

Building the Future of the Legal Profession

PCL AI Initiative — Public Summary

A public summary of a proposed Penn Carey Law AI initiative — adapted from an internal concept document currently under discussion with the Dean and the development team. The proposal will evolve; this summary captures its shape and direction at a level of abstraction appropriate for a general audience.

The Challenge

The transformation of legal practice by AI is already underway. Generative AI systems are performing routine legal analysis — research, drafting, document review, due diligence, initial case assessment. The consequences for the profession are structural, not incremental.

Four implications are already visible. New graduates are expected to operate at higher levels from day one, supervising AI-generated work and making strategic decisions that used to wait for mid-career. Law firm economics are shifting as the leverage model that depends on billable junior associate hours comes under pressure. Legal work is migrating — away from traditional firms and toward corporate legal departments, technology companies, and new kinds of service organizations. And courts and regulators are confronting new questions about AI-assisted advocacy, automated decision-making, and the governance of legal AI systems.

The deeper change is structural. The existing trend toward in-house and corporate legal work — predating AI — is accelerating as AI further reduces the barriers to sophisticated analysis. AI is beginning to enable individual lawyers to deliver work that previously required teams, creating conditions for practice to break into smaller, AI-first firms that compete on quality and speed rather than headcount. AI-enabled self-help tools are expanding the range of problems people can address without representation.

These shifts won't displace lawyers. They'll reward a different kind of lawyer — one whose professional judgment is amplified, not replaced, by AI. The “10x lawyer” framing captures the idea: the practitioner whose ability to marshal AI makes them dramatically more effective than peers who treat AI as a novelty or a threat. The 10x lawyer doesn't just use AI tools. They exercise the judgment that makes those tools useful — supervising output, designing workflows, and building the systems through which legal work gets done.

The scope and pace of this transformation call for a structural institutional response. Adding individual courses or clinics won't do it.

The Bet

Most institutional responses to AI assume a specific endpoint — AI replaces task X, students need skill Y, we should build program Z. That approach fails for a simple reason: the rate of change makes any specific

endpoint obsolete before the response ships.

The proposal frames Penn Carey Law's response not as a prediction about where AI takes the legal profession — no one can predict that with confidence — but as an institutional commitment to observing the transformation in real time, embedded in it rather than theorizing from the outside.

That is the proposed bet. If adopted, the initiative would produce the institution best positioned to lead regardless of where the transformation goes. Success would be measured by adaptive capacity, not by whether a particular prediction turned out to be correct.

The Adaptive Architecture

The proposal is built in two layers.

What would be permanent. The infrastructure — core research capacity, innovation programs, fellowship structures, and partnership frameworks — built to last. These are durable investments in Penn Carey Law's capacity to engage this transformation at the highest level, regardless of where it leads. The intent is investment that compounds over time rather than a series of one-off experiments.

What would be intentionally variable. The specific research themes, curriculum content, and project focus within that infrastructure change each year. Semester-length and annual program cycles allow redirection as conditions change. Annual formal review of each pillar keeps the work at the frontier rather than calcifying around yesterday's questions.

Three mechanisms keep the proposed initiative current. **Institutional sensing through partnerships** — by embedding with firms, courts, and legal departments actively navigating the AI transition, the initiative would maintain real-time visibility into how the profession is evolving. **Short feedback loops** — the building work would run on 3–9 month innovation cycles, producing testable outputs and real data rather than long-horizon plans. **Annual recalibration** — initiative leadership would review each pillar formally each year, using evidence from the field to guide adjustments. Fellowship appointments would run on one-year renewable commitments to preserve that recalibration capacity.

The Four Pillars

The proposal organizes the initiative around four pillars designed to reinforce one another. Research informs pedagogy. Student projects feed the Building pillar. Institutional partnerships provide data and context across all four.

Research — Understand how AI is reshaping legal institutions

The research agenda builds on a distinctive capacity: real-time institutional observation. By partnering with firms, courts, and legal departments that are actively navigating the AI transition, Penn researchers can document what is actually happening — not what might happen in theory. This produces empirical work that no one else is generating.

Research questions are organized around the shape of the transformation itself: what governance frameworks are emerging for legal AI, how courts are responding to AI-assisted advocacy, and how AI is

reshaping the structure of legal practice. Outputs include academic scholarship, empirical studies, practitioner reports, and public datasets and evaluation frameworks.

People — Prepare graduates to lead in an AI-transformed world

The People pillar combines a layered set of proposed student credentials — spanning selective operational cohorts, structured JD tracks, and broader participation-based recognition, subject to curriculum review — with mechanisms that connect students to real institutional work. Student Innovation Teams tie into the Building pillar. Practice Transformation Bootcamps bring students and practitioners together for short intensive programs.

The proposed credentials would serve graduates at different levels of engagement: a broad credential reflecting demonstrated AI competence, a structured track reflecting depth and readiness to manage AI-integrated practice, and a selective fellowship positioning graduates as the operational core — students who help build and test the systems the profession is adopting. Each credential’s design, criteria, and sequencing would be developed with faculty curriculum governance before launch.

The pillar also strengthens recruiting. Students with strong technical backgrounds — undergraduate engineers, computer scientists, and others with existing fluency in technology — look for a law school that takes law and technology seriously as an institutional commitment. A visible pathway from technical training to legal careers at the frontier of AI and institutional change compounds as a recruiting advantage.

