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Abstract

Nicola Wakefield and Emily Allbon are academic Law Librarians. In this paper they offer their thoughts of the future that all academic law librarians may face as we move further into the 21st Century. They look at the key issues that may face them in the future and examine possibilities for the future role of law librarians, examining how changes in technology, library spaces, study habits and the pressures of time and funding could affect us as a profession.

Biography

Nicola Wakefield is the Law Librarian at the University of Salford. Having worked in academic law libraries for eight years she has spent the last eighteen months designing, creating and opening a law library to support the newly created University of Salford Law School.

Emily Allbon has been Law Librarian at City University since 2000. She is the creator of www.lawbore.net and was named the *Best Legal Information Professional in an Academic Environment* late in 2005 (Biall/Lexis Nexis Awards for Excellence).

Word Count

3,521

Title

Can we remain a part of the university 'learning experience' in such a bite-sized, social, flexible, competitive and high spec future?

Introduction

All academic libraries experienced changes at the start of the 21st Century. Advances in technology, cuts to funding, changes to student demographics and the seemingly endless supply of information is leaving many of us feeling bewildered as we try to keep up. We are busy dealing with budgets, stock, teaching, administration and enquiries but there is the increasing pressure to enhance our students' learning experience. Where does this leave law libraries and librarians of the future? Will there be a need for us with the advent of Google, Web 2.0 technologies and the reams of electronic information, which mean some students never set foot into our libraries.

Berring (2005) states that the "soul of law libraries consists of law librarians[1]". If this is true, then what will our future role be? What do these developments in technology mean for us in our working lives? What impact will this have on our teaching, our role as guardians of legal information, our budget and our library spaces? Alas we have no crystal ball to predict exactly what will happen over the next few years but in this article we attempt to envisage some answers to these questions.

The future for legal skills training

With the growing popularity of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), it is no longer necessary for small groups of students to gather in one room to receive legal research training. Training can be delivered online using tutorials, interactive guides and practical exercises. For us as law librarians, it means we can prepare our teaching materials in advance, during the quieter times of year and then release them to our students when needed. We no longer have to deliver the same teaching session repeatedly which can often be de-motivating and lead to low job satisfaction.

Although virtual training is increasing there are concerns that students are isolated without face-to-face interaction with librarians, academic staff or their fellow students. Despite its online nature, students are often still bound to a physical training room when participating in an introductory session to get them started with a module.

With the advent of live classroom technology, teaching sessions of the future can be removed completely from the confines of a physical library or computer suite. "*Live Classroom software provides a virtual classroom with audio, video, application sharing and content display, allowing instructors to demonstrate resources and encourage interaction*" (Hunt, Smart 2007[2]). Using live classroom technology combines online training with human interaction. The librarian led training enables students to immediately apply skills and learning. Sessions can be run at any place or time convenient to the student or librarian, and staff and students can attend the training remotely. As training is asynchronous separate face-to-face introductory sessions are not needed.

Future teaching methods could also include the use of mobile phone technology. Stuart Smith at MIMAS, University of Manchester, delivers training materials for hairdressing students via their mobile phones[3]. Will law librarians soon be delivering bite-sized training in legal citations via a mobile phone? If we do decide to embrace these new technologies we will have to work closely with our students to identify how best to use them and how they would benefit from the new training methods.

There is no doubt that our skills will need to develop to exploit these emerging technologies effectively. Time will be needed to identify the best technology and to adapt our current training methods. Cost will be an important factor. Most libraries are experiencing raising resource costs and lower budgets which may restrict purchases of new technologies and our ability to fund training.

New technology will put time and budgetary pressures on all librarians. This would be eased by sharing training materials. The success of Informs[4] and the rapid growth of learning material repositories such as Jorum[5] highlights that librarians are willing to, and do benefit, from sharing training materials between themselves. Since its launch in 2006, Jorum has attracted over 403 members who have downloaded over 8,000 learning objects for reuse in their own organisations. In similar projects the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded £3.3 million to the London Metropolitan, Cambridge and Nottingham Universities to create a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). The CETL is developing reusable learning objects (RLOs) to be shared between the academic community to enhance the learning experience of students and achieve educational impact.

