
THE COMING LAW REVIEW SHORTAGE

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Today, law reviews sit near equilibrium: roughly 5,000 annual submissions for about 5,600 placements. Tomorrow, large language models are likely to drive output toward 8,000. The result is a systemic shortage of publication placements. Peer review will not emerge; instead, journals will lean more heavily on prestige heuristics, expand symposia, experiment with limited faculty input, and adopt technological triage. The core student-edited model will endure, but scarcity could revalue publication across the hierarchy, thereby raising the floor of prestige, elevating specialties, and turning abundance into a more competitive, plural, and consequential marketplace for legal scholarship. Hiring committees, promotion reviews, and tenure evaluations may adapt by revaluing placements outside the traditional elite.

I. INTRODUCTION

Calls for reforming the law review system are not new. Since at least the 2000s, if not earlier, scholars have wondered aloud why law reviews in the United States (“U.S.”) remain student-run enterprises, insulated from peer review even as other academic disciplines tightened their publication standards.¹ The rise of law and economics sharpened the puzzle. Economists expected the same faculty-based review process that governs the *American Economic Review* or *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.² Instead, they found second-year students screening thousands of manuscripts, deciding placement in hours or days, and leaning on the prestige of the author and trendiness of the topic as proxies for scholarly merit.³

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1. See Richard A. Posner, *Law Reviews*, 46 WASHBURN L.J. 155, 156 (2006) (noting that student editing is largely a product of historical inertia: early legal scholarship was written for practitioners and could be capably edited by students, whereas today’s academically oriented work demands peer review).

2. Cf. Lawrence M. Friedman, *Law Reviews and Legal Scholarship: Some Comments*, 75 DENV. U. L. REV. 661, 661 (1998) (noting the astonishment of scholars in all fields outside of law when learning of its lack of peer review).

3. Albert H. Yoon, *Editorial Bias in Legal Academia*, 5 J. L. ANALYSIS 309, 311 (2013) (noting editorial demand for prestigious authors); Friedman, *supra* note 2, at 665 (noting editorial demand for trendy topics).

The same questions resurfaced with the emergence of empirical legal studies in the 1990s and 2000s.⁴ Sophisticated statistical work was often routed to faculty reviewers on an ad hoc basis, and some journals experimented with hybrid models involving faculty advisory boards.⁵ But these experiments rarely stuck.⁶ Faculty were ambivalent about investing scarce time in a system they did not control, while student editors were reluctant to surrender authority.⁷ Inertia at the flagships carried the day: despite four decades of pressure points, the basic structure of U.S. law reviews has barely moved.

This institutional resilience is striking. Other fields have absorbed surges in submissions through peer review. Political science's *American Political Science Review* fields over 1,500 manuscripts annually, relying on editors and referees to separate the few publishable articles from the many.⁸ Sociology's *American Sociological Review* manages roughly 650–700 submissions each year, again with faculty editors aided by peer reviewers.⁹ Law reviews, by contrast, receive thousands of submissions per flagship per cycle.¹⁰ Their survival depends on armies of student editors skimming abstracts and introductions, leaning on heuristics, and triaging largely in silence.

The newest stress test for this model comes from generative artificial intelligence. Large language models (“LLM”s) make it dramatically easier to produce article-length legal scholarship.¹¹ Drafting costs fall. Generating prose, structuring arguments, and polishing citations now take days or weeks instead of months. The natural result is a flood of new submissions. And unlike prior waves of methodological innovation in law and economics, empirical work, and interdisciplinary borrowing, the LLM surge is not limited to particular scholarly communities. It lowers the barrier to entry for everyone: faculty, adjuncts, practitioners, students, and international scholars alike.

4. Cf. Theodore Eisenberg, *The Origins, Nature, and Promise of Empirical Legal Studies and a Response to Concerns*, 2011 U. ILL. L. REV. 1713, 1733–34 (noting an increase in law faculty with advanced degrees in the 2000s, and presumably with experience publishing in peer-reviewed journals, drove demand for a peer-reviewed legal journal such as the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*). Open access journals raised similar reform questions, but the approach failed to gain traction. See Michael J. Madison, *The Idea of the Law Review: Scholarship, Prestige, and Open Access*, 10 LEWIS & CLARK L. REV. 901, 905–06 (2006).