Building — Design and test next-generation legal systems with institutional partners

The Building pillar would be the proposal’s primary differentiator. It grounds the work in applied collaboration rather than study alone. Students would develop capabilities the initiative is designed to produce: exercising judgment in real institutional settings, supervising AI-generated work, and solving problems that don’t yet have established solutions.

The Legal Innovation Lab would operate on 3–9 month cycles. Teams of students, faculty, fellows, and institutional partners would design and test solutions to real problems. Project types could include AI-assisted litigation workflows, AI contract review systems benchmarked against human review, compliance monitoring prototypes, and legal research supervision workflows. As new practice models emerge — AI-first firms, new approaches to legal service delivery, expanded self-help — the Lab could prototype the workflows and systems those models require.

The value proposition for partners is access to three things that are difficult to assemble independently: a peer network (competitors sharing in an academic setting), Penn faculty expertise and student talent for structured projects, and published research and evaluation outputs that help partners make better-informed decisions about AI adoption. Penn Carey Law has a proven model for this convening function — the Institute for Law and Economics has done it for decades with corporate lawyers from competing firms.

Pedagogy — Reimagine legal education for an AI-integrated profession

If AI handles routine legal analysis, the skills that matter most are the ones that are hardest to teach — judgment, strategy, institutional problem-solving, and the ability to supervise AI-generated work. The Pedagogy pillar is organized around how to accelerate the development of those capabilities within a three-year JD program.

The proposal formalizes and scales the AI Law Lab’s existing pedagogy work as the AI Teaching Lab, building on its current coordination through the Deputy Dean’s office. It would support AI-assisted feedback systems that give students rapid formative input; simulated practice environments where students manage AI tools in realistic legal scenarios; new assessment models that test judgment and supervisory skill rather than doctrinal recall; and comparative studies of learning outcomes under different AI-integrated approaches.

Course transformation is a related thread. The goal is not to add AI as a topic within existing courses but to rethink what those courses are training students to do — in a context where AI handles much of the routine work that previously served as the vehicle for developing core analytical skills. Civil Procedure as AI-enabled litigation simulation. Contracts as AI-supported contract analysis with a supervisory frame. Administrative Law as AI-assisted regulatory analysis with evaluation of AI-generated policy recommendations.

An important premise: AI integration does not mean trading away the core analytical and reasoning skills the first-year curriculum is designed to teach. Close reading, legal analysis, rigorous argumentation, and the ability to work from ambiguous facts to structured conclusions are more critical in an AI-enabled environment, not less. The question is how to teach them in a context where the previous vehicle for developing them — routine work — is increasingly automated.

Why Penn Carey Law

Penn Carey Law isn’t starting from scratch. The school has already built meaningful infrastructure — in curriculum, faculty development, institutional partnerships, and research — that few peer institutions can match.

Five institutional advantages matter. **Existing infrastructure and momentum:** AI is already integrated into the required 1L curriculum through the Legal Practice Skills program; institutional access to leading legal-AI platforms and an institution-wide ChatGPT EDU deployment are in place; faculty are conducting active research on AI and law; existing legal-technology fellowship programs provide entrepreneurial pathways for students; and coordinated AI support infrastructure for faculty is operating. **Penn Carey Law’s scale:** the school is small enough for coordinated curricular experimentation, with faculty governance that can move when the evidence supports it. **Penn’s interdisciplinary ecosystem:** Wharton for firm economics and organizational change; Penn Engineering for technical collaboration on AI systems; the Graduate School of Education for research on professional training and pedagogy; the Perelman School of Medicine, Nursing, and bioethics programs for shared questions about AI governance and the transformation of expert practice. **Geographic position:** Philadelphia sits between New York and Washington — the two largest concentrations of legal work and legal policy in the country. **Strategic plan alignment:** the proposal is a direct expression of Penn Carey Law’s strategic vision, particularly the “Inventive University” theme that calls for a faculty-led center that anticipates, leads, and responds to transformations in practice.

What’s Already in Motion

Groundwork is underway on several fronts — faculty research mapping, partnership conversations, credential design, and preparatory work on the Teaching Lab — using existing resources and institutional relationships. The point: the proposal isn’t a plan waiting to be operationalized; the directions are already

being tested.

The Five-Year Arc

Year 1 — Foundation and first projects. Formal launch with faculty leadership and a program director. Inaugural fellowship cohort selected. Legal Innovation Lab established with one or two anchor pilot projects. AI Teaching Lab established by partnering with faculty already experimenting with AI in their courses. First practitioner roundtable convened. First research project connected to an institutional partnership begins.

Years 2–3 — Expansion and visibility. Scale selectively, expanding only what has demonstrated results. Institutional partnerships expand to four to six active collaborations. Credential programs launch through curricular governance as each is approved. First practitioner reports and empirical studies published. Three to four Building pillar projects per year. Interdisciplinary research collaborations begin with Wharton and Engineering. First Practice Transformation Bootcamps hosted.

Years 4–5 — National leadership. National leadership follows demonstrated outputs, not aspirational claims. Penn Carey Law recognized as a leading institution for legal AI experimentation. Teaching models developed through the initiative adopted by other law schools. Research outputs cited and used by practitioners, courts, and policymakers. Institutional pilot projects generating replicable models for the profession. Penn Carey Law graduates entering the profession demonstrably prepared to exercise professional judgment, supervise AI systems, and lead institutional change — the initiative’s ultimate measure of success.

Based on a concept document as of April 2026; the working draft continues to evolve.

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