Lawbore's new skills area, Learnmore[6], offers tutorials written to help students with mooting and legal research, and is available freely to all. Learnmore has been created using MediaWiki[7] and the talking slide shows using Articulate Presenter[8] and Adobe Captivate[9]. Software packages like these enable users with limited technical expertise to create very polished learning objects, and no doubt the coming years will bring ever more advanced programmes.

Higher Education Academy subject centres, such as the Subject Centre for Information and Computing Science, have funded smaller projects such as the development of RLOs for law librarianship[10]. These schemes have bought some of our training materials from behind the closed doors of a University's VLE. Development of RLOs is on the increase and demands on technology, budget and skills development will intensify in the future. Sharing materials between law librarians may be the most effective way to cope with developing high-tech teaching materials to retain and meeting student expectations. Sharing resources would create a vibrant culture of collaboration between librarians. We can learn from each other and our students would benefit from the good work that is produced as a result.

We are all aware of the research that shows our attention spans are getting shorter (BBC 2007[11]); many say it lasts roughly the time between advert breaks in the average television programme! Students want their learning to

happen in bite-size chunks rather than long drawn-out lectures and as entertainment is key we must spend time creating highly visual, fun resources which can be viewed (and indeed revisited) whenever required. As the courses become increasingly intensive, with more people studying flexibly, cramming it in alongside employment, more support needs to go online. As competition between law schools increases, each strives to make themselves distinguishable from the rest, and its online offering is one area many are looking to, for that all important edge.

It may become commonplace for law librarians to pursue professional teaching qualifications to compliment their existing knowledge in librarianship or the law field. As information literacy becomes a bigger issue for Universities it only gives us more ammunition to strive for a strong presence within the curriculum, integrated rather than an add-on.

Changes to library spaces

Moncrieff (2007) argues that the *"major challenge for libraries is to rethink their services and facilities in light of the fact that many clients rarely visit them physically[12]"*.

With this in mind I (NW) considered how I researched this article. Did I visit the library to find relevant articles? I didn't. I worked at my desk and searched electronic databases for information, using SFX linking technology to access full text articles not available within the database I was using. All but two of the articles I needed were available online. For the two other articles, I submitted an electronic inter-library loan request and waited for the documents to arrive by email.

In the past seven years we have seen the format of material delivery changing. Electronic databases store hundreds of volumes of case law, archives of legislation and reams of government publications. Electronic journals have widened the availability of articles and publishers are digitising some legal textbooks. In the future legal textbooks may be downloadable from the library catalogue straight to mobile phone, media device or book reader[13].

The popularity of online back catalogues of archived journals and legal information such as those available through JSTOR[14] and Public Information Online[15] has freed up metres of shelving space. Academic libraries across the UK are pursuing digitisation projects to reduce space-consuming print materials and SFX linking capabilities are creating 'one stop shops' of information for users. In order to ensure our students benefit we will have to work hard to make our virtual library environments accessible and as simple and effective as Google. Pursuing single sign-on to all library systems and ensuring our users use our resources is a priority.

Law students rely heavily on electronic primary source materials which has an impact on the physical space of our libraries. Students of the future will demand more group work space, access to technology and physical law library environments which facilitate their learning styles rather then shelves of

printed materials. Ideally, future students will also be able to access high quality electronic secondary resources to support their learning. Our future law libraries will look different then a 'traditional law library' with less material on the shelves and more technology and study zones. For law libraries to continue to remain at the heart of a law school we will have to offer quick access to carefully selected resources that meet our student needs, as well as equip students with the skills to enable them to navigate the wealth of information available.

Our role as communicators

Everyone's talking about Web 2.0. Debates have been ringing out across the land (well on LIS-LINK anyway…) regarding the extent librarians should be getting involved in such frivolity.

I (EA) was on maternity leave from September 2006 until April 2007 and I felt totally overwhelmed when I came back to work – the legal information world really *was* a different place. Before I left I had been playing with wikis for Lawbore Learnmore. Suddenly though, everyone was talking about blogging (or scarier, actually doing it), Second Life, social networking, YouTube… Something was clear; I had a lot of catching up to do.