5. See, e.g., Northwestern University Law Review, *Peer Review Board*, <https://northwesternlawreview.org/submissions/peer-review-board/> (last visited Dec. 11, 2025) [<https://perma.cc/8BP4-8B8M>].

6. Cf. Richard A. Posner, *Against the Law Reviews*, LEGAL AFFS. 57, 57–56 (Nov.–Dec. 2004) (noting that student edited journals should be placed under faculty control) [<https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/32593194>].

7. *Id.*

8. AILI MARI TRIPP & MICHELLE L. DION, AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW EDITORIAL REPORT (2023) (documenting 1,483 submissions in 2023).

9. AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW EDITORIAL REPORT (2024) (documenting 647 submissions in 2024 and 685 in 2023), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/political-science-today/article/american-political-science-review-editorial-report-executive-summary-fall-2023/CFCD95D2AF8F273A6CA9D1ABAD66BD47> [<https://perma.cc/5PDD-UR8S>].

10. See Letter from George Washington Law Review (Apr. 10, 2025) (on file with author) (noting that the Review had received over 2,500 submissions for 8 available publication slots).

11. See Kevin T. Frazier & Alan Z. Rozenstein, *Large Language Scholarship*, 20 FIU L. REV. (forthcoming 2026).

The effect could be substantial. Today, submissions and available journal slots are roughly in equilibrium, but that balance may not hold. As LLMs increase output across the scholarly pipeline, raising productivity for established scholars, mid-career academics, and aspiring professors alike, the volume of submissions is likely to grow substantially while journal capacity remains relatively fixed.¹² Tomorrow's system could be marked by persistent excess supply of what might be termed "synthetic legal scholarship," with corresponding pressure on selection, expedites, and placement norms. Absent meaningful journal expansion, the result is a coming shortage of law review placements.¹³

What happens when a system that already processes thousands of articles is asked to absorb thousands more? This Essay offers a forward-looking answer. Part I lays out the assumptions for the increase in article submission. Part II examines how law reviews might respond, not by wholesale reform, but by small adjustments: more symposia, light faculty involvement, or technological triage. Part III highlights the downstream consequences of inertia, including the likely hardening of prestige heuristics. Part IV concludes with an optimistic note: even if flagships remain unchanged, the LLM surge may revalue publication itself, expand demand for symposia, and create more opportunities in specialized and niche outlets.

II. THE SUPPLY CURVE SHIFT

To assess how large language models are likely to alter the submissions equilibrium, this Part sets out simple capacity and flow estimates. Capacity is relatively fixed in the short run. Using the Scholastica pool as the relevant market—approximately 200 flagship journals and 300 specialties—the annual number of available article slots is about 5,600. That figure aggregates flagship slots (tier-weighted across T14, T15–50, T51–100, and T101–200) and specialty slots (with heavier concentration in the T14–T50 range), and it tracks current publication practices (issues per year \times articles per issue) without assuming page-count expansion.

12. See *infra* Part II.

13. It is possible that LLMs will reduce editorial workload and enable journals to expand their available publication slots. Yet this outcome is uncertain. And even if achieved, journals remain constrained by exclusivity: the more they publish, the less valuable each publication becomes. Supposing journals expand capacity by 10% to approximately 6,500 articles, a substantial shortfall still exists.

A particularly wild scenario is one in which journals, unconcerned about potential prestige loss, radically expand their publication capacity or schools create entirely new outlets, even automated ones. For example, an automated law review for which humans set initial publication parameters, not unlike a smart contract, could sharply reduce the human effort now required for curation and editing, and in turn ease current capacity constraints. It is possible that articles produced with substantial AI assistance will become appealing primarily as material for future models, despite present concerns about synthetic data quality. Some futurists may welcome this prospect even while overlooking the continued importance of human judgment in defining the aims of synthetic legal scholarship.

TABLE 1: BASIC CAPACITY ASSUMPTIONS

	Slots/Year	Total	No. Specialty			Grand Total	
			Journals	Slots/Year	Total		
T14	20	280	T14	100	10	1,000	-
T15-50	16	576	T15-50	120	8	960	-
T51-100	14	700	T51-100	80	8	640	-
T101-200	12	1,200	T101-200	50	6	300	-
Total		2,756				2,900	5,656

These estimates are back-of-the-napkin and meant to provide a rough estimate of annual law review capacity.¹⁴ Against that capacity, the pre-LLM annual submission flow is on the order of 5,000 articles.¹⁵ That total combines approximately 3,750 articles from doctrinal tenure-track law faculty (distributed across production levels) with approximately 1,200 articles from other regular contributors such as aspiring law professors, non-law academics in law-adjacent fields, academic-minded practitioners, and international scholars. In other words, the pre-LLM system sits close to balance: capacity modestly exceeds submission flow, with tight competition at the top tiers and some slack lower down. This should be a familiar story to interested readers.

