

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Why do you need all those staff members?

#### *a. Work done behind-the-scenes*

The main reason that the library works so well for you is because of all the work done behind-the-scenes, from ordering, processing, and shelving materials to acquiring, upgrading, and maintaining equipment. These services require people and time. For example, ordering legal materials involves working with a variety of jobbers and lenders, as well as managing and recording financial transactions, tracking shipments, and dealing with customer service issues. Processing them takes knowledge of highly specialized classification systems and application of this expertise to each item to make sure that it is properly labeled, cataloged, and directed to the appropriate physical and electronic locations, *i.e.*, on the shelf and in the online catalog. Legal serials present particular challenges because of the frequent and unique methods and formats for keeping them up-to-date. Staff members are also charged with routing serial updates to faculty members according to their individual needs and interests. Routing involves multiple record-keeping, communications, delivery, and retrieval activities. Maintenance of the physical collection and facility entails yet another set of labor-intensive tasks. Before the library opens each morning and throughout the day, library personnel replace all materials that have been taken from the shelves and microforms cabinets and perform ongoing inventory monitoring to keep track of the collection. Other staff members boot up public computer terminals and check them for viruses, turn on photocopiers and printers and make sure that paper and ink are loaded, and troubleshoot for potential malfunctions. Throughout each day, library staff members carry out many other responsibilities, such as managing and delivering faculty requests for information and print-outs, assisting patrons at the reference and circulation desks, and mediating interlibrary requests to lend and borrow materials.

#### *b. Multi-task processing*

Information that patrons receive from the library is often handled by several people before it makes its way to the end user. For example, a patron's reference request may be researched by a reference librarian, ordered and received by the interlibrary loan department, and delivered to the patron by a library assistant. Another example of the need for staff is the procedure for routing: For serial items such as law reviews and looseleaf updates to be routed promptly and appropriately to faculty, a routing list must be maintained and kept current by a supervisor; materials must be checked in by a library assistant; mailings must be prepared and delivered; fugitive materials must be diplomatically retrieved from faculty offices; and missing issues (whether lost or never received) must be verified, reordered, sometimes paid for, checked in, processed, and bound or shelved to ensure complete runs. It takes a combination of academically qualified librarians as well as trained support staff to provide services quickly, accurately, and efficiently.

### *c. Adapting to changing needs*

As student enrollment and faculty size and demographics change, staff and librarians need to track these changes to adapt existing services and develop new ones to meet needs and demands. For example, the addition of a new faculty member may expand curriculum offerings into a field that has not previously been a focus of collection building. Bibliographic specialists in the library will explore the resources in that field and make recommendations to the acquisitions personnel and new faculty members for filling in collection gaps and for prospective collection building. The acquisitions staff may have to set up relationships with new vendors who carry materials in that specialty, and serials staff may have to order new subscriptions, set up payment procedures, and create new serials records for processing and for informing patrons of the serials holdings. Electronic services librarians and staff will also work with new faculty to identify, acquire, and implement subscriptions to online services that focus on their specialty. Setting up connections to new online subscriptions for proper access and operation is often complex and time-consuming. Similar accommodations will be made with development of new graduate or clinical programs. The library's continued support of law school scholarship and academic offerings requires the input, efforts, expertise, and training of many librarians and staff members.

The law library remains one of the most important aspects of the law school for faculty scholarship and for faculty recruitment purposes. Strong, responsive libraries that meet, and anticipate, faculty needs, will further faculty research and writing projects; poorly supported or maintained libraries will hinder serious research. The existing faculty will be clear about library services in their discussions with candidates; a good library is a strong attraction for new faculty.

### *d. Responding to fiscal exigencies*

Changes in budget allocations also require special staff attention: If the library acquisitions budget is increased, bibliographic specialists must cull catalogs and advertising material to make appropriate selections. Library staff must handle increased ordering and processing demands; they must also shift the physical collection to accommodate greater than anticipated growth. Interlibrary loan staff may have to handle an increase in borrowing requests as the collection expands. If the library acquisitions budget is cut back, bibliographic specialists need to assess which subscriptions to cancel and which areas of legal scholarship can be neglected with the least damage to the school's curriculum and programs. Staff will have to modify many bibliographic records to reflect these changes, and they will also need to physically shift portions of the collection to accommodate changes in collection building emphasis. If the technology budget is increased to purchase more hardware and software or to upgrade or expand networks, demands on technology staff will similarly increase. They will need to monitor the operations of more computers and accessory equipment, load and troubleshoot more software, and handle increased traffic, all the while keeping current on the latest technological developments.

