt-prompts/#readme>; Alan D. Thompson, *Microsoft Bing Chat (Sydney/GPT-4)*, LIFE ARCHITECT (Feb. 22, 2023), <https://lifearchitect.ai/bing-chat> (quoting the prompts used to convert GPT’s base model into Bing Chat); Tyler Cowen & Alexander T. Tabarrok, *How to Learn and Teach Economics with Large Language Models, Including GPT* (Mar. 17, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors). See also *AI and Machine Learning Experts, Experienced Attorneys, Thousands of Hours of Prompt Engineering—and That’s Just to Launch*, CASETEXT (May 12, 2023), <https://casetext.com/blog/building-an-ai-legal-assistant-lawyers-can-trust>.

58 For multiple-choice questions, we also instructed the model to “answer the following multiple-choice question from a law school exam.”

59 See *supra* Part I.

the AI model to “think step by step” before producing its result.⁶⁰ Few-shot prompting involves providing the AI model with examples of good responses that it can use to shape its response.⁶¹ For few-shot prompting, we gave GPT-4 questions and model answers from prior exams that had been provided to students taking each class. Finally, grounded prompting involves providing the AI model with relevant sources.⁶² In this case, we provided GPT-4 with excerpts from the lecture notes used to teach the underlying class. The lecture notes addressed the course material tested in the relevant exam questions, although they were not formatted for easy reading and therefore would potentially have been difficult for a human to apply.

Specific language for each of the prompts used, and additional information about GPT-4 specifications, is in Section A.4 of the Appendix.

III. Results

We found that access to AI substantially improved average student performance on multiple-choice questions but did not substantially improve average performance on essay questions. Beyond these averages, GPT-4 substantially improved the scores of students at the bottom of the class and negatively impacted the scores of students at the top of the class. The performance of GPT-4 alone varied substantially depending on exam and prompting methodology. In general, the AI performed best when grounded with source materials. It also performed better on relatively simple multiple-choice questions than on relatively complex essay questions.

A. Quantitative Results

We first report the relative performance of AI-assisted humans in terms of their percentile performance relative to the human exam-takers who did not have access to AI. Subsection 2, below, then constructs letter grades for AI-assisted humans by reference to the letter grades received by real students who performed at the class percentile of the relevant exam. Finally, Subsection 3 examines how AI access impacted the speed with which participants completed exams.

1. Percentile Performance

Table 1 shows the relative performance of humans alone, AI alone, and AI-assisted humans on the various exam components. Results are reported separately for the Introduction to American Law multiple-choice questions, the Introduction to American Law essay question (which tested a single

60 There are many variations on chain-of-thought prompting, but the one we used was based on the most promising version from the prior literature. Jason Wei et al., *Chain-of-Thought Prompting Elicits Reasoning in Large Language Models*, in PROCEEDINGS OF THE 36TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NEURAL INFORMATION PROCESSING SYSTEMS 4356 (2022).

61 Tom B. Brown et al., *Language Models Are Few-Shot Learners*, in ADVANCES IN NEURAL INFORMATION PROCESSING SYSTEMS 33 (2020).

62 See Baolin Peng et al., *Check Your Facts and Try Again: Improving Large Language Models with External Knowledge and Automated Feedback* (Mar. 8, 2023) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with authors).

straightforward legal issue), and the Insurance Law exam (which featured two complex issue-spotter questions and no multiple-choice questions). All results are stated in percentile points relative to a baseline of performance set by humans who took the exam without access to AI. The percentiles in the “Human-Only Mean” row reflect the mean scores for the subset of students who volunteered for our study relative to all students enrolled in each of the studied classes. These data show that the average exam scores of the students who completed the study were similar to those of the students taking the class as a whole, though volunteers from Introduction to American Law performed slightly above average on the multiple-choice portions of their real 2023 exams as compared with the class as a whole.

For the “AI-Assisted Mean” row, the percentiles were calculated by evaluating how the exams produced by students given access to AI would have scored relative to all the students who completed this exam in 2022 without access to (and before the creation of) ChatGPT. These data reveal that, on average, access to AI had little impact on how well participants performed on either the Insurance Law exam or the essay portion of Introduction to American Law. By contrast, participants’ access to GPT-4 substantially improved their ability to answer the multiple-choice questions in Introduction to American Law.

Each cell in the table includes both the value listed and a 95% confidence interval.⁶³

63 All distributions, confidence intervals, and significance tests in this article were conducted by bootstrapping. See B. Efron, *Bootstrap Methods: Another Look at the Jackknife*, 7 ANNALS STAT. 1 (1979) (proposing bootstrap methods). I used 50,000 bootstrap iterations to generate the graphs in this article.

Table 1: Performance of Humans and AI-Assisted Humans on Exams

	Intro to Am Law– Multiple Choice	Intro to Am Law–Essay	Insurance Law
Human-Only Mean	59.1	49.5	47.5
	(49.9, 67.3)	(39.1, 59.2)	(33.4, 63.3)
AI-Assisted Mean	88.0	53.0	46.3
	(81.0, 92.8)	(43.3, 62.1)	(32.2, 58.1)
Mean Change	+28.9	+3.5	-1.3
	(+20.3, +38.4)	(-6.7, +15.3)	(-9.7, +7.7)
Human-Only Standard Deviation	25.8	29.4	31.6
	(21.4, 31.7)	(25.1, 34.9)	(25.2, 39.6)
AI-Assisted Standard Deviation	16.9	28.0	27.2
	(12.5, 20.9)	(23.8, 32.8)	(21.9, 33.8)
Standard Deviation Change	-8.9	-1.4	-4.4
	(-16.1, -2.7)	(-8.2, +5.2)	(-12.4, +3.0)

Figure 1 through Figure 3 below show the mean performance of humans and AI-assisted humans on each exam component (in each case relative to students without AI assistance who took the same exam). Each curve includes a mean (solid lines) and a 95% confidence interval (dashed lines).

Figure 1: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice–Mean Performance

