

# Time Machine: Emma's Legal Education, 2025

Paul Boudreaux

A gentle chime in her ear woke twenty-two-year-old Emma from sleep on a Wednesday morning. With a wink of her left eye, she illuminated the wall-sized screen in her studio apartment. While music began to play quietly, she noted that she had received no messages during the night. After a moment of thought, she decided to start her legal education work for the day. With a small twist of her left wrist, she changed the screen to the topics for that day in her course on “Legal Agreements.” A smiling face popped onto the screen and, underneath it, the copyright notice of the Lexington Legal Program (LLP), owned by a Chinese-German corporate conglomerate, that had become the leading provider of legal education in the United States.

Today's lesson, the speaker on the screen said, focused on the policy reasons for negating the enforcement of agreements. The speaker briefly outlined the opposing positions on the issue and then the background of two recent appellate court cases. With another twist, Emma switched her screen to a menu of videos about the first case, which a federal court had decided two months before. The first video was a three-minute segment of the video-argument before the court (judges rarely held live arguments any more), which consisted largely of the plaintiff's counsel answering questions from the judge. Emma made some mental notes about the lawyer's demeanor, which she thought was effective. The second video was a summary of the defendant's argument, along with a discussion of litigation strategy that the defendant's lawyer had prepared for LLP. The video offered links to summaries of social science studies that supported the defendant's position.

Emma then grabbed her 9G device, which immediately replicated the video on her wall, and strolled into her bathroom. She started the shower water and placed the 9G device in its bathroom receptacle, which automatically displayed the video on the wall of her shower. She twisted over to the court's opinion (generally limited to 1,000 words by a new federal law). As she lathered her hair, Emma twisted over to the aspect of study that she always found the least useful—legal “commentary” on the topic, which emphasized the new court

**Paul Boudreaux** is a professor at Stetson University College of Law, Florida's oldest law school. This article originated from his reflections on the changes in society and the economy in the twenty years since his own legal education, which prompts Boudreaux to wonder whether he still will be teaching (as he hopes to) in 2025.

opinion. She quickly scanned through a couple of commentary pieces, none of which was longer than 2,000 words. With a handful of exceptions, nearly all legal commentary pieces these days were limited to this length. By now, Emma knew the law student strategy of focusing on practical points and not wasting much time on “theory,” which rarely was tested.

After finishing her shower and drying her hair, Emma returned to her bedroom and twisted her wrist a few times to review some of the screens she had already seen. She was confident about her innate ability in legal analysis (after all, the still-controversial genetic testing she underwent in the fifth grade had assessed her at a very high level for logic and legal analysis). After preparing for her afternoon employment—paralegal work she did at home—she felt ready for her twice-weekly test, or “assessment,” as LLP referred to it.

Emma’s assessment included multiple-choice questions, a couple of short essay questions, often with a professionalism bent, and a short interview with a computer-generated “client” struggling to make the high interest payments on his new cold fusion car. Emma knew that her answers, including the short essay answers, would be “assessed” by a computer program that knew to look for certain phrases and combinations of words. A random sample of the written answers and interviews would be reviewed briefly by human lawyers under contract with LLP. But with more than 5,000 students in this Legal Agreements course, the flesh-and-blood lawyers reviewed only a fraction of the students’ assessments each week.

As she dictated her answers (which immediately appeared in type on her screen), she felt a light sensation in her ear chip. With a slight movement of her head, she flicked over to the incoming call.

“Hi, honey,” came the voice of her middle-aged father into her ear. “What are you up to today?” When she said that she was studying law, he asked, “Do you like your Contracts professor?”

Emma chuckled and said, “Daddy, they don’t have ‘professors’ like they did when you did legal education!” Her father, who had graduated from a part-time law school program in 2010, said that he couldn’t get used to the new terminology. “My coordinator is okay, I suppose,” said Emma. “I don’t spend much time listening to her.”

Emma’s “coordinator” was the face that had first appeared on her screen when she had awakened. The coordinator, who guided Emma through studies in Legal Agreements, Personal Injuries, and other topics, was the closest thing to an instructor for LLP. Although the coordinator was a lawyer, the work was only a part-time job. Everybody suspected that LLP hired coordinators less for their legal acumen and more for their speaking ability and youthful good looks (which, many felt, were in bigger supply following the boom in teenage plastic surgery in the 2010s). In fact, most law students referred to their coordinators simply as “talkers.” A competitor to LLP had already switched to computer-generated “talkers.”

“Wow, it seems strange not to have a professor,” her father said. The year before, he had asked her whether she wished to apply to either of the two remaining traditional law schools, Harvard and Stanford, which still had small online courses with only 100 students, in which instructors still knew who their students were. But Emma, like most young people, was satisfied with LLP. In fact, Emma heard that only rich kids who were worried about their own abilities sought out the two traditional schools.

Certainly, Emma’s father had one big reason to be happy about LLP: While Stanford cost \$20,000 a year (under the new dollar pegged to the yuan), the two-year LLP legal program cost only \$2,500 a year. It was this cost difference that led LLP and its two chief competitors to capture more than 95 percent of the legal education market. The cost differences had also led to the successful lobbying and litigation (some by advocates for racial minorities and the poor) in the 2010s against state bar rules that favored the old-fashioned, labor-intensive model of legal education.

Hearing a slight buzz in her ear, Emma finished up the call with her father. The buzz was a notification of the forthcoming delivery of her pizza lunch. After finishing her assessment, she went to the door as a second buzz notified her that the pizza had arrived at her apartment. She opened her door to see the familiar robot, “Parcheesi,” delivering her lunch. But she was surprised to see an older man, in a gaudy red and yellow striped pizza company uniform, standing behind the robot. “Hello,” she said, “Who are you?”

“I’m just a quality control officer,” the man said politely. “We’ve added some new software to this model and I’m just making sure that all the functions work well.”

As the robot scanned Emma’s ankle debit card, she asked idly, “So, do you like working for the pizza company?”

“It’s okay,” said the man, who noticed the LLP screen still on her wall. “Are you studying law? I used to be a tenured law professor before...well...before things changed.”

Emma exchanged a few pleasantries, closed the door, and reminded herself to ask her father, the next time she spoke with him, what the word “tenured” meant.