TABLE 2: BASIC FLOW ASSUMPTIONS (LAW PROFESSORS)

	Total	Pre-LLM		Post-LLM	
		Articles/Year	Total	Articles/Year	Total
Doctrinal/tenure-track law professors	5,000				
by production level:					
High	25%	1,250	2.0	2,500	3.0
Medium	50%	2,500	0.5	1,250	1.0
Low	25%	1,250	0.0	0	0.0
		5,000		3,750	6,250

TABLE 3: BASIC FLOW ASSUMPTIONS (OTHER)

	Pre-LLM			Post-LLM		
	Pre-LLM	Submissions	Total	Post-LLM	Submissions	Total
Aspiring law professors	400	1	400	400	1.5	600
Academic-minded practitioners	300	1	300	450	1	450
International scholars	250	1	250	400	1	400
Non-law professors	250	1	250	400	1	400
Total			1,200			1,850

Post-LLM, the submission flow increases markedly. The central change on the intensive margin occurs among the most active cohorts. Top performers are likely to increase their output from about two articles per year to about three, while medium performers move from one article every two years to one article

14. Admittedly, a more precise estimate could be developed with access to Scholastica data or by observing the number of publication slots for each journal listed on Scholastica averaged over a period of years. If the rough capacity estimate here seems too low, one consolation is that the number of submitted articles could far exceed 5,000 in the post-LLM era. Even if one increases the capacity assumption by 40% to 7,000 slots, a shortfall still looms.

15. A more precise estimate could, of course, be developed with granular data from Scholastica. I wrote to request access to that data, but Scholastica declined to share it.

annually, and the least active faculty will likely continue to publish rarely, if at all. Aspiring professors, who already submit aggressively, are also expected to raise their contributions—from roughly one to about one and a half articles per year. On the extensive margin, participation rises among groups for whom LLMs reduce barriers to entry (notably non-law academics and international scholars), even if their per-capita output remains near one article per active author.

Quantitatively, these shifts move the doctrinal law-faculty total from an estimated 3,750 articles pre-LLM to 6,250 articles post-LLM, reflecting the higher output of the most productive scholars and an increase in the output of the average scholar. Among non-law contributors, the total moves from 1,200 to 1,850, with the increase driven mainly by a larger number of participants rather than higher per-author output. Taken together, the annual flow thus rises from approximately 5,000 to 8,000 articles—an outward shift in supply of roughly 3,000 articles against a capacity that remains at approximately 5,600. Put differently, the system moves from near balance to an excess demand for placements of about 3,000 articles per year.

The same conclusion holds, even if more modestly, under a conservative estimate that excludes practitioners, international scholars, and non-law academics altogether. Considering only doctrinal faculty and aspiring professors, the total still rises from approximately 4,150 to 6,850 articles annually. Against the same 5,600 slots, that conservative scenario already produces a shortfall of approximately 1,000 placements per year. In either framing, the central empirical point is the same: with capacity sticky and flow increasing, selection pressures intensify.

These are, of course, estimates, and they are intentionally stylized. They do not assume editorial expansion (e.g., more issues or longer issues), nor do they assume systemic adoption of peer review or faculty screening that might dampen the submission flow by raising pre-submission costs. They also treat specialty journals as a single aggregated category, though in practice the distribution of added flow will vary by subject area. But as a first pass, the arithmetic clarifies the institutional stakes. If LLMs make it easier to produce a publishable draft, and if the student-edited model remains otherwise unchanged, then the submissions market moves decisively from tight equilibrium to persistent excess supply. The remainder of the Essay takes that condition as given and asks how law reviews are likely to respond, and with what consequences for placement, prestige, and the value of publication.