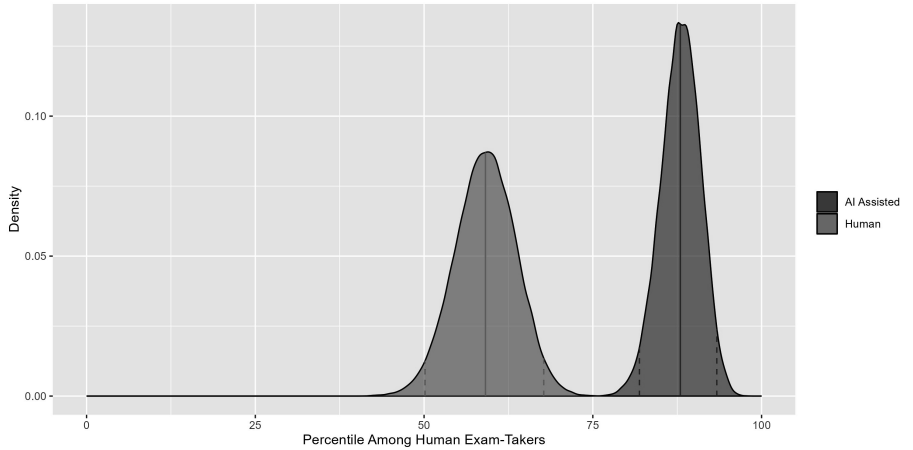
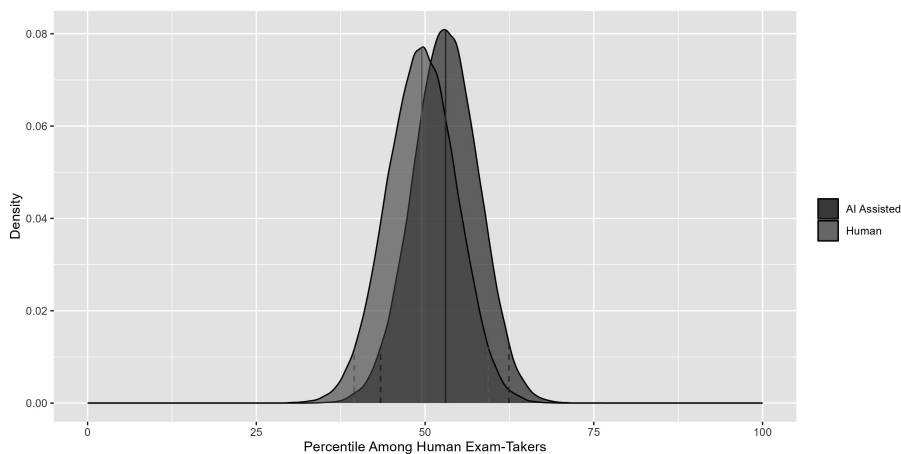
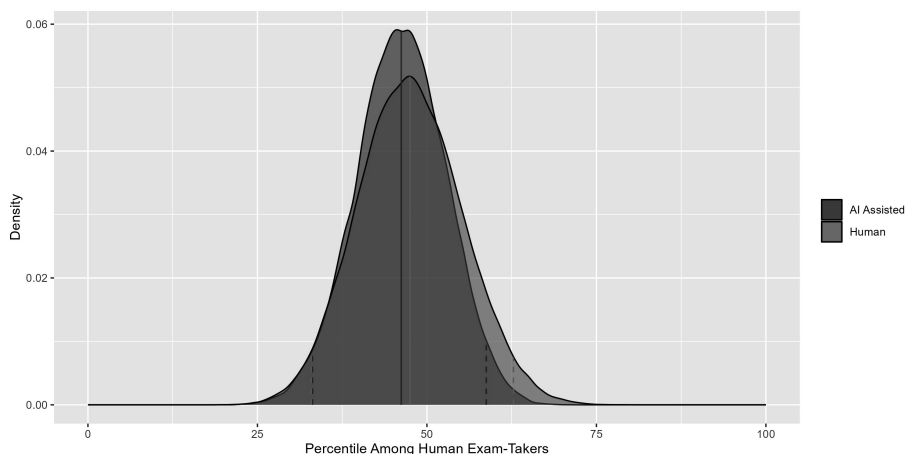


Figure 2: Introduction to American Law Essay—Mean Performance**Figure 3: Insurance Law—Mean Performance**

These figures show that mean performance significantly increased for the multiple-choice questions but did not significantly increase for the essay questions.

In addition to changes in *mean* performance, we should also consider whether access to AI helps some students more than others. Consistent with the nascent literature on AI-enhanced professional writing outside of the legal setting,⁶⁴ we might hypothesize that access to AI would substantially help low-performing students by establishing a floor (the AI's own performance) below which their performance should not fall. In contrast, we might imagine

64 See *supra* Section I.B.

that high-performing students might not benefit from AI nearly as much as low-performing students because their innate skills already surpass the AI's capabilities. Even further, at least one study suggests that high performers might be harmed by access to AI by becoming less creative or using the AI as a crutch.⁶⁵

Figure 4 addresses this issue by showing the per-student performance improvement when given access to AI (on the *y*-axis) relative to unassisted student performance. Each dot represents one student, and the curve represents the line of best fit with 95% confidence intervals estimated by bootstrapping.

Figure 4: All Exams—Performance Improvement with Access to AI Relative to Baseline Performance

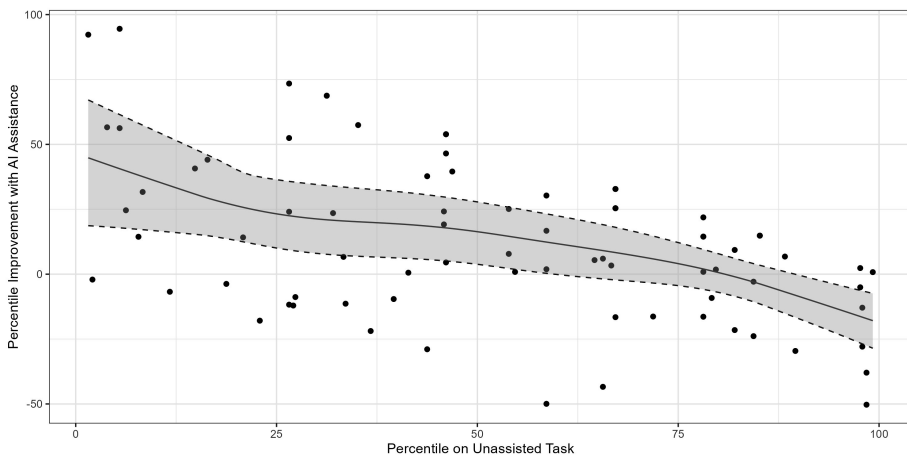


Figure 4 corroborates the hypothesis mentioned above. It suggests that the lowest-performing students see large and statistically significant improvements when given access to AI, whereas the best-performing students see moderate and statistically significant declines when given access to AI. Note that the results in Figure 4 may largely be driven by mean reversion—that is, if student exam results are randomly drawn from some distribution, we would expect that students who had underperformed in one sitting of the exam would outperform in the next sitting relative to their prior sitting. These results are therefore most meaningful to the extent that student performance on exams is consistent between sittings.⁶⁶ Figure 15 through Figure 17 in the Appendix

⁶⁵ See *id.*

⁶⁶ In theory, we could either parametrically or nonparametrically (based on the empirical distribution of exam scores in our sample) estimate both a baseline of the expected amount of mean reversion between exam sittings and the degree to which our results differed from this baseline. However, constructing the baseline would require prior probabilities of the parallel forms reliability (also known as equivalent forms reliability) of law school exams, meaning the correlation between a student's scores in different sittings of the same exam type with different specific questions. To our knowledge, no empirical research on the

provide additional detail on the effect of AI assistance on the variation in performance between students.

Table 2 shows the performance of GPT-4 alone on each of the exam components, using four different prompting techniques.⁶⁷ Again, the results are percentile points relative to the performance of humans in a prior exam sitting. Note first that GPT-4's improvements based on prompting were consistent across settings: The basic prompt consistently performed the worst, with some improvement for the chain-of-thought prompt, more improvement for the few-shot prompt, and optimal performance for the grounded prompt.

