



Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: A Vision for the Future

by **Claire M. Germain**

The law library community has been talking about how to ensure permanent public access to primary legal information, both US (state and federal), as well as international and foreign legal information (see Claire M. Germain, "Digital Legal Information: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow," *AALL Spectrum* 5/98:27). Web Mirror Sites present a new way to disseminate and preserve digital legal information, and offer a security backup for issuing agencies, an increasingly important factor in the new cyberspace world prone to computer hacking.

The Cornell Law Library has recently made freely available two Web mirror sites for researchers and the public. These are the ILO mirror site (International Labour Organization) and the ICJ mirror site (International Court of Justice). To get access to the mirror sites, as well as to additional and background information produced by the law library, go to: <http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library> and click on "International Labor" or "International Court of Justice."

These mirror sites have been developed with several goals in mind, which can be adapted by other universities and organizations. Among these are:

1. To increase reliable access and response time for persons living in the Americas and, thereby, assist in the dissemination of important information resources for research, study, and other uses. Researchers in Latin America had trouble logging on to the ILO Web site in Geneva, Switzerland; the response time from the Cornell server in Ithaca, New York, is much better. The ICJ Webmaster in The Hague, the Netherlands, is very pleased to redirect users to the Ithaca server as well.
2. To assure faculty, students, and staff that these sources can be used with a high degree of reliability (not dependent on functionality of communication systems outside of a particular university) for research and instructional purposes on campus and/or for distance learning purposes.
3. To permit the yearly capture and retention of the information found at these Web sites on CDs or other electronic storage media, thereby providing long-term access and archiving necessary for researchers and decision-makers and to serve as a secure backup location for these international organizations.
4. To establish partnerships with these most distinguished international organizations permitting the development of new courses, scholarly exchanges, faculty visits, research sabbaticals, and student internships.
5. To provide sets of information useful for legal as well as multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research, study, and instruction valuable to the entire campus and, thereby, serve as a catalyst for cooperative research. In addition, these tangible academic assets can be leveraged for grant applications and government support involving a variety of departments and schools.
6. To provide a focus for producing supplemental research and background information sources on the issues that are of concern to these international organizations. These are to be developed by faculty, librarians, and students to enhance the intellectual experience associated with the use of the Web sites by international experts, researchers, and the public at large.

These efforts are consistent with the impetus provided by the AALL leadership, which has formed a Special Task Force on Authentication and Preservation of Digital Information to look at the issues of long-

term access to electronic information. The Task Force met in Williamsburg, Virginia, in December 1999. It plans to come up with a statement describing the issues and concerns of the law library community, providing examples of best practices by courts and legislatures, and making recommendations to other entities. The group may also serve as a clearinghouse and aims to be in close communication with other organizations dealing with legal information, such as the ABA, the National Conference of State Court Administrators, the National Association of Court Management, and the National Center for State Courts, as well as library groups such as the RLG/Digital Library Federation Task Force formed in 1999 on Policy and Practice for Long-term Retention of Digital Materials (I represent the law library concerns to that group).

A **mirror site** is a local (domestic) Web site that has the same exact information as a foreign (international) site. Databases of information coming from a particular organization—here, the ICJ (located in the Hague, the Netherlands) and the ILO (located in Geneva, Switzerland)—are loaded on Cornell University local servers and updated automatically from the originating country. The result is that researchers in the Americas get a much faster Internet connection than if they had to go to the European sites.

Web mirror sites present a great opportunity for law libraries to be a vital part of the intellectual life of their organizations, and they demonstrate one of the most efficient and cost-effective ways of collecting and disseminate information. (See also Claire M. Germain, "Matching Library Vision with Institutional Mission: the Library as Web Author and Publisher," *AALL Spectrum* 6/97:16–18, which retraces the partnership between Cornell and the ICJ.) Please send comments and feedback to cmg13@cornell.edu.

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