## **2. Hasn't technology saved on staff?**

### *a. Meeting expanding service expectations*

Whether the library has primary responsibility only for library computers, software, and

networks or for all law school technology, patron and staff needs cannot be met without efficient and competent human support. Library administrators and other professionals must consult with library, law school, and university computing personnel to plan for infrastructure design; purchase and upgrades of hardware, accessories, and furnishings; development and maintenance of computer labs and other computing facilities; and the interdepartmental responsibilities and communications processes for implementing and maintaining systems. While libraries have streamlined their procedures with the help of technology, librarians have found that the availability of electronic resources has increased patron expectations and demand for new services. Rather than decreasing staff workload, technology has increased the sophistication of staff tasks and the dependence on in-house technology support staff to keep all departments in operation. To keep their reference, circulation, cataloging, interlibrary loan, acquisitions, and inventory systems functioning, libraries now need additional staff to install and maintain new systems, system enhancements, and software programs; to protect against the ever-increasing barrage of worms and viruses; and to assist patrons with library equipment and with their own equipment so that it can interact with library networks, printers, and web sites. In addition, most libraries now have professional librarians who specialize in assisting patrons with the identification and use of appropriate electronic resources; many also assist faculty with adapting and applying technology for use in the classroom and in their scholarship. As libraries add more computer workstations or wireless capabilities, the need for this type of support also grows. To many of our patrons, these are the most important services that they receive from the library.

*b. Building and maintaining web sites*

Maintaining a useful, attractive, well-organized, and easily navigable website is no longer merely an option for academic law libraries; it is now an imperative for any law library that aims to function, remain competitive, and fulfill the research needs of its patrons in today's electronic-dependent research environment. Maintenance of a credible web site is a labor-intensive endeavor. It requires constant attention from librarians and technology staff to keep information up-to-date and accurate; check that all links are operating properly and connecting to the intended sites; expand content and links to include material of current interest and topicality; improve design as new technology options appear on the market; make changes to pique viewers' interest and curiosity; and especially to preserve security. If the web site is not kept fresh, appealing, and operational, the library's reputation will be tarnished as surely as if the physical facility is allowed to become run-down. One potential danger of inadequate technology staffing is that prospective applicants who are making their initial "visit" to the law school online will receive a negative impression of the law school's offerings and will gravitate toward those schools that put their best foot forward on the Internet.

*c. Supporting faculty instructional technology needs*

The availability of technology has expanded users' expectations of the types of expertise that librarians can offer them. For example, faculty members look to librarians, who are adept in building web sites and using instructional technology to teach research, for assistance with their own web and course pages. Providing this assistance requires staffing levels that are adequate to avoid the neglect of traditional library services. In fact, most contemporary academic libraries have either rearranged the duties of existing librarians or created some iteration of an Electronic Services Librarian position to address this need.

*d. Expansion of research training needs*

The increase in quantity and complexity of electronic resources has multiplied the requests for qualified staff to train and assist users in doing effective and efficient electronic research. The need for staff to identify, acquire, and maintain access to those sources has also expanded. Furthermore, those students who have been out of school for many years and who do not work extensively with technology require a lot of individual attention as they acclimate back into an educational environment. Even students who have grown up with computers have often received little or no formal training in research and require extensive assistance with their online searches. The availability of legal resources online does not necessarily foster independence from seeking expert legal research support; in fact the minimization of access to traditional finding aids cuts legal researchers adrift from the structure of print publications and interferes with their awareness of alternate sources and techniques for locating relevant legal authority. Consequently, reliance on electronic legal resources broadens the scope of research training needs that librarians must address.

*e. Heightened expectations of instant response*

Computer-age students are an "instant gratification" constituency. They expect quick, knowledgeable responses to research questions and problems as a given, not as serendipity or extravagance. As they become faculty and deans in the years to come, these expectations will become institutionalized in law schools. However, even in the Information Age, in real time, information professionals can only provide one instant response at a time, and so staffing levels must keep pace with rising expectations.

**3. Hasn't technology saved on space?**

No, the need to integrate technology into the library's services has increased physical facility demands, including the need for space to house computer labs and other computer facilities, such as servers, hubs, and public workstations. Effectively incorporating technology requires changes to every aspect of the library's operations. Students and patrons demand more electrical outlets. Furniture needs to be replaced and rearranged. Lighting sources must be evaluated and usually modified. Shelving and storage space for equipment, books, CDs, DVDs, tapes, and other formats must be adjusted. Study spaces must accommodate sound and pictures as well as quiet study and reading. Specially trained staff members are necessary to support technology, and they need the space to do so. Moreover, the amount of material that we have been able to remove from our shelves because of its online availability is insignificant in terms of space savings. These items are chiefly hard copies of some Shepard's sets and duplicates of some reporters, codes, and periodicals, and the space recovered by these cancellations has quickly been consumed by the growing body of scholarly monographs, very few of which are available electronically. Furthermore, it is risky for academic law libraries to remove even materials of questionable value. Until the statistics on law school libraries reported by the American Bar Association and by U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT de-emphasize volume count and focus on access, law school libraries are loathe to reduce their physical collections and risk falling behind in their competitive ratings.