Focusing on exam type rather than prompting strategy, Table 2 shows that the performance of GPT-4 alone varied widely. For the multiple-choice questions in the Introduction to American Law exam, GPT-4 alone consistently performed well above the median human test-taker, consistent with its performance in other multiple-choice legal settings, like the bar exam.⁶⁸ This was true with all four prompting strategies, and with few-shot and grounded prompting it received a perfect score. GPT-4's capacity to correctly answer the types of multiple-choice questions contained in the Introduction to American Law class explains why participants' access to GPT-4 substantially improved their performance on this component of the exam: It makes sense that humans would perform better when given access to a high-performing tool.⁶⁹

For the essay exams, GPT-4's performance varied significantly both by prompting strategy and by exam type. Overall, GPT-4 performed significantly better on the relatively straightforward Introduction to American Law essay than it did on the much more complex and specialized Insurance Law essays. With respect to the former, all four prompting strategies resulted in exams that scored above the class mean, and the best AI model—which, recall, grounded its answer in the relevant instructor lecture notes for the class—would have performed near the top of the Introduction to American Law class. For Insurance Law, by contrast, basic prompting produced an exam toward the bottom of the grade distribution.⁷⁰ Notably, however, improved prompting strategies generated progressively better results in Insurance Law, with grounded prompting allowing GPT-4 to produce an exam that would have performed moderately above average in the class.

parallel forms reliability of law school exams currently exists. We therefore present Figure 4 as is, noting that if one interprets Figure 4 to say that we can reject the null hypothesis for certain levels of human-only performance that access to AI does not affect performance, this interpretation crucially assumes perfect parallel forms reliability.

67 See *supra* Section II.B.

68 See Katz et al., *supra* note 4.

69 But see Agarwal et al., *supra* note 33 (finding that the diagnostic quality of radiologists does not improve even when they are given access to an AI tool that outperforms humans on its own).

70 This is consistent with earlier results showing that GPT-3.5 averaged a C+ on several different law school exams. See Choi et al., *supra* note 3.

Table 2: Performance of GPT-4 on Exams

Prompting Method	Intro to Am Law–MC	Intro to Am Law–Essay	Insurance Law
Basic	79	60	5
Chain of Thought	79	56	15
Few Shot	100	56	30
Grounded	100	93	65

Figure 5 through Figure 7 elaborate by showing the relative performance of humans alone (the red density plots, with mean performance represented by the red vertical line), humans with access to AI (the blue density plots, with mean performance represented by the blue vertical line), and AI alone (the dashed vertical lines) on each component of the exams. The graphs are density plots showing performance relative to all human exam-takers. Note that as with the tables above, the density plots include only students who participated in our study, not all students who took the relevant exams without the assistance of AI, whom we use as the control group to calculate percentiles.

Figure 5: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice–Raw Performance

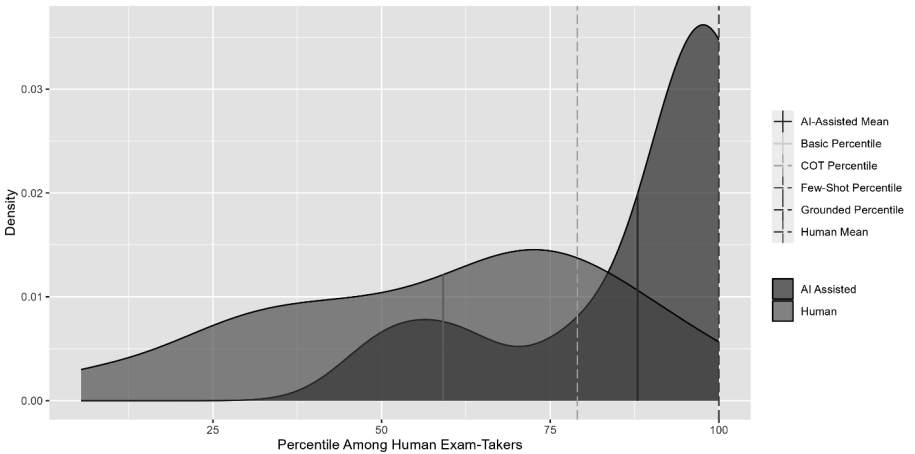


Figure 6: Introduction to American Law Essay—Raw Performance

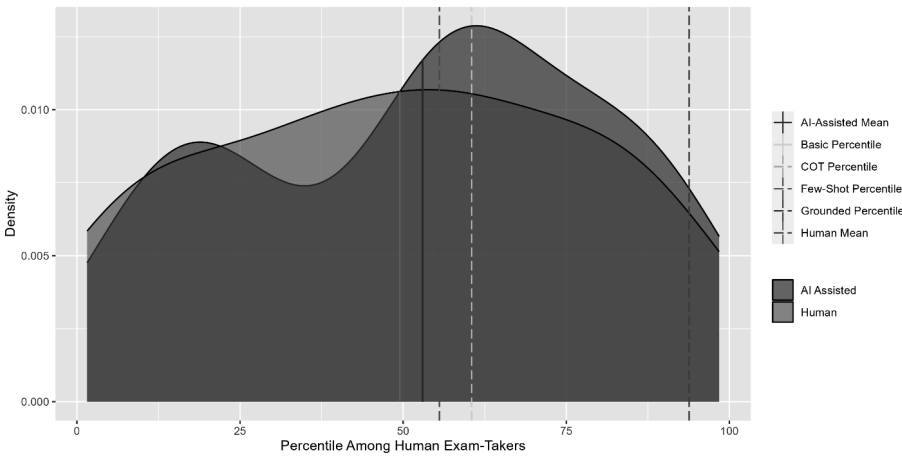
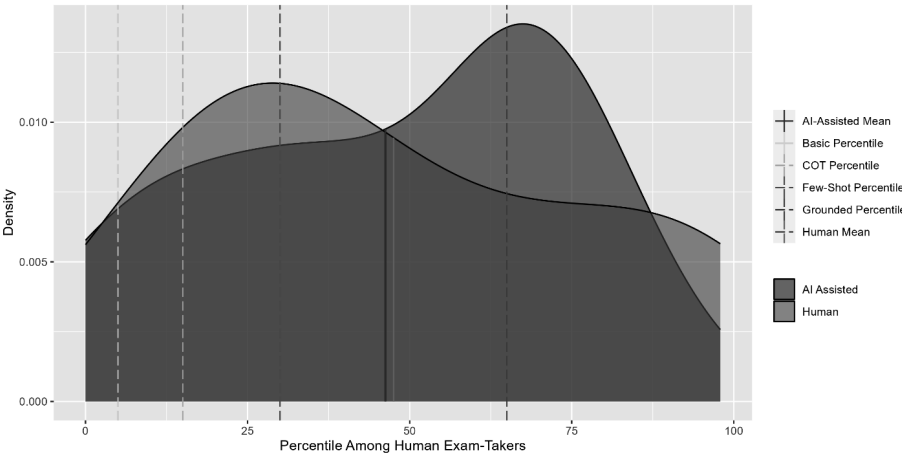


Figure 7: Insurance Law—Raw Performance



The solid and dashed lines in Figure 5 through Figure 7 report the same data as is contained in Tables 1–2. But the curves themselves tell a slightly more nuanced story than do the averages alone: Consistent with prior research on the impact of AI on professional writing, human performance improves somewhat with access to AI at the bottom end of the grade distribution but does not significantly improve at the top end. And for the more complex exam given to more sophisticated students, access to AI may even cause the performance of the top students to decline, as seems to be the case in Insurance Law. Section B of the Appendix contains additional discussion of the relationship between baseline performance and the benefit of AI assistance depending on the specific exam questions being analyzed.

2. Letter-Grade Performance

In addition to comparing humans, AI, and AI-assisted humans in percentile terms, we can construct letter grades for each of the exams based on our findings. To do so, we simply looked at the actual letter grades received by the real students who performed at the class percentile of the relevant exam.

