University Usage of ESI Technology Gives Rise to Alternative Career Paths for Lawyers

For iCONECT, certifying future lawyers on XERA at the university level may help solve a talent gap issue as well as increase licensing from potential buyers of the platform.

BY JARED COSEGLIA

Looking to jump start your legal technology career but don't know how? Starting in August, Jared Coseglia of TRU Staffing Partners will be writing a monthly column on certifications to know and training to acquire in the industry for Legaltech News. The first of those pieces is below.

Bill Hamilton, legal skills professor and executive director of the University of Florida Law School's International Center for Automated Information Retrieval, is using e-discovery technology in the classroom every single day. His wildly progressive curriculum incorporates a bevy of proprietary ESI technology including tools from Nuix, Catalyst and iCONECT. While Hamilton's agenda is undeniably to "train people pursuing legal degrees

to be superlative lawyers," the reality is that many law school graduates are leveraging their legal education to establish non-practicing "career viability with vendors, government agencies or consultancies supporting the legal process."

Hamilton's courses do much more than expose students to technology as end users. At the University of Florida, students are getting dense hands-on experience executing sophisticated functionality and developing complex workflows with processes related to data analytics/analysis techniques, technology-assisted review, deNISTing and de-duping, advanced Boolean search, data processing and ingestion, and even some light programming. The tools in use were hand-picked by Hamilton for

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several reasons, including "great pedagogical value, virtualization in the cloud for easy access, and the generosity of ownership to provide access to the technology free of charge."

iCONECT, makers of XERA, a robust full-service software platform used to host, review and produce data for discovery, is specifically investing

time, effort, energy and technology at the university level to meet the industrywide need for legal tech education and also increase market share. As more consumers of e-discovery software are turning to alternative cloud-based solutions, iCONECT stands out as a trusted platform that has been part of the conversation and community for well over a decade.

iCONECT offers several tracks within its current certification portfolio: XERA Administrator, XERA Advanced Analytics and NetworX Program Certification. Certification holders must recertify on an annual basis, largely because of advancements made in tool development year-over-year. iCONECT XERA has recently made meaningful security and functionality updates to the technology that are being incorporated into training and certification programs. Other new initiatives include adding active directory capabilities in order to synchronize with internal protocols, two-factor authentication and augmentation of video review, and commenting capabilities for end users—something iCONECT development has seen

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a significant uptick in demand for in recent years.

Olivia Cain, director of technical and training services for iCONECT, identifies XERA's competitive advantage as "easy to use with training exercises that are challenging without being overly difficult." Training is available online through instructional videos as well as in-classroom throughout the year and country (**Click here to review class dates**).

Unlike kCura's Relativity Fest, Ipro Tech's Innovations or Guidance's Enfuse, iCONECT XERA currently has no annual conference focused on certifying the masses in one sitting. iCONECT will, however, be joining the TRU Staffing Partners Scholarship Program in 2018 to offer free certification packages for

aspiring professionals looking to distinguish themselves in the space with iCONECT XERA skills.

According to Cain, iCONECT historically has "not put tremendous emphasis on getting people certified who are not already users, but that is changing." That shift starts at the pre-graduate level with technology indoctrination of soon-to-be-minted attorneys entering the workforce. Certifying future lawyers on iCONECT XERA at the university level may help solve a talent gap issue for existing subscribers of the software as well as increase licensing from potential buyers of the platform.

Lynn Frances Jae, marketing director at iCONECT, recognizes that often "the only place our new clients can go to get

people to run their systems is from our legacy clients." Having a more robust pool of talent trained and ideally certified on the technology can reduce the barrier to entry for law firms and corporations concerned about surrounding themselves with skilled professionals capable of hitting the ground running on iCONECT implementation and rapid utilization. According to Frances Jae, training lawyers at the postgraduate level could quell a potential client's concern of being "not sure I want to buy this new technology, because I'm not sure who I will get to run it with me." An individual that can "run it" may be the difference between getting the job and being passed over by employers.

Hamilton believes that the integration of technology into the law school environment has the potential to "invert the lawyer apprenticeship model." As Hamilton recollects from his rise within the Am Law 200 as a practicing attorney, his mentorship process followed a traditional "shadowing" paradigm. In other words, the more experienced attorney would say, "Watch me do these depositions—then after a few months, now you do it and I will watch you and comment or redirect your efforts and approach." With the next generation of lawyers gaining a set of technology knowledge and skills that the current partners and senior associates never received either in school or on the job, up-and-coming litigators find themselves serving as the mentors to their mentors when it comes to technology.

The ABA requires practicing attorneys to take dozens of CLE credits per year. In Florida, three of the credits must be in technology-related areas. Many busy and successful litigators do not have the time to take off from their practice to densely learn new software-related skills. Instead, these rainmakers or seasoned lawyers are learning these new skills on the jobs from the students-turned-associates who acquired said chops in the university setting. Thus, an inversion of the traditional lawyer apprenticeship model is giving aspiring lawyers a tremendous competitive advantage when hunting for jobs.

However, Hamilton notes that regardless of which tool an attorney is trained on, it is the skills, not necessarily the certification, that give them professional leverage *if* their goal is to practice rather than support the practice. "The vast majority of students interested in litigation want to join law firms," states Hamilton. "At a law firm, no one distinguishes themselves by merely getting a certification. They distinguish themselves by cost-effectively winning or helping win litigations and advancing their client's goals."

The converse can be said of J.D.s who are not practicing, but rather in consultative support of law firm litigators. Having the certification in a specific tool, like iCONECT XERA, does give you immediate advantage over others who do not possess the certification when applying for e-discovery jobs as project managers, analysts, technicians or sales representatives with companies which use that technology. The new "value added" role for non-practicing J.D.s is combining legal skills and competence with technical acumen to provide case-specific consultative services to clients and corporations.