III. PESSIMISM AND OPTIMISM

The most immediate and predictable reaction to oversupply is entrenchment. Student editors already lean heavily on prestige heuristics: author affiliation, prior placements, and visible markers of authority.¹⁶ Facing a still larger pool of submissions, editors will not suddenly invest more time in careful review;

16. Yoon, *supra* note 3, at 310.

their incentives push the other way. Editorial deadlines are fixed, boards turn over annually, and the reputational cost of rejecting a hidden gem is borne by no one in particular. The path of least resistance is to screen more aggressively by visible signals.

The consequences are straightforward. Authors at lower-ranked schools will struggle even more to be noticed. Scholars outside law, whether in business, political science, or economics, will be filtered for their ability to mimic disciplinary conventions familiar to student eyes. Subfields already perceived as peripheral such as family law, tax, state and local government, risk further marginalization. The system, in this account, evolves toward greater concentration: the same topics, the same institutions, the same names. Winner-takes-most becomes winner-takes-all.

Yet scarcity can also change perceptions of value. When every journal receives hundreds or thousands of submissions, publication anywhere becomes harder to secure and therefore more valuable. The act of placing an article, even in a mid-ranked flagship or specialty, signals quality in ways that hiring and tenure committees may learn to recognize. Over time, this can elevate overlooked venues, particularly those that build clear reputations. A technology law review that reliably publishes rigorous work will command greater respect once placement there reflects scarcity rather than fallback.¹⁷

So while entrenchment and a hardening of existing practices is certainly possible, there is room for optimistic pluralism: oversupply could spread prestige more broadly. While the top may harden, the middle can rise, and the periphery can sharpen its identity. The glut forces recognition that valuable scholarship happens outside the narrowest channels, potentially revaluing the entire ecosystem.

In addition to systemic revaluation, additional quality filters could emerge. Symposia are an obvious adaptation. They let journals outsource screening to faculty organizers, reducing the flood of unsolicited submissions to a curated set of contributions.¹⁸ A skeptical view might see this as tightening the prestige loop, with invitations circulating among familiar networks. On the other hand, symposia can also open doors. They can be designed to spotlight emerging scholars, interdisciplinary collaborations, and neglected fields. Because the stakes of a symposium are different insofar as they are anchored in a theme, and oriented around dialogue, faculty organizers can include scholars that might not prevail in blind competition.¹⁹ Journals, meanwhile, gain new capacity without abandoning their student-edited model.

17. This pattern can be seen in a handful of specialties today such as the *Yale Journal on Regulation* and the *Berkley Technology Law Journal*. The point is that more like these could emerge.

18. See Judy Stinson, *The Pros of Regional Legal Writing Conferences*, ASS'N OF AM. L. SCHS. SECTION ON L. WRITING, REASONING, & RSCH. NEWSL. (Spring 2004).

19. See Global Conference, *What is the Difference Between Symposium Paper and Conference Paper*, GLOB. CONF. ALL. (May 9, 2024), <https://globalconference.ca/what-is-the-difference-between-symposium-paper-and-conference-paper> [https://perma.cc/897S-Z3ZX].

At their best, symposia blend the virtues of curation and openness. They preserve student authority over production and framing, but they inject faculty expertise into selection. They create publication pipelines that are timely, thematic, and often more porous than the general submission cycle. In an era of oversupply, their increased use may prove one of the most constructive adaptations.

Another likely adaptation to oversupply is the use of automated tools to assist in screening.²⁰ Here the risks are evident. If classifiers are trained on past placements or instructed to mirror familiar editorial criteria, they may replicate existing biases by privileging conventional topics, well-known names, and stylistic conformity.²¹ Worse, the opacity of algorithmic sorting can obscure responsibility. When manuscripts are filtered out by software, editors may present rejection as a neutral technical fact rather than a discretionary choice. Such practices would not alleviate concerns about exclusion; they would disguise them.

Yet the same tools can be used quite differently. Automated classification can ensure that manuscripts in less obvious fields such as tax, municipal governance, and comparative law, are at least routed to the right editorial team.²² Summarization engines can surface contributions that student editors might miss in a hurried skim. Shared triage platforms across journals could reduce duplication and expand the range of articles receiving serious consideration. The decisive question is design: whether technology will be employed to narrow the aperture of attention or to widen it. Properly deployed, even modest automation could help journals see more of the field, not less, while preserving student discretion over ultimate decisions.²³