In Introduction to American Law, the median grade received by students in our study without AI assistance was a B. With AI assistance, the median grade improved to an A-, a result that was driven by the improvement in students' multiple-choice answers, which counted for 50% of the overall exam score. In Insurance Law, the median grade received by students in our study without AI assistance was a B/B+. Applying this grading curve to the exam taken with AI assistance, that median grade was unchanged.

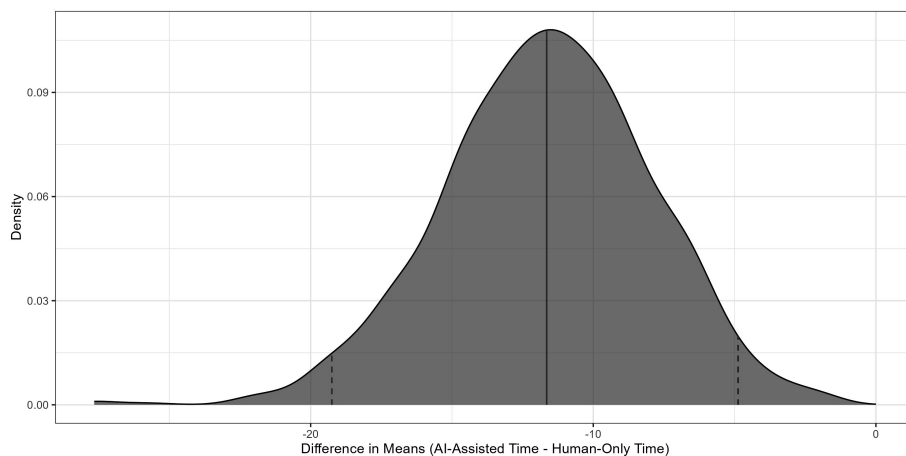
On its own in Introduction to American Law, GPT-4 attained an A- grade with basic prompting, a B+ grade with chain-of-thought prompting, and an A grade with both few-shot and grounded prompting. This performance was relative to a whole-class median grade of B+ in Introduction to American Law, suggesting that GPT-4 systematically outperformed real students in that class. In Insurance Law, GPT-4 achieved a B grade with basic prompting, a B/B+ grade with chain-of-thought prompting, a B+ grade with few-shot prompting, and an A- grade with grounded prompting. This was also relative to a whole-class median grade of B+, suggesting that GPT-4's performance fluctuated around median depending on prompting techniques.

3. Speed

Human access to AIs like GPT-4 can impact not only quality of writing but also the speed with which humans can write. For that reason, we examined how access to GPT-4 impacted the speed with which our participants completed their exams. On the real exam without AI assistance, our participants took an average of 74.5 minutes out of 75 allotted minutes to finish the final exam for Introduction to American Law. With access to GPT-4, our participants took an average of 62.9 minutes to finish the exam. We were not able to track how long study participants took to complete their actual final exam in Insurance Law, but with access to GPT-4, they took an average of 115.4 minutes out of the time limit of 120 minutes.

Figure 8 below shows the difference between the amount of time spent on the real exam and the AI-assisted exam for Introduction to American Law, with the curve representing the mean difference generated through bootstrapping. The solid line denotes the bootstrapped mean of means, and the dashed line denotes the 95% confidence interval. The figure shows a large and statistically significant drop in the amount of time students took to complete the exam when provided with AI assistance.

Figure 8: Change in Speed of Exam Completion with Access to GPT-4, Introduction to American Law



Three participants completed the AI-assisted Introduction to American Law exam very quickly, in less than 25 minutes (out of the 75 minutes allotted). When we exclude these three participants, the average time taken on the AI-assisted exam increases to 66.9 minutes, and the average time taken on the real human-only exam decreases to 73.1 minutes, still a statistically significant difference.

B. Qualitative Results

Relative to human-only exams, exams written with AI assistance more consistently provided clear and reasonable answers to issues identified in exam prompts. At the same time, AI-assisted exams were more likely than human-only exams to have organizational problems, to overlook hidden legal issues, and to ignore specific cases and rule variations. AI-only exams had many strengths and weaknesses similar to AI-assisted exams. However, they were generally more clearly organized than AI-assisted exams, but also more likely to include conclusory analysis. Notably, AI-only exams did not have these weaknesses when the AI was grounded with sources as part of its prompting.

Because these trends differed somewhat over the two exams, it is helpful to consider them in more detail based on the underlying class.

I. Insurance Law

Insurance Law exams written with AI assistance were particularly likely to provide clear and reasonable answers to the principal legal questions tested by the questions. These answers tended to do a better job, on average, than human-only exams at threading through their analysis many of the specific relevant facts from the exam hypothetical. Moreover, they tended to accurately characterize these exam facts and to accurately link them to the relevant legal issues. A related strength of AI-assisted exams was their tendency to quote

relevant portions of key legal texts, such as excerpts from the applicable insurance policy text. Additionally, AI-assisted exams were generally better written at the sentence level than human-only exams, containing easily understandable sentence constructions and few spelling or grammatical errors.

AI-assisted Insurance Law exams also had several notable weaknesses relative to human-only exams. They often contained conclusory analysis, or failed to clearly articulate the relevant legal doctrines, particularly when those doctrines varied across jurisdictions. Another common issue in AI-assisted exams involved the macro-organization of answers. AI-assisted answers were particularly likely, for instance, to introduce relevant legal rules midway through the analysis, to repeat analysis, or to supply arguments whose relationships to one another were unclear. Apart from these organizational problems, AI-assisted exams were more likely to miss legal issues that were less immediately apparent from the fact pattern, particularly when other issues were called out by the relevant exam prompt. Yet another common downside of AI-assisted exams was their sometimes-excessive length, which often reflected either repetition or attention to irrelevant issues. Finally, these exams tended to engage less with specific cases that were covered in the course relative to human-only exams.

The AI-only exams in Insurance Law had many of the same strengths and weaknesses as the AI-assisted exams, with several of the weaknesses being particularly notable depending on the prompting strategy that was used. AI-only exams were especially likely to provide conclusory analysis that did not fully explore the various ways in which the exam facts might be leveraged in support of arguments. This tendency was most visible in the basic AI exam, less visible in the chain-of-thought exam, less visible still in the few-shot exam, and least visible in the grounded exam. Another notable feature of the AI-only exams was their tendency not to explicitly state relevant rules covered in class, though once again this tendency differed by prompting strategy, with the grounded AI performing best. A common feature of all of the AI-only exams was their tendency to miss somewhat hidden legal issues that were not explicitly alluded to in the facts.

Relative to both human and AI-assisted exams, all of the AI-only exams exhibited especially strong writing and organization of analysis. Many of the organizational problems contained in the AI-assisted exams, including repetition and the introduction of relevant rules in the middle of an analysis, did not appear in the AI-only exams.

2. Introduction to American Law

Relative to human-only exams, the AI-assisted exams for Introduction to American Law did a good job of clearly and reasonably analyzing the principal legal issue identified in the exam prompt. On average, these exams were better written than human-only exams, both at the individual sentence level and the paragraph level. They often adhered to the basic “IRAC” structure that students were taught to employ. Additionally, AI-assisted exams

were generally more likely than human-only exams to precisely specify the central legal issue raised by the question. Another strength of the AI-assisted exams relative to the human-only exams was their direct application of the relevant legal rules to the facts of the problem; as with the insurance exam, AI-assisted exams for Introduction to American Law generally did a good job of accurately highlighting key facts in connection with the appropriate elements of the applicable rule. AI-assisted exams were particularly good at articulating strong counterarguments to the positions that essays ultimately endorsed.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the principal weakness of AI-assisted exams relative to human-only exams was their ability to draw from relevant case law covered in class. This weakness was particularly consequential for the essay exam in Introduction to American Law, which instructed students to analogize or distinguish two specific cases studied in class.

