

## Laying the foundations for law library co-operation around the world.

### **Notes on the annual workshop of the Legal Information Transfer Network held at New York University Law School Library, October 2002, by David Gee, Reader Services Manager at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library.**

In October 2002 I was lucky enough to spend three stimulating days at the New York University Law School Library participating in the annual Legal Information Transfer Network workshop. The Legal Information Transfer Network (ITN) is funded by a generous grant from The Starr Foundation (established in 1955 by insurance entrepreneur Cornelius Van der Starr) and is headed by the dynamic Director of the NYU Law School Library, Professor Kathie Price. ITN aims to establish a global network of prestigious law libraries which ultimately can offer a 24/7 virtual reference service, both to its own partner libraries in the developed world and to academic legal communities in less developed countries. Previous annual workshops in such cities as Lausanne in Switzerland have given senior librarians from ITN partner libraries the opportunity to meet and make progress on issues such as providing a global virtual reference desk, sharing database access across the partner libraries, developing interactive legal research guides, and creating imaginative training programmes for local law librarians in China and Southern Africa (<http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/itn>). Between workshops the exchange of ideas is continued by email discussion. Currently the list of law library partners includes New York University, Washington University in Seattle, Toronto University in Canada, IALS Library in the UK, the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, Tilburg University in the Netherlands, Konstanz University in Germany, Cape Town University in South Africa, Melbourne University in Australia, Yerevan State University in Armenia, and Tsinghua University in China.

Most of the law library representatives participating in the Legal Information Transfer Network workshop last October (including myself) had also attended the Annual Course on International Law Librarianship organised by the International Association of Law Libraries (<http://iall.org>). This five-day course was based at the beautiful Yale Law School in New Haven, with a final day held at the impressive Harvard Law School Library in Boston. Consequently a slightly higher number of law librarians than usual (for a Thursday evening) took the "Boston Shuttle" to travel down to New York for the ITN workshop. Rigorous customs searches and security procedures for foreign passport holders at Boston Airport meant that the group were even better acquainted (particularly about the contents of our suitcases) by the time we reached LaGuardia Airport on the outskirts of New York at around 11.00pm. A long and hair-raising taxi ride to Greenwich Village then ensued. One of the main reasons for our unexpectedly extended journey was that our inexperienced taxi driver spoke little English, and our Chinese was not as fluent as required. Unfortunately there was no representative from Tsinghua University with us for the 2002 workshop. Still, in an early example of co-operative effort, the combined language skills of four foreign and international law librarians from

three continents triumphed, and we all arrived safely at the Washington Square Hotel around midnight.

At 9.00am on the following morning the whole Legal Information Transfer Network group met up in New York University Law School Library. This prestigious library is housed within the elegant brick-built Vanderbilt Hall that is situated on the south side of Washington Square in Greenwich Village. Inside the state-of-the art library training room there was a buzz of anticipation. Law librarians from Washington, Toronto, Cape Town and Melbourne joined senior library staff from NYU for an intensive, and very friendly three-day workshop.

The main aim of the October 2002 workshop was to discuss the development of interactive legal research guides and online tutorials, and the possibility that partner libraries in the Legal Information Transfer Network could share training and teaching techniques and customise online templates. Each library partner representative spent a couple of hours demonstrating interactive legal research training guides or online teaching tutorials from their own particular jurisdiction. For example I spoke about and demonstrated Sue Pettit's excellent "Internet for Lawyers" guide (part of the UK's Virtual Training Suite) (<http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/tutorials/lawyers>), and then used this model to identify what I saw as the most useful features of an effective interactive training guide. I think it is important that such guides offer a variety of navigation options, with easy to understand sub-menus, which allow researchers to either jump forward to bypass sections or take step-by-step instruction. The guides should also have a clear and uncluttered layout with an intuitive structure that helps understanding and encourages usage. Friendly language and attractive but understandable web graphics and embedded web links are also essential. A variety of quiz formats and practical scenarios tailored for specific types of user can also be used to reinforce learning. Finally, links encouraging feedback and user-friendly help screens should always be included.

I also talked to the group about the development of Sarah Carter's exciting Lawpaths project at the University of Kent, which will create a database identifying high quality online legal research and information skills guides from law libraries across the UK. The intention is to present the best existing skills materials produced by librarians, legal academics and publishers as well as newly created materials including guides, tutorials, and workbooks. Materials will be made available in a format that can be freely copied and customised, with other law libraries just needing to add their local information. Much repetitive design work and time should be saved in the process. For more details about the project see <http://www.ukc.ac.uk/library/lawpaths>. I mentioned IALS Library's role as a Lawpaths project partner and suggested that the Legal Information Transfer Network might link up similar projects being developed in different jurisdictions to create a powerful global information bank or hub of customisable online legal research and legal information skills guides.

