

Reporting on experiments with research integration in teaching

Name
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Course Name
Artificial Intelligence and Legal Disruption
Study Board
MA
Level and class size
MA; 15
Description of the experiment
<p>Students were tasked with pursuing an empirical study as a research project that they would use as the basis for their final exam, based on their own individual research proposals. These studies constituted the empirical data they used to develop their ideas and subsequently write up as their exam paper. The students were introduced to empirical methods early in the course with specific lectures afforded to empirical research design and methods, accompanied by appropriate readings and examples of empirical legal research. There were multiple empirical class days where the students shared their research ideas and evaluated their peers' proposals and designs in an open style workshop format and linked the research to issues as developed in class. In regular class sessions the students took theoretical papers and asked how they would pursue evaluating the strength of the claims made by the authors and how they might be tested.</p>
Outcome for the students
<p>The student projects were very well done. Although with limited exceptions, the students had no training in empirical methods, they were able to create and delimit their research questions and adjust their paper topics to ideas and themes that genuinely interested them. They were able to identify the weaknesses and scientific limitations of their work and learned to value the difficulty of proving certain claims. This was a major realization for some of the students as it forced them to consider the course material in much more depth and allowed them to engage with the material instead of memorizing and regurgitating it. Compared with the beginning of the course, the subtlety with which they dealt with the legal issues surrounding AI was greatly increased, and the students considered the real-life implications of legal precepts when it comes to AI regulation.</p> <p>The evaluations reflected the students' ability to evaluate the course readings in much more depth and gain confidence in using their skills. As one evaluation put it: "It was really nice to see a legal class being conducted in a (legitimately) discussion-based format with critical analysis and open space for viewpoints. By asking students to do something other than stare at slides and listen to a non-interactive lecture, skills are developed, friendships are formed, and learning occurs. Professor Slosser did a great job compiling readings and questions that initiated deep and important discussions on very real issues that impact our world. I loved the blend between the theoretical and meta-analysis and the practical and micro-level impacts of AI. Well-lead class, brilliant professor, great group of students."</p>
Outcome for the research

<p>The research has led to multiple students reengineering their empirical work for developing their thesis. One student is continuing as a visiting researcher with Slosser to continue the research started during the course. Another student plans to revise their empirical study so that it is suitable for publication as a paper. The other projects are being held (anonymously) for use for next years class where students will reproduce, question, or expand the research of the previous year.</p>
<p>Interaction between teaching, research and exams</p>
<p>As with any class, at the beginning of the year students were very interested in how the exam would work and were trepidatious of pursuing empirical work in which they had no familiarity. It was a challenge to get them out of this attitude in the beginning, but by mid-semester, they started to think as both legal scholars and researchers. By the time it came to putting their surveys, interviews, or experiments into the field, we were particularly impressed by their enthusiasm and the quality of the questions asked and designs. There was significant improvement in the projects through each stage of the deliberative sessions, as students evaluated their projects in light of comments from the lecturers and their fellow students. In the future, it might be beneficial to start the process of research design a bit earlier, and perhaps as a block where the students work in the project through consecutive weeks, rather than revisiting the project every few weeks.</p>
<p>Adapting of the experiment</p>
<p>The project went as planned with very minimal changes. The only major change to the project as originally envisioned was allowing the students a bit more freedom in the design than originally planned, as many of the students felt unsure if their anticipated project would fit within the overall framework of the exam, but they nevertheless showed to us significant competence in the design phases that reassured us that they would be able to expand away from the original design. We believe the experiment looks great for future implementation with the added bonus of being able to use the previous year's material and findings for expanding the work done there.</p>
<p>Strengths and weaknesses</p>
<p>The primary strength was engagement. We got the impression that the students pursued their project beyond the commitment of 'just getting a good mark'. Many of the students became quite passionate about their results and continuing the research beyond the class. This was further reflected in the exam papers, which were generally of a very high quality. The primary weakness was relying on students' prior experience with empirical methods to some extent. Though we covered some methods in class, this is obviously no replacement for full training. This issue can somewhat be attenuated by frontloading the seminars that we deliver on empirical methods so that the students have a good idea of the research process from the start.</p>
<p>Experienced challenges</p>
<p>We don't think there were any particular challenges that were unique to this format. The normal substantial and pedagogical challenges remained very similar to normal classes. If anything, the format gives an opportunity to test out new ways for overcoming more established challenges that arise in class participation, and getting students to think beyond the scope of doctrinal methods.</p>
<p>The most important experience</p>
<p>If students are pushed to think for themselves, they will do so with passion. Sometimes it may be important to teach 'beyond the exam' if the students are given tools, guidance, autonomy and trust.</p>
<p>Will the experiment be conducted again?</p>
<p>In light of its considerable success, the exam format will be continued in the coming semester.</p>