Many of these same strengths and weaknesses were evident in the AI-only exams for Introduction to American Law exams. For instance, these exams were well written and did a good job of directly answering the question asked using key facts from the prompt and the relevant legal rules. And, with the notable exception of the grounded AI-only exam, these AI-only exams scored relatively poorly when it came to analogizing and distinguishing the specific cases identified in the exam prompt. The grounded AI-only exam, however, did an excellent job at both identifying some of the nuances in the relevant rules that were discussed in class and analogizing and distinguishing the specific cases that were identified in the exam prompt. For that reason, the grounded exam received a nearly perfect score and outperformed nearly all of the AI-assisted exams.

C. Study Limitations

Our work represents an early attempt to gauge how student performance on exams improves with access to AI. However, the questions considered in this paper would benefit from subsequent research and replication attempts, especially in extrapolating these results to other settings. There are several reasons to be cautious about the external validity of this study.

First, the training we provided to students may have been inadequate. As students increasingly use ChatGPT and similar technologies in their everyday lives, and as universities begin explicitly to instruct students to use AI models more effectively, students' performance improvement from access to AI may increase. This is an inherent limitation of the sort of study we conducted, which can gauge the impact of AI in only a single setting.

Second, students may have been less motivated to exert maximum effort in our study than they were in their real graded exam, causing them to underperform and causing us to underestimate the benefit of access to AI. Conversely, students might have been better prepared, more familiar with the format of the exam, or more at ease during our study than during their real exam, which would cause them to *overperform* and therefore cause us to overestimate the benefit of access to AI. One piece of evidence suggesting

that effort was not the main driver of our results was the amount of time taken in the actual exam versus the exam in our study. In Insurance Law, our study participants took almost all of the time allotted to them, but their performance still did not improve on average. In Introduction to American Law, the participants did take systematically less time on our study exam than on the real exam, but their performance *did* systematically improve on the multiple-choice component while remaining roughly unchanged on average in the essay component. This suggests that the type of exam question was the primary determinant of the benefit of AI assistance, rather than effort as proxied by time taken.

Third, we should be cautious about extrapolating the results of our study to other settings, particularly nonlegal settings. Law school exams may differ systematically from exams in other subjects, and law school exams may not accurately test the kind of skills that many lawyers use in real life. We are currently working on a follow-on study that tests performance improvements on more realistic lawyering tasks when given access to AI.

Fourth and finally, the methodologies we have labeled “AI-only” vary in the extent to which they actually require some human input. Although we did not edit or review the responses produced by GPT-4, generating the few-shot prompts required access to model exams and the selection of appropriate source materials. If the AI model were asked to select its own model answers and source materials, its performance would likely have been worse. Thus the performance of these models might be regarded as a ceiling on what is possible with current technology.

IV. Implications

Overall, we found that GPT-4 wrote reasonably good law school exams on its own and even better ones with appropriate prompting. We also found that access to GPT-4 improved average student performance only on straightforward multiple-choice questions, with essentially no change to performance on essay questions. However, the effect of AI assistance varied significantly depending on baseline student performance; low-performing students received a substantial boost, while top-performing students may have been harmed by access to AI. Finally, access to GPT-4 significantly decreased the time required for students in the Introduction to American Law course to complete exams while also significantly improving their grades, suggesting that access to AI can improve both the quality and speed of output. These findings have a variety of implications for the future of law and legal education.

First, the fact that AI helps with simple legal analysis but stumbles over complex legal reasoning complicates the conventional story that AI will be generally useful to practicing lawyers. Based on our results, we believe that current versions of AI like GPT-4 are best suited to the sort of simple tasks that are already frequently outsourced to assistants and paralegals. Our findings are consistent with our own prior work on the performance of AI on law school exams, in which we found that AI performed best at organization,

composition, and simple analysis of legal rules, struggling with more complex legal judgments and issue-spotting.

One reason AI might not be particularly useful at complex legal problems is that GPT-4 itself is worse at these problems (as demonstrated by the relative performance of AI alone on multiple-choice versus essay questions). By analogy, a crib sheet with mostly correct answers will be more helpful than a half-correct and half-incorrect crib sheet. Alternatively, the process of integrating AI insights with human insights might be more difficult with complex essay questions, and in this setting AI responses might be more likely to crowd out human ingenuity. For multiple-choice questions, we suggested that students make an initial guess as to the correct answer and use GPT-4 as a gut check, with additional introspection when the student and GPT-4 disagreed. For essay questions, GPT-4's output was not so simple to integrate, requiring synthesis with the students' own writing and creating the potential for conflicting styles and organization. An interesting question for future research would be the extent to which variation in the quality of GPT-4's responses drove the results in this article versus variation in the difficulty of synthesizing human and AI answers.

Second, the fact that GPT-4 helped the worst-performing students significantly more than the best-performing students has important leveling implications for society in general. The legal profession has a well-known bimodal separation between "elite" and "nonelite" lawyers in pay and career opportunities. Various factors help to explain this bimodal distribution, including the growth of corporate legal services and the perceived need of firms to compete on resume prestige. But disparities in lawyers' and law students' abilities may well also play a role in the bimodal distribution of results. To the extent this is the case, AI tools could be a force for equality in the practice of law by helping to bring up the bottom (and even potentially bring down the top).

Of course, a major question that we cannot answer in this paper is precisely *why* the best performers did worse when given access to AI. Although this finding is preliminary (especially in light of the issue regarding mean reversion discussed above), access to AI might discourage effort when used as a crutch. In particular, access to AI might stifle creativity or lead users to settle for easy answers rather than exert themselves and spot more difficult issues. This finding is consistent with an emerging literature on the possible limitations of human-AI interaction in complex professional settings. For example, one study mentioned in Part I found that radiologists struggled to appropriately incorporate AI assistance in their decision-making and that unless they learn to do so, "the optimal solution involves assigning cases either to humans or to AI, but rarely to a human assisted by AI." However, more research is needed to confirm this effect and to see whether it generalizes to the broader practice of law.

Third, we found that with good prompting but no human supervision other than selecting relevant sources, GPT-4 alone outperformed both humans *and*

AI-assisted humans on average. This was despite the fact that we provided study participants explicit instructions on how to provide relevant sources to GPT-4. Our results raise the possibility that humans soon may be entirely removed from certain legal tasks, especially given work by legal tech companies to automate the prompt-engineering techniques described in this article. The fact that GPT-4 can outperform humans with access to GPT-4 has ominous implications for paraprofessionals (like paralegals and law firm assistants) who often conduct simple legal analysis under the status quo. It is possible that these paraprofessionals will soon be entirely replaced.

Of course, an hour of training may have been insufficient for students to master prompt engineering. Thus one could also take our findings as evidence that lawyers and law students should invest in learning how to use AI tools effectively. And if new technologies effectively automate prompt engineering for specific legal tasks, lawyers may enjoy significant benefits from AI assistance even on complex legal tasks.