Communication is a key part of our role as academic law librarians; whether this be with our students, academics, legal publishers or colleagues, and it might be said that it is this liaison element which ensures we have a place in law schools now, and always will have. As a profession we need to reach out and create opportunities wherever possible. Gone are the days when we could hide away amongst the dusty bookshelves, people might well be sprinting away from us in the future as we will be coming at them from so many directions! Didn't I mention that we will have the technology to clone ourselves? (If only…sigh…)

Many of the applications we talk about now are still in their infancy. As with anything new, there are a few trailblazers out there, and the rest of us are mulling over whether to get involved or not. Take the blog; there are a number of big bloggers in UK legal information, not many from the academic field though. I think the stumbling block for most is: Where would I find the time? What would I write about? Would anyone read it? Will blogs become bigger? Certainly they have the potential to; being a great format to get a message 'out there', they make good reading because of the diary-like format. Within academia they work well as a current awareness tool for librarians to get news to their users.

The issues for academia are as always – getting the balance right. We want to get to our users but not irritate them. We want to talk to them but not to make it look like we're trying to be like them. Social networking offers us lots of challenges - as to how we meet student expectations but without overstepping the mark (Phipps & White: 2007[16]). The Guardian Online (Hoare: 2007)[17] quotes the findings from the JISC Learner Experience Project as

"Their (the students) message to the trendy academics is: "Get out of MySpace!" It's very tempting to try and 'get down with the kids' but if law librarians are to have any kind of future, we need to recognise we can't do this. I can just about remember what it was like to be 18, but being 18 in 1995 was very different to being 18 in 2008, on Lawbore I take care not to get carried away and pretend to be 'cool'.

Sites like Facebook, Bebo and MySpace are only going to get bigger; it is only a matter of time before a support group for Facebook addicts begins. So how will law libraries be using them in the future? As with most Web 2.0 applications the key concepts are interaction, sharing, common interests, and forming communities. Rather than gatecrashing, the emphasis should be on allowing students to join our groups, offering them a unique way of communicating which isn't tied to the university public face. We can use it to get extremely valuable feedback – although universities need to be aware this will be no holds barred (…if you want to play with the big boys…) The content can be partially generated by users, potential that in the future you can have facebook groups dedicated to specific modules – with discussions on texts read, what was good/bad about them, what websites are worth using.

With 200 million users on MySpace, 53 million on Facebook, 75 million blogs, 5 million articles in Wikipedia, 100 million videos seen on YouTube every day and 2 billion pictures on Flickr (Kroski: 2007[18]) – we've got to get a piece of that. These are ideal promotional tools –acting as an extension of library website, but in a way we can be less stuffy.

So what about other Web 2.0 tools? Wikis are certain to gain in popularity – in our context they give us an easy way of creating web content, without needing to know html. It means that anyone can have a go. Wikis are used popularly for subject guides and for knowledge management on the cheap.

YouTube has been used by many libraries already as a platform for their 'Introduction to the Library' and it offers a way of 'lightening up' an offering which can be a bit…well…dull. One thing is certain for the future, it's that libraries must think about the information they're trying to get across in different ways for different users. Something aimed at undergraduates would be very different to what a postgraduate might expect. YouTube is also ideal for 'How to…' videos.

Social bookmarking like del.icio.us[19] is the perfect way of building support pages for your academic liaison role; build up sets of source materials for students, adding commentary using a linklog. You can even open the pages to a group of people, making a shared space for students to edit or add their own recommendations.

RSS feeds together with an aggregator like Google Reader[20] are hugely popular now, and in the future our current awareness limitations are only going to increase. Users sign up to something interesting which then automatically feeds into a personal page so they don't have to keep checking

multiple sites. Great for libraries as it's an easy way for students to be kept informed, without being bombarded.

Second Life is a virtual world – I didn't really know a lot about this before writing the article – mainly because it seems just one nerd step too far. I gleaned a lot of information from Cathal McCauley (McCauley: 2007[21]) - apparently there are 10 million users of SL, with the Gartner Group[22] predicting 80% of active internet users will have a 'second life' by 2011. Second Life is used by many universities as a promotional tool and to teach real classes to students. Libraries use it to offer reference services, book discussion groups, training and networking. Like the other Web 2.0 products mentioned, it's another way to reach people, and in particular the gaming community who would find a home from home here.

