

## Legaltech® news

# Orrick Trains Summer Associates in Prompt Engineering With New Course From AltaClaro

By Stephanie Wilkins

**A**s generative AI continues to strengthen its seemingly permanent foothold in the legal industry, prompt engineering is quickly becoming a valued skill for the future of legal practice. Considered a science by some and an art by others, prompt engineering is the exercise of creating, curating and refining inputs to a generative AI application in order to achieve the ideal output.

In recent years, successful legal practitioners have been focused on gaining competency in a number of highly desired talents that go beyond traditional legal skills, and prompt engineering is quickly moving its way up that list.

Now, one firm is helping its future attorneys master that skill.

This summer, the innovation team at Orrick, Herington & Sutcliffe worked with legal education provider AltaClaro to develop a new learning module to train its summer associate class in prompt engineering.

“We’ve been very focused on generative AI [at Orrick], and we’re sort of in the active testing phase,” Kate Orr, global head of practice innovation at Orrick, told Legaltech News. “We’re now understanding how generative AI works, what its limitations are, educating our lawyers and staff about those limitations and testing tools as they hit the



market, so that we can also be ready and be comfortable with the technology and understand how it works when the market is mature and the tools are ready. ... And one important part of generative AI that you quickly learn, if you even just go to ChatGPT and mess around with it, is prompt engineering, how important it is to ask the right questions in the right way to get the best responses.”

### **A New Approach to Gen AI Training**

AltaClaro, an experiential learning platform for lawyers, aims to deliver what Abdi Shayesteh, CEO and founder, and Julie Ryan, co-founder and chief learning officer, described as the kind of training they wish they’d had when they first came out of law school and were starting out in Big Law.

Orrick has used AltaClaro’s educational platform in the past, but this is the first training that focused on purely technical skills, rather than traditional

legal skills. “We invested in them over a year ago now, and use them to deliver different training to lawyers and summers here at the firm, including some transactional training,” Orr explained. “We were having lunch with them, just catching up, and just kind of started spitballing and brainstorming about how this idea of prompt engineering training was something we really wanted to do and wanted to develop. And the timing worked perfectly to offer it to our summers first.”

As with all AltaClaro courses, the prompt engineering training at Orrick was built on a learn-by-doing framework made up of three main components, Shayesteh explained. First, there’s up to an hour-and-a-half of short videos, ranging from seven to 10 minutes, featuring experts instructing on the topic, with assessments or quizzes along the way. Second, there’s a mock client practical component. “The goal is to get their hands dirty with a real-world assignment,” Shayesteh explained.

Finally, trainees turn in their assignments to the AltaClaro portal for a live Zoom group review session with the expert instructors to go over results, ask questions, and get a deeper explanation of the hows and whys of the assignment requirements, emulating real-world scenarios as closely as possible.

“Because I’ve been researching and using generative AI, the first thing that came to me was, there are some limitations, right, and there are some risks to using generative AI. So, we didn’t want to just do a course that said, here’s how you create a prompt, because [some specific tools] can give you tips on how to do that,” Ryan explained. “We’re not about doing that. We’re about, how do we get these lawyers to understand what generative AI is, what its capabilities are, how to use it effectively and play to its advantages, while at the same time being effective and safe?”

She added that Alta Claro’s training is platform-agnostic and aimed at allowing users to apply their learned skills on any task or in any scenario.

For Ali Cervantes Solis and Amanda Morales, rising 3Ls at Berkeley Law and Boston College Law School, respectively, and members of Orrick’s summer associate class, the final live feedback portion of the training involving actual results proved highly valuable. “One of my favorite parts was definitely the live session,” Cervantes Solis said. “I think it’s really helpful to have gone with a group of other people and see their mistakes and what they did, because there’s so many ways to do it. And there’s a different order to go about doing different things that I would have not thought of. And also just seeing where everyone made similar mistakes as I did. It was reassuring.”

Morales also enjoyed the live session, because it featured the same instructor from the recorded sessions. “It was great to ask more pointed questions and get clarification on any questions that we may have had during the actual course, and I think they just gave really good pointers,” she said. “I think when new tools emerge, it’s really easy to get frustrated that they’re not perfect as they are at this point in time. And I think something that I learned from the course that was really important was that you put a prompt in, but you might need to add more details to that prompt as the tool is generating the answers that you’re requesting. And so kind of learning how to be patient, but also efficient in the way that I am prompting these different tools was really helpful.”

Orr took the course herself and had what she called “quite a few ‘aha’ moments.” Prompt engineering “truly is an art form,” she said, “and knowing that whether you’re a lawyer or not, generative AI is going to change how we’re doing what we’re

doing, it just sort of seemed like a natural opportunity to train folks on it.”

Prompt engineering wasn't the only focus on generative AI during Orrick's summer program. The summer associates also received training on Casetext's CoCounsel, the AI legal assistant built on OpenAI's GPT-4 large language model.

Further, Morales noted that “AI, and generative AI specifically, was top of mind throughout the summer program,” and she even assisted Orrick's innovation team with delivering a presentation on generative AI in legal services to one of the firm's Fortune 500 clients. “I think that something that was important to me is that I got to learn a lot in the process of helping present and also help draft the presentation,” she said. “The audience was engaged, but ... I felt very equally engaged in the content as well. ... Seeing how rapidly these tools are advancing is very interesting to watch.”

### **Training the Future Lawyer**

After analyzing feedback from the summer associates and other firm innovation team members who also took the course, Orrick plans to work with AltaClaro to roll out the prompt engineering training to additional teams of lawyers at the firm, Orr said. “The way that we have our generative AI initiative structured right now is we have working groups in each of our business units made up of lawyers from associates to partners, and paralegals and some other professionals, and they're helping us test different generative AI tools,” Orr explained. “It's about 50 people, and so we're going to now offer the same training to those people, and

then continue to iterate on it and train more as we go and as the tool grows.”

Shayesteh said AltaClaro is currently speaking with other firms who have similar working groups and are interested in implementing similar training. “The interest is there,” he concluded. “We were having calls every day around it.”

If Orrick's summer class is any indication, prompt engineering and other generative AI training is likely to be in high demand from other law students and junior associates going forward, because they realize its potential to be a competitive differentiator. Cervantes Solis and Morales also said they saw generative AI as a turning point in the legal profession, and were happy to have been part of a summer program at a firm that was an early adopter.

“I think that it will definitely set us apart from our peers,” Morales explained. “I know I'm taking a class on contract drafting this fall. And I don't really know what the assignments are going to look like, but I'm looking forward to bringing up the fact that generative AI is the new frontier and it's something that I have experience with, and sort of giving my perspective on how we can integrate that into the class. Or if it hasn't been integrated already, how we can think about doing that.”

Cervantes Solis agreed, adding, “I'm also just very excited to come in with a new set of skills and see how it best fits in the law school setting, and also coming into the workforce as a junior associate with something that I can contribute to the team, whether that be optimizing my work or just making things a little bit faster.”