Fourth, the discussion above about the *quality* of legal output fails to account for an equally important finding in our study about the *speed* of legal output. Significant speed gains in Introduction to American Law suggest that AI could substantially improve lawyer efficiency, at least where straightforward lawyering tasks are concerned. In this way, AI could be a double boost to productivity, both increasing the quality of output and decreasing the time that it takes to produce that output. Limited lawyer time is an important current impediment in access to justice, and efficiency improvements could dramatically expand the scope of legal services to the public.

Finally, these results have important pedagogical implications for universities. If AI benefits the worst-performing students the most, assignments on which students use AI (whether allowed to or not) may compress grading curves, potentially making it harder for instructors to draw granular distinctions between the performance of different students. In addition, the fact that AI tends to be more useful on multiple-choice questions than on issue-spotters might induce professors to move toward essay questions, both to reduce the benefits of cheating and to focus pedagogical attention on the sorts of tasks at which humans have comparative advantage. More generally, our research can help to inform law schools about what skills remain uniquely human and therefore most likely to benefit law school students as they enter the labor market.

V. Conclusion

We conducted an experiment to test how AI assistance affects legal reasoning, by comparing student performance on law school exams with and without access to AI. We found that students consistently benefited from AI assistance only on simple multiple-choice questions and that GPT-4 alone outperformed both students alone and students with AI assistance with effective prompt engineering. We also found large variation in the effect of AI assistance, with the worst-performing students seeing the largest gains, and

the best-performing students seeing declines in performance. These findings have significant implications for the future of lawyering, legal education, and professional work more generally.

VI. Appendix

A. Additional Information on Data and Methods

1. Background on Courses

The principal goal of Introduction to American Law is to introduce undergraduates to legal analysis. To that end, the class is taught in much the same way as a typical law school class; readings consist principally of edited judicial opinions, and exams test students' capacity to apply legal principles to new situations. Four such exams are given throughout the semester. These exams typically include both multiple-choice questions and essay questions that require students to analyze a novel fact pattern by clearly stating the relevant legal issue, specifying the applicable legal rules, applying those rules to the facts, analogizing and/or distinguishing to relevant case law, and considering key counterarguments. The essay portion of exams are graded by 2L and 3L law school research assistants, who use a grading rubric produced by the instructor and who are trained by the instructor to apply that rubric consistently.

Insurance Law grades are based principally on a single final exam, which consists of between two and four essay questions. These questions generally involve elaborate and novel hypothetical scenarios that require students to analyze multiple legal issues while drawing on case law, statutes, and regulations studied in class. Final exams also occasionally require students to perform a policy analysis of legal rules or proposals.

The substantive material covered in both Introduction to American Law and Insurance Law was virtually identical in the spring of 2023 and the spring of 2022, when the co-author instructor taught these same classes.

2. Exams and Grading

Several practical considerations affected the exams that we administered to study participants differing in some respects from the real exams that we administered in 2022. For Insurance Law, study participants answered two of the three questions from the spring 2022 Insurance Law final exam, each of which counted toward 25% of students' final grades in 2022. Ultimately, then, students from the Insurance Law class took half of the real 2022 final exam. We used this approach both because we believed it would be easier to recruit students to spend two hours rather than four on the AI-assisted exam and because students in the 2023 Insurance Law class had previously been given the third question from the 2022 exam for practice. For students in Introduction to American Law, we used fifteen multiple-choice questions from the 2022 final exam question and an essay question from the third 2022 exam, which covered property and civil procedure. We used this approach because we wanted the exam that students completed to include both an essay and a multiple-choice component, as three of the four exams in the class do. It was

not possible to accomplish this solely by relying on the final exam in the class from 2022, because (as noted earlier) the final exam in the class is entirely multiple choice.

For Introduction to American Law, we used the same process for training RAs to accurately and consistently use the grading rubrics in this study as is used in the actual class. First, the instructor developed a detailed grading rubric that required graders to evaluate how well essays frame the relevant issues, describe the relevant legal rules, apply those rules to the specific facts of the exam, analogize or distinguish to relevant case law, and consider counterarguments. Specific descriptions, such as “The answer notes both the question of whether a motion to dismiss should be granted and whether Charlie adversely possessed the property but reflects a somewhat confused understanding of the interaction of these two questions or inconsistent usage,” are associated with specific numeric scores. After reviewing the rubric together, the RAs and the instructor independently applied it to four test essays and then reviewed the consistency of the results in a meeting. Differences in scoring were discussed and resolved, and the rubric itself was adjusted accordingly. After these test exams were scored, RAs were instructed to use them as anchors during their grading if they were unsure how to score a particular component of an exam. Subsequent to this process, a “lead” RA reviewed all of the grades produced by the individual RAs to ensure that they were consistent and flagged any potential inconsistencies in scoring for further review by the instructor.

For each exam that was graded for this study, the grader filled in a detailed grading rubric that assigned specific points for different elements of the exam answer. Once the initial grading was complete and the exams were unblinded, the co-author who taught the classes examined these rubrics along with the underlying exams to identify trends in the relative strengths and weaknesses of AI-assisted and AI-only exams.

3. Recruitment of Study Participants

To recruit study participants, we sent e-mails to all students enrolled in Introduction to American Law and Insurance Law. We paid each participant a flat fee for their participation, unrelated to their exam performance and conditional only on successful completion of the trainings and the exam. Participants agreed to take part in the study before receiving their final grades for the relevant courses.

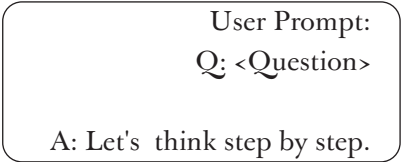
As Figure 5 through Figure 7 above show, the students who volunteered for our study were not a representative sample across performance levels. If they were, the curves for human-only performance (representing how well our participants did in percentile terms compared with the class as a whole) would have been roughly flat. Instead, they were inverse-U shaped, suggesting that our sample underrepresented both low-performing and high-performing students. Thus, average treatment effects in our study are most representative of the effect on roughly average students.

4. GPT-4 Parameters and Prompts

To produce AI-only exam responses, we used the 8K GPT-4 model through OpenAI’s API, using the March 14, 2023, version (gpt-4-0314). For optimal reproducibility, we set temperature to 0, as recommended by OpenAI. We used the following system prompt for essays: “You are an experienced legal academic like Cass Sunstein or William Eskridge writing a model answer to a law school exam.” And we used the following system prompt for multiple-choice questions: “You are an experienced legal academic like Cass Sunstein or William Eskridge answering a multiple-choice question on a law school exam.” These system prompts (and all of the following prompts) were validated using a small training set of old exam questions and then used out of sample to produce the results described in the “Results” section above.

Each of the following prompts was the version used to generate responses for the essay questions. We used the same prompt with minor appropriate modifications for the multiple-choice questions.

Figure 9: Chain-of-Thought Prompt



The few-shot prompting method we used requires specifying both user and assistant prompts within the GPT-4 API; thus it is currently not possible to perfectly replicate this method without API access. In our study, we provided the AI model with a single model exam and answer; this might properly be described as “one-shot” prompting as opposed to the “zero-shot” prompting used in the basic and chain-of-thought prompts.