Guardians of information?

Our role as guardians of information will get more extensive. For many years we have led the way in evaluating, assessing and presenting only quality resources, guiding our students to the best sites. The biggest of these is of course Intute[23] (formerly SOSIG) where resources are all selected by librarians expert in their field. Other sites do this on a much smaller scale (like the Directory in Lawbore.[24]Ruth Bird makes a number of what she terms 'generalisations' about the Google Generation; amongst these is the perception that 'online information is free, and a lack of understanding of the nature of provenance or authority of free sources' (Bird: 2007[25]). Yes, the students of today are expert at using many facets of the web, but there are gaping holes when it comes to understanding the results displayed on screen. Academics continue to be amazed by the kind of sources which are used as authority in coursework, as well as the ignorance students show by plagiarising the work of others.

I didn't attend this year's Online Information conference but kept an eye on blogs to hear about the big issues. The *Library etc*[26] blog reports on Day 2 (5th Dec) on the research of Dr Ian Rowlands, a former professor at City but now at SLAIS, UCL. He spoke about his research into the Google Generation which seemed to expose today's teenagers as not being the intuitive searchers we are encouraged to think they are, rather that their 'conceptions of the web were essentially "horizontal", insofar as they saw the internet as basically Google and all the stuff "contained" by Google'. This suggests strongly that we still have a key role to play in our teaching.

Deep linking is another thorny area; it is an increasing expectation of students, and academics to a lesser degree, that librarians should provide deep links to cases, sections of acts and journal articles on reading lists (Bird: 2007[27]). Students obviously love this provision as it gives them more time to actually study the materials (without that pesky searching around in the library/on databases), but they are completely lost as independent researchers. If this trend continues will our law students be disadvantaged at training contract/pupillage stage?

What about the budget?

All academic law librarians will have to cope with financial pressures to accommodate the following:

- Advances in technologies
- Improvements to library systems
- Refurbishment of library spaces to meet the user needs and to facilitate future students learning
- Training
- Purchasing and creation of electronic information

All universities are experiencing rapid change and we, as law librarians must find our place within a higher education environment that is fast becoming a place dominated by business principles. As students are now paying customers, management styles are changing to reflect the need for high productivity and low overheads. We will need to demonstrate the added value that our skills and knowledge bring to the student experience in supporting the teaching and learning needs of our law schools, justifying our role as commercial law firms already do.

Tara Brabazon (2007) describes librarians as the *"Jedi Knights of the modern age... like the Jedi, librarians have also been under threat from an evil empire – in this case, capitalism, as schools and universities reduce the budgets for books and staff"[28]*. My own organisation has asked all subject librarians to quantify their roles, recording how much time is spent performing tasks and how developing library support materials, e-learning tutorials and delivering teaching to students is benefiting our student population. With a future that demands a high level of investment, all academic law libraries will need to report to central university bodies to ensure we (and our libraries) remain central to our law schools and can secure necessary funding. Law librarians will have to focus on being business savvy in order to state clear and professional cases for services and resources as competition for university funds becomes more challenging.

Conclusions

So what are we facing in the future? Germain (2005) states that "librarians must keep pace with the breakneck speed of emerging technologies and adjust to the new research needs and information use behaviours of students, faculty, judges and lawyers[29]". We believe that the future is about law librarians focusing on delivering a personalised service to our customers, embracing and utilising a wide range of methods to reach all our users. We will have to be flexible to experiment with new mediums.

Our prospects as academic law librarians are looking very good. No other profession can navigate through the range of resources and assess the quality of information like we can. Never has there been more opportunity for communicating with our customers via tailored services for individuals. We have to remember that although future students will be familiar with advanced technology they still don't know everything about using what information they find and will need us to help guide them through the masses of sources available to them. Our key challenges will be funding issues and undertaking our new business role as we state our cases for advancement and change.

Frederick Kilgour offered this advice to librarians in 1972 and it still holds firm today, "To continue to be vital to society, libraries must adopt new objectives. In particular, they must strive to participate with individuals in their cultural activities; passive, depersonalized service is no longer enough[30]."

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