

## Latham's New Academy Starts Associate Training on AI

By Patrick Smith

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Seeking to get firm lawyers prepared for AI topics in the law, Latham & Watkins is rolling out an “AI Academy,” the firm announced Thursday, one of the first structured training programs in Big Law for all things AI.

The Academy is a multiprong program, the firm said, with events, educational classes and networking opportunities—both internally at the firm and externally with clients and vendors—throughout the year.

The firm will initially focus on training first through fourth-year associates, but the firm plans to roll out the training to any and all takers at Latham later on, said John Scudato, the director of artificial intelligence and innovation at Latham.

“We are fans of iterative approaches to problem-solving,” he said. “With the creation of the new program, we wanted to get folks together quickly and get a great spread across our global offices. This (first through fourth-year associates group) seems to be the right demographic to do that with.”

The firm said as the program expands, more and more attorneys, including partners, will participate.



Credit: Urupong/Adobe Stock

The program had 125 participants in its first two-day event recently, and it will grow from there, the firm said, adding they had more applicants for the training than seats.

“We had people write as to why they wanted to be there and they certainly had to apply,” said Michael Rubin, leader of the firm’s AI Task Force who also serves as the global vice chair of the technology industry group.

He also said the response from those who did attend the initial long weekend event was remarkably positive. “People were thanking me,” he said.

The training topics vary, such as how attorneys can and will use generative AI now and moving forward, as well as AI’s impact on clients and what attorneys will need to know to address their

questions. Issues such as AI regulation in various jurisdictions, such as the European Union, APAC and the U.S., are popular topics.

Rubin said that the number of attorney attendees at the first program was about 60% corporate and 40% litigation. And, while he said those attorneys may never have to know the “deep copyright questions or the deep regulatory questions” concerning AI, “contextualizing” how those issues will affect their clients is paramount.

“I have been a technology lawyer for 25 years. I have seen change after change. This [AI] is the most profound I have seen. It will alter the way we practice,” Rubin added.

### **Associate Focus**

Sources familiar with the firm’s program said Latham’s cost in the program was “significant,” given that half of the 125 attendees at the initial event were flown in from overseas and that the firm had both “internal and external subject matter experts” there as well.

The sources also said associates are given hours credit for the time they put in at training.

The idea of focusing on early career associates was due to their comparative fluency in all things tech, Rubin said.

“Part of the reason we started with years one through four was the facility of junior lawyers with technology,” he said. “And I am really excited to get that 125-person cohort out in the world, chattering about it.”

From a competition perspective, Rubin said he believes Latham’s early entry into this sort of formalized training will provide a leg up for firm attorneys as generative AI becomes more and more widespread in its use.

“The associates get a chance to speak with clients, such as the VP of legal from Meta, where

they could hear where he thought AI was headed next,” Rubin said. “And they get to get their hands dirty talking to vendors, sharing what they know and what has worked for them. It really came together seamlessly.”

### **Internal Collaboration**

The project is a collaboration between several existing groups within the firm, including its AI task force, its Training and Career Enhancement Center (TACE) and its technology industry group.

While each of these teams has been doing various aspects of training that could be considered AI training, the AI Academy was the first time the firm was able to pull those resources together into one program, Latham said.

“We have been running trainings for a while in different ways,” Scudato. “We have been doing legal trainings, AI Task Force training and sessions on generative AI. Six months ago, we thought about putting those together into one event and pulling in other resources.”

The result was the two-day training that included lectures, best practices and trainings. “Our attendees found it very compelling,” Scudato said.

Other law firms have also promoted or announced a program similar to Latham’s, including most recently Travers Smith in the U.K.

Several other firms also have begun formalized pieces of training. Orrick, Herington & Sutcliffe has been working with educational provider AltaClaro to help train its summer associate classes moving forward on generative AI. K&L Gates has also partnered with AltaClaro on generative AI, including an AI supervisory course for firm partners and managers.

*Rhys Dipshan contributed reporting to this article.*