Figure 10: Few-Shot Prompt

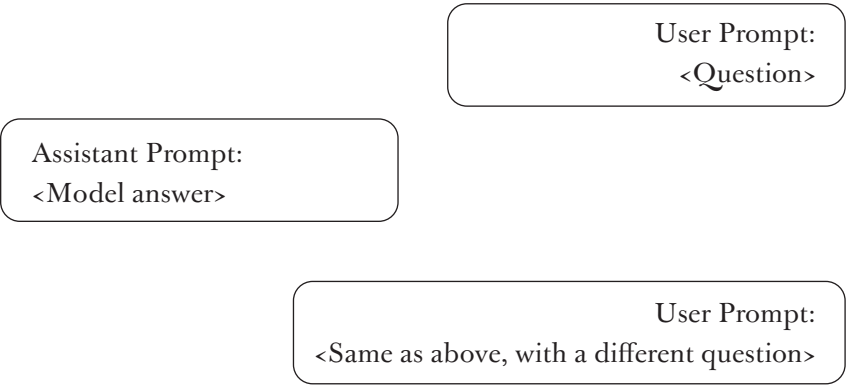


Figure 11: Grounded Prompt

User Prompt:

You will be asked to answer a law school exam question relying on materials from a law school class. Here are the materials:

<Source materials>

Here is the law school exam question:

<Question>

B. Additional Figures

The following figures show the mean improvement of humans when given access to GPT-4 on exams in our study. As above, curves are generated through bootstrapping and 95% confidence intervals are shown by dashed lines.

Figure 12: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

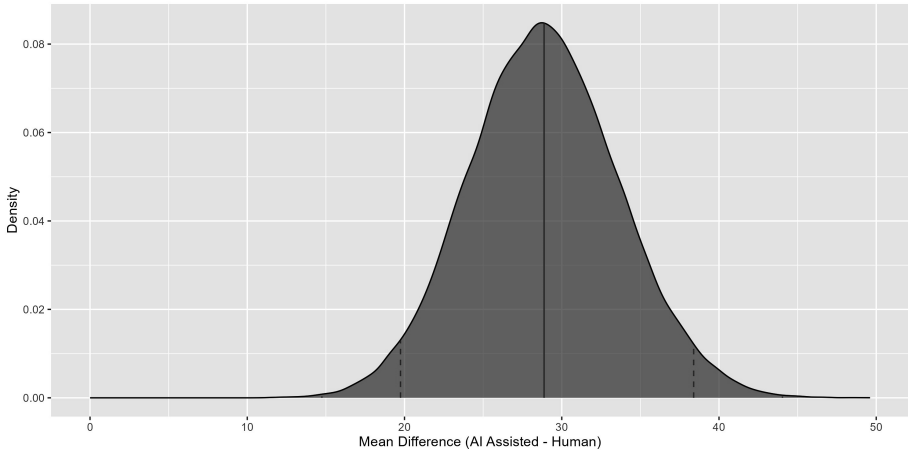


Figure 13: Introduction to American Law Essay—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

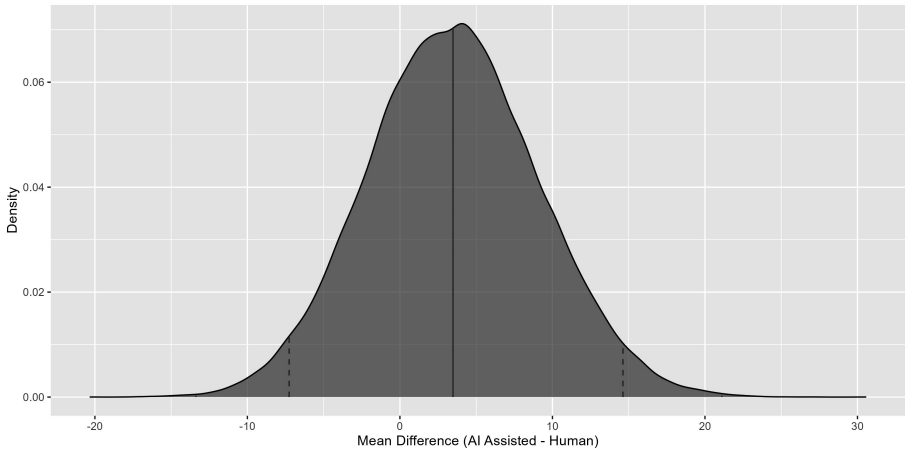
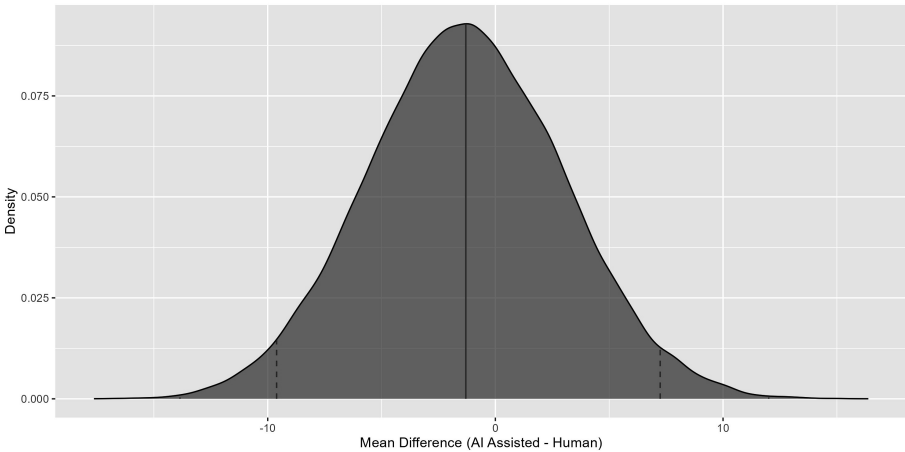


Figure 14: Insurance Law—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4



The following figures show performance improvements from AI assistance in relation to the initial performance of students without AI assistance (similar to Figure 4), broken down by exam and exam component. The figures show a consistent inverse correlation between performance without AI and the boost a student receives from AI assistance. However, the specifics differ by exam component. In the multiple-choice section of Introduction to American Law (on which GPT-4 performed best on its own), students toward the bottom of the class saw enormous performance gains in excess of fifty percentile points, while students toward the top of the class saw no performance losses (just smaller gains). The essay section of Introduction to American Law saw both

gains for the bottom students and declines for the top students. And the Insurance Law exam generally saw modest gains for the students toward the bottom and noticeable declines for students toward the top. Overall, these findings add nuance to the general story described in Section III.A.1 that assistance from GPT-4 helped struggling students and harmed top students; specifically, it seemed to help struggling students the most with easier (especially multiple-choice) questions and harm top students the most with more complex (especially essay) questions.