Another adjustment is the reintroduction of faculty involvement at the margins of selection.²⁴ Student-edited journals have experimented with faculty involvement before.²⁵ Advisory boards, expert readers, and faculty “consultants” have all been tried in various guises, usually with the aim of bringing subject-matter expertise to bear on manuscripts that student editors feel unprepared to evaluate.²⁶ Yet these arrangements have rarely taken hold.²⁷ Advisory boards often exist on paper but are seldom consulted; even when engaged, they tend to fade quickly as student boards rotate.²⁸ Wholesale adoption of faculty oversight has never materialized, largely because it runs against the defining feature of the

20. See Frazier & Rozhenstein, *supra* note 11, at *33–34 (forthcoming 2026) (noting the possibility).

21. Brenda M. Simon, *Using Artificial Intelligence in the Law Review Submissions Process*, 56 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 347, 387–91 (2022) (noting the possibility).

22. See *id.* at 373 (noting limited editorial knowledge in obscure areas can be overcome with the help of language models).

23. *Id.* at 369 (noting the potential for wider vision).

24. Frazier & Rozhenstein, *supra* note 11 at *35 (noting that if AI emerges as a substitute for doctrinal analysis, legal scholarship will lean more academic, driving editorial board demand for faculty input).

25. *Peer Review Board*, *supra* note 5 and accompanying text.

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

28. *Id.*

student-edited model: the preservation of editorial authority by students themselves.

Oversupply could make renewed experimentation more appealing. A small group of faculty readers or outside peers tasked with reviewing empirical submissions, interdisciplinary manuscripts, or articles flagged by technological triage would help journals manage volume and quality simultaneously. Faculty involvement of this sort provides journals with reputational benefits and gives faculty a limited but real chance to influence the direction of scholarship in their fields.²⁹

Still, the most likely outcome is incrementalism rather than transformation. A handful of journals may make meaningful use of advisory input, particularly those with strong institutional support. But across the system, the effect will remain marginal. The fundamental commitment to student control, combined with the perennial limits on faculty time, make it improbable that faculty advisory models will ever be adopted wholesale.³⁰ At best, they will function as a modest supplement, not a structural overhaul.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF SCARCITY

The LLM surge reframes an old question. For decades, critics have asked whether law reviews could withstand mounting pressures for reform. The answer, again, appears to be yes. Student editors will lean more heavily on prestige heuristics; symposia will multiply as controlled outlets; automation will be enlisted to manage flow; and faculty will be asked, sparingly, to lend expertise. None of these adjustments amounts to wholesale reform. All are continuous with existing practices. The deeper lesson is that the resilience of law reviews is structural. The practices already in place are likely to persist, only in intensified form.

This resilience, however, carries systemic consequences. Oversupply alters not only editorial processes but also the meaning of publication itself. When placement is harder to secure, it signals more than before. Even if the top journals preserve their exclusivity, the value of publication in mid-tier flagships and top specialties rises. What once looked like fallback begins to look like accomplishment. Scarcity, in this way, does not only concentrate prestige at the top, it also raises the floor beneath it.

The effect extends to the intellectual landscape. Scarcity creates incentives for journals to differentiate themselves more sharply by subject matter, method, or perspective. Specialties that define clear domains such as regulation, civil rights, environmental law, bioethics, and comparative law, are likely to consolidate into stronger hubs, becoming quasi-flagships in their areas. The result is a more textured map of legal scholarship that is still hierarchical, but increasingly pluralistic, with multiple points of authority.

29. Natalie C. Cotton, Comment, *The Competence of Students as Editors of Law Reviews: A Response to Judge Posner*, 154 U. PA. L. REV. 951, 959 (2006).

30. See generally Friedman *supra* note 2.

Technology, too, becomes both source and response. LLMs create the flood but also supply the tools to manage it with systems for automated classification, summarization, and even the prospect of a single-point editorial system serving multiple boards. Whether these tools narrow or broaden attention will depend less on their novelty than on their design. Used to replicate past practice, they may harden existing biases; used to extend capacity, they may surface work that would otherwise be lost in the deluge.

In this sense, the law review system is entering a phase of intensified continuity. The core structure of student control, limited faculty input, and prestige-driven selection remains intact. What changes is the pressure exerted by scarcity, which revalues publication, sharpens differentiation, and accelerates the stratification already underway. The story of the LLM era is not one of radical break, but of the existing system absorbing a shock and emerging more plural, more competitive, and, in the absence of journal expansion, defined above all by a coming shortage of law review publication placements.