Other workshop participants, particularly Nicki McLaurin Smith from Melbourne Law School Legal Resource Centre and Jonathan Franklin from the Law Library at University of Washington in Seattle, showed the group how technology and multi-media can be incorporated into creative law teaching programmes and courses on teaching legal information literacy (see <http://catalyst.washington.edu/method> for more details). Paul Callister, Law Reference Librarian from the College of Law at the University of Illinois, was equally inspirational in showing the group how imaginative teaching techniques could be used to make online tutorials more effective. Finally, Deborah Paulus, Reference Librarian at NYU Law Library, chose to demonstrate the considerable capabilities of the powerful CALI (Computer Assisted Library Instruction) “lessonette” software (<http://cali.org>) with an extremely useful and entertaining talk guiding us through its best learning features. This US online tutorial software, developed by the University of Minnesota Law School and Harvard Law School, is used mainly for teaching law and legal concepts, but it has also been used for creating online legal research and information resource guides for use in libraries.

During the three-day ITN workshop we were also treated to several interesting demonstrations of virtual library tour technology. For example, Leslie Rich (Associate Director for Technology at NYU Law Library) showed us her inventive virtual guide to the NYU law library catalogue, created during a special six month sabbatical. We were also lucky enough to see the new Smartboard virtual library tour software being developed by the NYU Information Technology Service for the main NYU Bobst Library and noted its great potential to assist work in this area. Traditional library tours given in person by a librarian will probably always be one of the key services offered to new researchers, but the facilities we saw are adding a new dimension with virtual interactive library tours giving researchers the ability to take as many tours as they like, and to dip into a tour whenever and wherever it is convenient for them to do so. Different tours can be tailored to different user types, with adjustments for varying skill levels and subject emphases. The next stage will be to integrate off-site access to all the library’s electronic databases and other online resources with this virtual library tour software.

The final day of the workshop centred on a Business Meeting where the group discussed the next steps for ITN. The creation of a robust 24/7 global virtual reference service, staffed in different time zones around the world by senior library staff at each of the partner libraries, continues to be a priority for ITN. At present the network operates on an informal level with all of the partner libraries helping each other answer complex reference questions beyond the scope of their own collections. Achieving a full 24/7 global reference service still requires much careful thought, planning and commitment of resources. Difficult practical questions such as the suitability of different types of virtual reference desk software and the legal liability of ITN for inaccurate information were explored in detail. The importance of continuing to share access to ITN-funded databases was also discussed, as was the need to support an initiative to develop pilot online tutorials that, in time, could be shared and customised by all the partner libraries. To help share ideas in the medium term, it was agreed that an ITN web repository would be set up using the

TWEN bulletin board available on Westlaw, and that this special area on the web would allow partner libraries space to present their latest online tutorials and interactive legal research guides. Lastly, we discussed the September 2003 African training programme for local law librarians. The equivalent programme in China in 2002 had been a great success and proved very beneficial for all involved. It was agreed that the 2003 programme would concentrate on training about twenty law librarians from law faculties, NGO's and local courts in southern Africa, with the hope that these trainees could in turn cascade their new knowledge by training others.

As we completed the business of the day I reflected on a most informative and rewarding experience. Workshop days had been very intensive (9.00am to 6.00pm most days with discussion continuing over a "brown bag" lunch in Kathie's Office), but throughout our stay Professor Price and her staff helped us relax by arranging thoughtful evening visits to the theatre and the opera, and delightful dinners in some of the local speciality restaurants to be found in Greenwich Village. (The busy Lebanese restaurant with ten-foot Charlie Chaplin videos was a particular favourite of mine).

I would like to thank the Starr Foundation for funding my stay in New York and Kathie Price and her wonderful staff for looking after us all so well. The whole three-day experience was extremely memorable. I feel I gained an enormous amount, not only from each of the workshop sessions, but also from numerous informal discussions with the other law librarians - very good, entertaining and informative company indeed. One of the great achievements of ITN and Professor Price has been to establish very strong, friendly links between the senior law librarians of the partner libraries, creating a personal and professional network which offers a firm foundation for future collaboration and joint initiatives. Our prestigious law libraries have so much in common, and talking to each other about the future of legal information provision can only be beneficial for our own researchers, and the growing community of researchers we share worldwide.

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PHOTO caption: "Outside the NYU Law School Library"