Figure 15: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

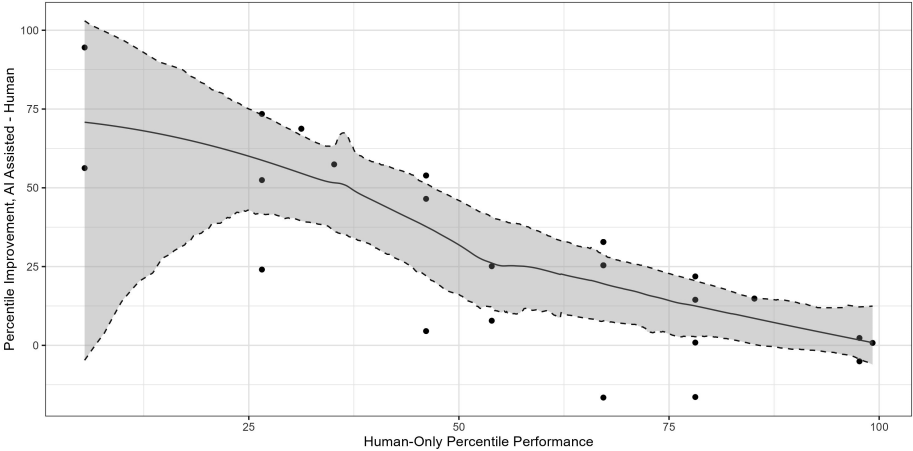


Figure 16: Introduction to American Law Essay—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

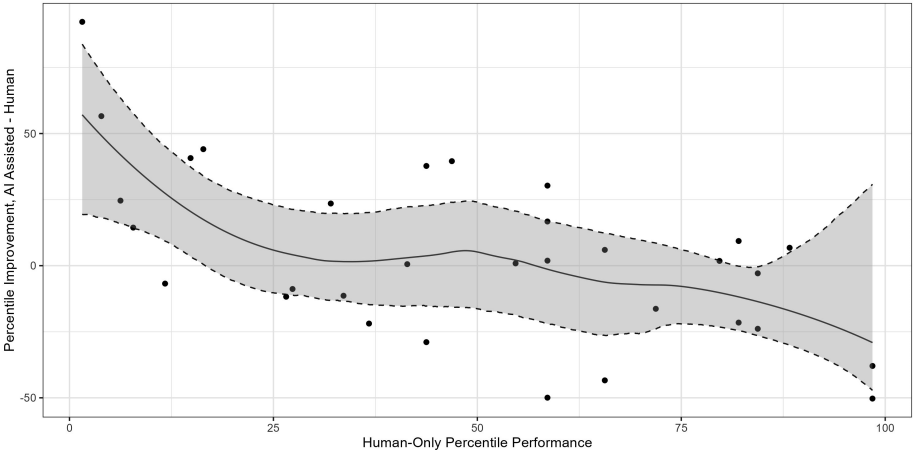
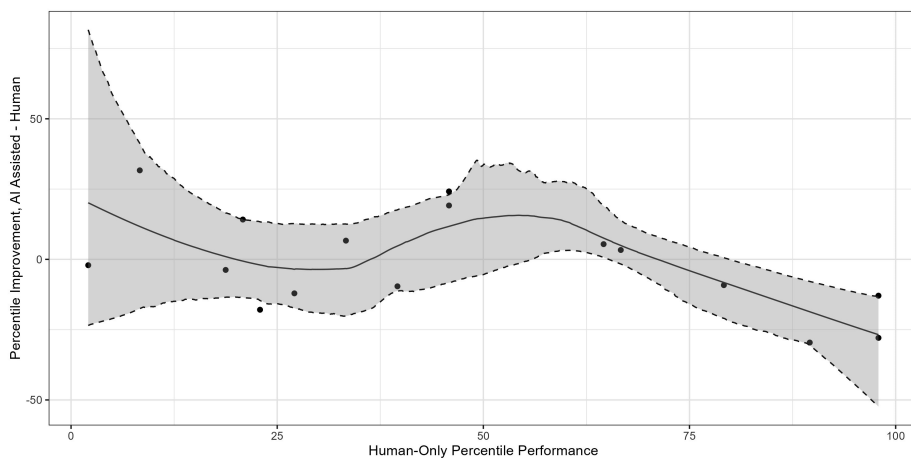


Figure 17: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4



Finally, another way to consider how AI assistance affects the distribution of student exam performance is to look at changes in the standard deviation of scores when AI assistance is provided. The following figures plot this difference, with 95% confidence intervals denoted by dashed lines. While standard deviation is a measure of variation in student performance, asking whether AI assistance decreases the standard deviation of exam percentiles is subtly different from asking whether AI assistance benefits bottom students more than top students. For example, if AI assistance simply causes bottom students and top students to switch places—turning the first-percentile student into the 99th-percentile student and vice versa, second-percentile into 98th-percentile and vice versa, etc.—we would see strong variation in improvement from AI assistance, as above, without seeing *any* change in standard deviation.

The following figures suggest that something like this may be happening—that the standard deviation of performance decreased only in the multiple-choice component of Introduction to American Law, with essentially no change in the essay component of either exam. Although further research is needed, this might be because skill in traditional legal analysis is orthogonal to skill at properly employing AI assistance, so that the best students at legal analysis may “switch places” with the best students at AI collaboration. In general, though, AI assistance may compress the raw amount of variation between students only when it actually improves performance.

Figure 18: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

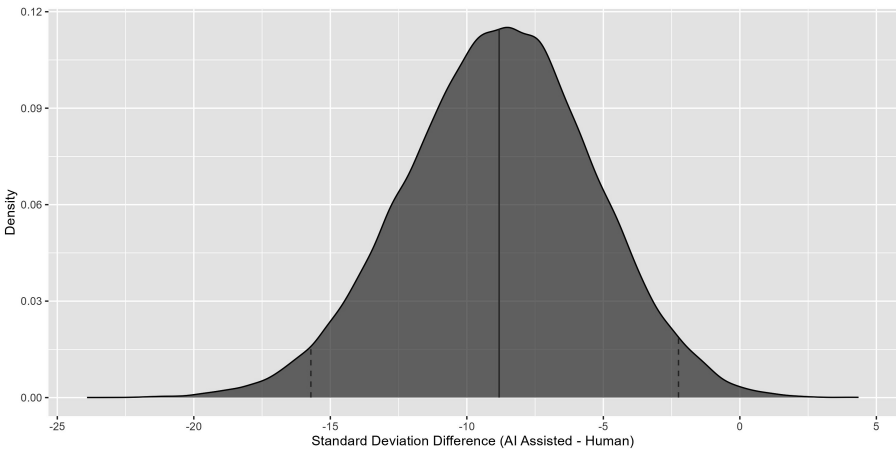


Figure 19: Introduction to American Law Essay—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

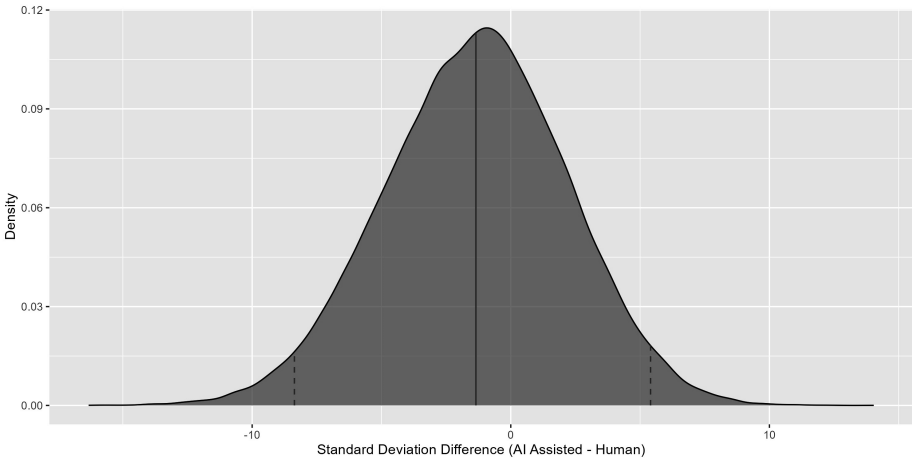


Figure 20: Introduction to American Law Multiple Choice—Mean Student Improvement Given Access to GPT-4

