

The UW Law Library: Visions of the 90s

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As we head into the 90's, prospects have never been better for using the UW Law Library's resources in creative, innovative ways. A notable feature of the library we envision will be the integrated access it offers to material held in all formats (print, online, and cd-rom). Imagine this scenario . . .

A user enters the library and checks out a laptop computer at the circulation desk. He then goes to an area of the collection he is doing research in, for example the government documents collection on the third floor. He finds an electronic study carrel and plugs his computer into a data outlet. This brings up a menu, likely to include: 1) an automated library catalog plus access to other online systems providing serials, acquisitions, and circulation information; 2) word processing; 3) various cd-rom services like Infotrac, Index to Legal periodicals, and Martindale-Hubbell; 4) gateway access to LEXIS, NEXIS and WESTLAW; 5) and other software choices, such as the Law School's electronic mail system.

Searching the university's online catalog, Network Library System (NLS), the user finds items from the government document collection and begins taking notes on the word processing software off the network. He discovers the need to cite check some cases and to do so, accesses LEXIS. Online cite checking leads to other related research so the user signs off and heads to the fifth floor periodical collection where he finds a convenient carrel and resumes his research. Once he has completed his use of print sources, he leaves the library and continues working at home, dialing the library's local area network. He then sends his completed project to a faculty member via electronic mail.

This scenario illustrates the transformation of legal research. Technology—the electronic storage, selection and transmission of information—will make it possible for the UW Law Library to become a library without walls in this decade. What is the library now doing to move toward this goal?

One of the biggest problems we face is accommodating all the new technology



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in our current space configuration. The Law School building addition addresses these concerns, but realistically it could be six years before remodeling efforts are underway. In the meantime, rewiring the library for electronic study carrels and the local area network, compact shelving to better utilize existing space, new carpeting, a redesigned library entrance and security system, and renovation of the student computer lab are projects budgeted for 1990-1991.

Work must continue on completely automating the library's technical service operations. This means that all library catalog records will be converted to machine readable format and that all of the major processes associated with ordering, cataloging and circulating materials will be tied to a single database. Having this system in place will be the cornerstone for improving access to the collection and will also be essential for interlibrary cooperation. The library will increasingly serve its users through a sophisticated network of libraries which promote resource sharing; it will not be necessary for every library to own what can be accessed elsewhere.

As a result of interlibrary cooperation, print collections will be more focused and specialized. We envision a library with collections which are consistently

good for all areas of United States and international law and nationally known research level collections in subject areas of particular interest to this law school.

Another new initiative for the UW Law Library is the development of an outreach program. Beginning this summer, the library will market fee-based services, will include document delivery, telefacsimile transmission, interlibrary loan, and legal research using online and cd-rom based systems. The UW Law Library will also work with other campus libraries in developing a "business information network" to better support the university's public service mission. This outreach program will make the extensive resources and expertise of the UW Law Library available to users throughout the state and has exciting potential.

As we head into the 90's, the UW Law Library is standing at a crossroads in its distinguished history. The mission of the library remains the same: to serve the legal research needs of the students and faculty of the law school and to support the legal research needs of our alumni, the legal community and the citizens of Wisconsin. However, in an era where every individual is information dependent, the library must re-tool for a new age to help the Law School maintain its national reputation for excellence.