**4. Hasn't technology saved on costs?**

The savings that may have been realized by canceling hard copies of some Shepard's sets and duplicates of reporters, codes, and periodicals have been more than offset by the costs of purchasing or leasing and maintaining hardware and networking equipment, operating systems, and software programs. Furthermore, equipment and hardware require frequent upgrades to keep up with expanding capabilities. These upgrades involve additional expenditures. Individuals with technical expertise and qualifications had to be added to the staff to keep the systems running smoothly and to advise on technology acquisitions, thus placing greater strain on personnel budgets. While technology is necessary to maintain the law school's competitive standing and to support efficient operations, it entails greater financial burdens than can be balanced by reducing the number of the library's serial subscriptions. On the other hand, even the greater efficiency realized by automating library operations cannot outweigh the inflationary cost increases of those items that the library must continue to purchase for its collection.

### **5. Can't we just have a virtual library and provide everything to students electronically via LexisNexis®, Westlaw®, the Internet, and scanned materials?**

As an academic institution, the law school's library supports scholarly research as well of the work of practitioners and future practitioners. The scope of the collection necessarily extends far beyond the basic sources of statutory, regulatory, international, and common law. Conservative estimates are that far less than 20 percent of the resources that are physically present in the library are available electronically.\* Historic and scholarly materials are unlikely to be found online. Interpretation 606-3 of the American Bar Association's Standard 606 for academic law library collections provides:

At present, no single publishing medium (electronic, print, microform, or audio-visual) provides sufficient access to the breadth and depth of recorded knowledge and information needed to bring a law school into compliance with Standard 606. Consequently, a collection that consists of a single format may violate Standard 606.

Moreover, the stability of online resources is far from guaranteed, and the providers of online resources are under no obligation to warrant that access to them will continue indefinitely. Therefore, when we relinquish physical possession, we relinquish not only ownership and guaranteed access to the resources, but even control over their access and use. Even now, LexisNexis and Westlaw usage is strictly limited by the terms of our educational contracts with these vendors. We are prohibited from making the services available to patrons other than our faculty and students, and students are barred from using their school passwords to do research for their employers. Without being able to supply the alternative, unrestricted access offered by resources we own, we must curtail our service to our students, the campus and legal communities, and to the public.

\*For more discussion of the virtual library question, see Penny A. Hazelton, *How Much of Your Print Collection Is Really on WESTLAW or LEXIS-NEXIS?*, 18 LEGAL REFERENCE SERVICES Q. 3 (1999).

## **6. Don't a lot of students graduate and find jobs without ever having used the library?**

Some students may avoid library use during their time in law school; others may avoid attending class or reading actual cases rather than canned summaries. However, students cannot reap the full benefits of their legal education by taking shortcuts, and we do not fulfill our obligation to them or to the legal profession by providing minimal resources. Just as we do not abandon the classroom experience in favor of videotaped lectures or limit the curriculum to subjects required for students to pass the bar examination, neither should we “dumb down” the legal research environment to the bare essentials. Legal education is more than a vocational training exercise; for some, it will be their last opportunity to grapple with the philosophy and ideals of the legal system and to consider how legal principles provide the infrastructure for the rule of law in a democratic society. The fact that some of our students fail to avail themselves of the opportunities offered by a fully equipped educational environment does not dictate the standards to which we should adhere. As stated in ABA Standard 601: “A law school shall maintain a law library that is an active and responsive force in the educational life of the law school.”

## **7. Shouldn't we devote scarce personnel funds to technology staff rather than to library staff?**

While automating our libraries, we must not lose sight of the primary functions that they serve. Law libraries are more than bookshelves and computer labs. The hallmarks of legal collections are (a) the classification of materials to provide the best access for legal researchers and (b) consultation with legal research experts about how to best navigate the wide array of legal resources available in diverse formats. These highly educated specialists do indeed rely on the latest technology to perform their responsibilities promptly and efficiently. However, while it is necessary to employ technicians to maintain the electronic operations of the library, it is also essential to retain the expertise of a full complement of library and legal specialists to guide and instruct patrons in their research. Without qualified librarians and trained library staff, students and other researchers would flounder in their efforts to find anything other than the most basic sources of legal information, and legal education would fail to fulfill adequately its missions of instruction and scholarship.