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Law Library 2.0: New Roles for Law Librarians in the Information Overload Era

Sasha Skenderija
ss234@cornell.edu

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**LAW LIBRARY 2.0:
New Roles for Law Librarians in the Information Overload Era**
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Sasha Skenderija
Cornell University Law Library

Abstract:

WWW has rapidly evolved from a technological into a social medium. Web 2.0 has become a metaphor for the distributed and decentralized collaboration networks on a global scale. With the recent trends of new media development, the sources available have reached a critical mass resulting in an unprecedented information overload. The urgent challenge to all information professionals, in this case law librarians, is no longer availability and direct provision of resources, but rather the filtering and highlighting the ubiquitous Infosphere. The recent transformation of legal information has had more drastic consequences than in many other cases. The Cornell Law Library recognizes the new role of law librarians as advocates of free access and open source and, in parallel, as guides through the information overload and coaches of critical thinking of IT.

I. Web 2.0: Changing Culture in Libraries

Web 2.0 has emerged as a magic word for everything that is related to networked human-computer interactions and technology-mediated social communications.

Library 2.0 is a metaphor for the return to the substantial rethinking of the mission, goals and meaning of our profession. Web 2.0 is a kind of platform for purging the excuses and technological alibis that have been preventing librarians from doing our core missions of:

1. Serving/reaching our patrons immediately where they are and where they need and
2. being a generic part of the educational-academic-research process.

Laura Cohen (2006) has summarized how librarians should embrace Web 2.0 in her widely-read *Librarian 2.0: A Manifesto*. In it, she urges librarians to educate themselves about how users work with increasing amounts of information, to “be courageous” about implementing new kinds of services, to find better ways of performing work and to continuously improve/change service offerings.

Users, contrary to popular belief, are often not aware of the information resources available to them. Knight (2005) describes how information overload can even lead to a reduction in mental abilities. Users often lack a context or conceptual framework for approaching complex research tasks (Germain 2007). Librarians, in such an environment, can serve as “torch-bearers” through the dark forests of too much information,

illuminating new paths and igniting new discoveries. Individuals still have responsibility in such an environment, as Nicholson (2006) notes, but librarians can assist in many capacities.

Indeed, Web 2.0 has as led to the (r)evolutionary shift of the focal point of the librarian profession from providing more resources and information to patrons to filtering and highlighting the these provide in the information deluge. The keyword “added value” does no longer necessary mean “adding”, but also can mean “limiting” (or “filtering”).

II. Utilizing Web 2.0: The Cornell Law Library Web Site

As a step towards the utilization of Web 2.0 values, the Cornell Law Library (CLL) recently re-launched website, available at library.lawschool.cornell.edu/.

The site highlights the wealth of resources and services available at this premier research library while, at all times, taking into consideration the information needs and information seeking behaviors of the library patrons and the worldwide legal research community. “Library slang” was removed wherever possible to make the navigational language natural to non-librarians, which led to the creation of a new standard in interface design and information architecture for the site. The site is intended to be “pro-active” and to “reach out to their users in the communities where they work, rather than waiting to be asked. (Germain 2007)”

The site consists of three main areas, which can be browsed based on subject:

- [Who We Are](#) (basic library information and history),
- [What We Have](#) (collections, both print and electronic)
- [What We Do](#) (services)

Additionally, so-called “bridge pages” are dedicated to specific groups, i.e. [students](#), [faculty](#), [alumni](#), and [visitors](#). These pages consolidate all the pages from the entire site that are most relevant to those individual audiences.

Many of CLL’s web resources are highly recognized, used, and linked to by the U.S. and international legal research communities for their reliability and authority. These resources fall into three general categories.

1. CLL provides tools that help researchers find primary and secondary sources on specific topics and jurisdictions. [Foreign and International Law Guide](#) is a popular resource for researchers looking for official websites, organized by jurisdiction and type of entity. The innovative [Legal Research Engine](#), a pioneering Web 2.0 application, is a gadget that provides easy access to authoritative legal research guides on any subject. It is particularly helpful in learning how to research foreign and international law. After its launch in February of 2007, it quickly became a hit in the blogosphere.

2. Cornell Law Library makes freely available a number of substantive digital collections. Cornell Law Library's [Librarian Law](#) collection is a unique resource, made freely available to the public. For those interested in the Nuremberg trials, the [Donovan Collection](#) includes many primary source materials. Some of the materials from our Donovan Collection have attracted significant attention from the international press and media, such as our rare book, [Analysis of the Personality of Adolph Hitler](#). The Library's [Trials Collection](#) is in the process of being digitized and portions of this collection will be freely available online within a year. It is currently available through HeinOnline.
3. CLL provides current awareness services to the academic research community. [InSITE](#) is one of the most successful free current awareness services available. For over ten years, InSITE has consistently offered legal research website reviews, written by professional law librarians, many of which include an international focus. InSITE is now available via RSS feed in addition to its print and email delivery methods. The revamped [Faculty Publications](#) database provides citations and full-text links, where available, to the articles and books of the Cornell Law School faculty, many of whom research and write on foreign, international, and comparative law subjects. The Faculty Publications application is our custom designed web bibliographical that has been used as a model by several other academic libraries.

CLL took special care to make the site visually appealing in addition to being easy to navigate. Color photographs are used throughout to illustrate and decorate the page content. Emphasize also is on the people and history of the library, with extensive [historical](#) information about the library itself, and its physical [space](#).

CLL wanted to ensure that our users could easily find all the benefits the library brought to the larger institution. Therefore, included are information about the breadth and depth of the Library services to both [students](#) and [faculty](#). These two audiences are also supported by the customized [Online Legal Resources](#) application, which organizes all of the subscription databases exclusively available to the Cornell Law School community.

The new web site conveys the totality of Cornell Law Library, from CLL's advanced legal research courses, to special services for law faculty, to online legal resources.

Conclusion:

The urgent challenge to all information professionals, in this case law librarians, is no longer availability and direct provision of resources, but rather the filtering and highlighting the ubiquitous Infosphere. The recent transformation of legal information has had more drastic consequences than in many other cases. The Cornell Law Library recognizes the new role of law librarians as advocates of free access and open source and,

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