Technology and the Law School Librarian of the Twenty-First Century[**]

Mary Kay Kane[**]

Dean Kane outlines seven areas involving technology in which library directors can play a significant role within the law school of the twenty-first century.

¶1 My remarks are focused on technology and the law librarian of the twenty-first century, even though I should say from the outset that I have no singular vision of exactly what a "perfect" librarian would offer in that arena. Instead, I would like to suggest several issues that deans should consider when selecting a new librarian and that librarians ought to think about when deciding whether a particular school and faculty is the right one for them to join. This is a time when law schools, as well as law libraries, are developing in different ways, emphasizing differing strengths and interests. And, just as it is important to find the right dean to lead a particular law school and make sure it achieves its mission, it has become increasingly important to identify the right librarian to respond to the peculiar needs or goals of the library of the law school.

¶2 While the skill set of an able administrator who can master budgets and inspire personnel remains at the core of all librarian positions, the opportunity to help the law school develop in directions that reflect its essential mission seems to me to have enhanced significance today as all law schools struggle in this competitive world. That opportunity may take different shapes and forms depending on the particular law school and the dean and faculty with whom the librarian may be working. So the key is to find the right match of demonstrated talents and interests for both sides of the relationship to be satisfied.

¶3 Having said that, let me throw out seven often-overlapping areas involving technology where I believe the librarian might play a significant role and which a law dean might consider in thinking about the type of person and the kinds of strengths or ideas a new librarian might offer to a particular institution.

Collection Planning

¶4 While this area has always been important, it is particularly critical today. We are in a period of transition between hard-copy books and articles and materials

---

available electronically. I firmly believe that books will always be a core of the library. Nonetheless, it is more important than ever to develop both a short-term (five-year) plan about how to create the right balance to meet the needs of the users, and a long-term vision of the future addressing which materials should remain available in hard-copy format and which should be provided electronically so as to provide maximum access to the law school's faculty and students. This requires not only a visionary, but also someone who can appreciate the needs of the institution's users and educate those users so that a consensus can evolve on how the collection should be developed.

Budget and Cost Containment

¶5 We have been in a time of exponential growth in the cost of library materials, whether electronic or hard copy, growth far exceeding most law school revenue growth. Again, the question is how to create the right balance using technological access to complement hard-copy resources to keep budgets under control. Is there any way to avoid the cyclical "raiding of the new books budget" to cover continuations? Does technology offer ways to pool resources and to share collections so as to avoid the need to duplicate resources available elsewhere?

Space and Library Configuration

¶6 Probably one of the constants in law libraries of the past has been that even though new buildings begin with vast unused capacity, the physical growth of collections inevitably leads to the need for more space. Does the availability of technological resources change that conclusion? How does technology change the norms of thinking about what needs to be retained in hard copy, thereby freeing shelf space? Further, how does the use of technology by researchers (i.e., students and faculty) alter what kinds of space needs there may be for those doing their research? In other words, how might the library of the future be physically configured to take advantage of and reflect the changing methods of research?

Management of E-Scholarship

¶7 We now are seeing an increasing use by the academic community of various forms of e-scholarship. At the base level, understanding what is out there and making sure that faculty members are made aware of these resources is now a sine qua non for the law librarian. More expansive, however, and depending on the individual school's interest, the librarian may play a major role as the manager or even developer of those resources. This may be limited to serving as the "publisher" for a faculty e-journal, but also could be extended to the development of student journals online, replacing the hard-copy versions.

Student Training in Technology

¶8 One of the constant complaints from the practicing bar about recent law gradu-ates—most of whom are wedded to technology even more than we are—is that the graduates appear to lack the ability to use technology efficiently and in a cost-effective manner, allegedly because they have been introduced to it without such constraints, given our educational discount with the major suppliers. Although the publishers have placed some student ceilings on at least Westlaw and LexisNexis to try to suggest limits, these are not enough. Thus, law schools should be consid-ering ways in which to train students, not just in what is available, but in how to use technology in the most efficient and cost-effective way. Depending on the way in which the school develops its research training, the librarian could take a lead-ership role—working with the legal writing program, creating special training modules, joining with the faculty—in developing the necessary curricular compo-nents for enhanced training of students in the use of technology in research.

Faculty Training in Technology

¶9 One of the touted assets of technology is that it makes the user much more self-sufficient than before. Yet, oftentimes we faculty members simply rely on our librarians to find things for us—and technology certainly enhances their ability to do so. However, with limits on personnel and staffing, one of the areas that might be explored is the development of enhanced training for faculty on the use of tech-nology for research purposes. The development of a regular training program for faculty research, rather than responding to individual inquiries, would benefit both the faculty and the library staff. For the latter, it would free their time for other pressing needs. This is an opportunity to develop in different directions and reor-ganize some of the traditional things the staff otherwise might be doing. In schools with too few staff and too many demands, rethinking the relationship of library staff and faculty by using technology to make the faculty more independent offers some interesting possibilities. Not to mention the likelihood of enhancing the capacity of the faculty to conduct expanded research.

Technology Supervision Outside the Library

¶10 In many law schools, the librarian has been wearing two hats, heading the effort to build the research collection (whether books or technological resources) and overseeing the school's technology developments outside the library, includ-ing classroom and other teaching technology, and word processing and other sup-port for faculty, journals, administrative staff, etc. Obviously in that environment, the emphasis is on technology development, with the library as just one piece of the puzzle. The model has its tensions and problems, and in some instances, such as at an institution like my own which is free-standing and thus has no university-

based technological resources or support to draw upon, is not viable at all because the need for administrative technology (e.g., records, admissions, fiscal, etc.) is too great to blend both positions. But where it is deemed feasible and desirable, then I simply would note that the position will demand some greater experience or expertise with technology than otherwise might be the case.

Conclusion

¶11 Let me conclude by saying that although technology poses new challenges for the legal profession generally as well for law librarians, I do not think that it means that law librarians need to be trained differently or obtain different degrees than has traditionally been the case. I still believe that the M.L.S. degree, combined with a J.D., offers the most useful training feasible. I base this statement on my trust that the field of library science itself has adapted its educational program to take account of changes brought about by technology.

¶12 As can be seen from the areas I have discussed, the challenges identified are not entirely new—they are the same old problems of funding, staffing, space, and planning, simply evaluated against the background of what technology has to contribute to (or take away from) the potential solutions. Thus, I do not think that you need to be a "computer whiz" to be the head of the modern law school library. Rather, you need merely to have superhuman powers to see into the future and stay ahead of the fast-paced changes that we are witnessing to help your institution make the most of the opportunities that exist!