

## UB Law Forum

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Volume 12  
Number 1 *Spring 1999*

Article 6

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4-1-1999

### Click Here: Technology Transforms Teaching

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#### Recommended Citation

Boyer, Barry B. (1999) "Click Here: Technology Transforms Teaching," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 12 : No. 1 , Article 6.

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*Technology  
transforms  
teaching*

# Click Here

BY PROFESSOR BARRY B. BOYER

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**W**hen preparing to draft a complex estate plan, would a lawyer do better to begin researching with Hieros

Gamos, Lawcrawler, or a meta search engine like Dogpile? Or would a proprietary database like LEXIS or Westlaw be more cost-effective?

Is it ethical for a lawyer to offer free advice on her Web site as a way of attracting potential clients? Is it effective?

Does a competent trial lawyer need to know how to use an evidence visualizer, a light pen highlighter, and computer animations to re-create a disputed event?

Would it be malpractice for a lawyer to fail to download a free GIS plot from EPA's data warehouse showing hazardous waste sites near a piece of property his client was planning to purchase?

Those of us who entered the legal profession in the days before computers ruled the earth never had to worry about questions like these. Books and yellow legal pads were all we knew, and all we needed to know. But for today's law students, the ability to perform competently in the electronic environment may mean the difference between professional success and failure. Berkeley Professor Robert Berring, an astute observer of the changing world of legal information, dismisses those familiar treatises and case reporters that fill the shelves in our

offices and conference rooms as "a dying information paradigm in the most computerized discipline in the world." Law practice, and law teaching, are changing almost as rapidly as the new generations of computers. What does this growing importance of "IT," as information technology has come to be known, mean for UB Law School?

It is already impossible to be in the first rank of American law schools without a strong technology program, and therefore UB Law has made the commitment to become a major player in the new electronic legal world. To reach this level, we are making a massive investment in our technology infrastructure, undertaking a progressive restructuring of the curriculum to include more applications of computers, and seeing more faculty and student interest focused on the ways that technology is changing the teaching, learning and practice of law.

The key to getting the necessary infrastructure in place was a \$1.8 million state appropriation, which we were able to secure through the efforts of the UB Law Alumni Association and former Attorney General Dennis C. Vacco '78. Those funds, along with private donations and funds generated by a student technology fee, have made it possible for the Law School to embark on a multi-year program of upgrading O'Brian Hall to support more effective learning with technology. Some elements of this program are already in place:

- The student labs in O'Brian Hall were rewired over the summer, and filled with new computers. In addition, two student labs next door in Baldy Hall were also upgraded with new Mac and PC machines, and high-quality projection equipment for teaching.

- Wiring 24 student carrels and five conference rooms with "plug-in ports" expanded the "laptop zone" in the Law Library. Now, laptop users can connect their computers to the Internet and the legal databases from inside the library. The library's Koren Center also added six new PC workstations and two more plug-in ports for student access, and acquired a new digital video camera to support use of on-line videos in Law School Web sites.

- The body of legal research materials distributed in CD-ROM format has been growing rapidly, and managing these materials has been a problem for law librarians everywhere. To make CD-ROM materials more convenient and accessible, the Law Library has added four NT workstations dedicated to CD-ROM products, and is creating four additional stations during the current academic year. Fourteen new Sun workstations have been installed in the Law Library to provide better access to digital information.

- The University libraries have added

"cybraries," with expanded IT facilities and digital materials.

Along with the rest of the University, law students will benefit from the additional access to information technology. Lockwood Library, for example, is offering 24-hour access to PC workstations and laptop plug-ins.

Beyond the current academic year, bigger changes are coming. The Moot Court Room, which has taken on a sadly run-down appearance after being used for years as an undergraduate classroom, will be remodeled as a state-of-the-art electronic courtroom, which will be used both by students and by local courts. A fully electronic conferencing facility, with features such as "smart board" projection technology, will be installed to host the many conferences, symposia and meetings held at the Law School. And many more O'Brian Hall classrooms will be re-designed and re-wired to become "technology-friendly."

How will all of this new equipment affect the courses that law students take? Nationally, it appears that content is lagging behind the fancy new delivery systems: much of what is being distributed digitally is the same text presented in the same fashion as the traditional casebooks law students have studied for generations. However, it would be wrong to conclude that

computerized law teaching is just old wine in high-tech bottles; the signs of more fundamental change are beginning to appear.

Both LEXIS and Westlaw are offering inexpensive systems for professors to create teaching materials on Web sites, with easy connections to the legal databases and the Internet. Web-based "threaded discussion boards" and e-mail listservs are becoming standard ways of extending the classroom dialogue into cyberspace. Even the Harvard

Law School, usually a bastion of pedagogical conservatism, recently unveiled the beta version of its Bridge Program, a set of multimedia, Internet-based teaching materials designed to enrich and complement the basic first-year law courses.

UB Law's faculty members also are actively experimenting with the new technology, finding ways to integrate traditional legal analysis with the Internet's powerful, instantaneous global access to a new universe of information. In recent semesters, students in the Law School have had the opportunity to take many courses enriched by technology, including:

- **A Criminal Law course created by Professor Markus Dubber.** Based on a Web site, students can make side-by-side comparisons of similar criminal code provisions from different states and from foreign countries.

- **A Property 2 course taught by Professor Robert I. Reis.** Web-based flow charts of real estate transactions are hyperlinked to cases, statutes, forms and Web sites relevant to that part of the transaction.

- **A Computer Law and Policy course developed by practitioner Howard Meyer.** Students hear from practicing lawyers how they use IT, and then develop their own research projects and post their papers on the Web.

- **An interdisciplinary clinic in Securities taught by Clinical Instructor Cheryl C. Nichols of the Law School and Associate Professor Joseph Ogden of the School of Management.** Students arbitrate and mediate disputes over securities transactions, using the course Web site to distribute forms for the clinic students to fill out, and to link the students with on-line resources such as the Securities and Exchange Commission Web site.

- **A semester-long package of three one-credit, hands-on courses covering Legal Research on the Internet, Marketing Legal Services on the Internet, and Presentation Graphics for Lawyers.** Professor Barry B. Boyer, Electronic Services Librarian Susan L. Dow, Associate Dean for Legal Information Services Ellen M. Gibson, and Steven J. Sturman '97 (who now works in the University tech support office serving the Law School), teach the courses in the computer lab.

What's the pedagogical payoff for "going digital" in the law classroom? Professor Robert I. Reis, who has been working with computers for more than 20 years, sees two principal advantages: "It opens doors for us to pursue context through real data rather than just through hypotheticals, and it lets us peer into the thought processes of students, so that we can focus on becoming better teachers."

Most faculty who have taught with computers would probably agree, and perhaps add that re-creating our courses for the digital world is often frustrating, sometimes exciting — and usually just plain fun. ■