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Al Podboy has identified four lenses through which we can look at the developing role of the law library in the coming years. The first is legal research. Here the future remains enshrouded in fog.

Unique Dish or One Ingredient in the Information Stew

Legal information once lived in its own world, surrounded by its own obscure indexes and abstracts. Understanding legal research was an arcane skill. Just using the

digital stew, and it is accessible via the same search engines as everything else. This makes the role of the law library much less defined. It will drive law librarianship closer to other branches of librarianship. This is not inevitable. At the conclusion, I will point out how legal information in a different form may well hold the rosiest future of all.

Library or Starbucks

Al's second lens concerns the concept of sanctuary. I fear libraries can remain sanc-

Challenges for Law Libraries— and Librarians— of Tomorrow

research tools was a challenge and law librarians knew the way through the maze. Increasingly, legal information is blending in with non-legal information in one great

tuaries only by morphing into proto-Starbucks. If libraries offer good coffee, reliable wireless connectivity, and a comfortable chair, we preserve the aspects

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of sanctuary. Some of my faculty colleagues at Berkeley already do their work at local coffee shops that meet all three of the comfort criteria above. Is this the area where we have the most to offer?

Face-to-Face or Cyberspace

The third lens is collaboration. Technological innovation is making conferencing, co-authoring, and meeting with others at a distance increasingly easier. Why waste the time, money, and psychic energy getting into airplanes and flying to other cities in order to work together? Working together from the desktop will be easier, cheaper, and less stressful.

I am not sure where the law library fits into this model. In some places, the law librarian has seized control of the IT operations and made himself into the coordinator of all such innovation. This is the law librarian saving his role by stepping away from it.

In the Stacks or in a Search Result

Finally, serendipity. Since most of my life seems to have been dictated by serendipity, I can hardly underestimate its importance. The capacities of new search engines provide serendipity of their own. I grew up browsing through books as a part of the tapestry of my life; however, my sons (18 and 21) have grown up with serendipitous online searches. The modern researcher is far more likely to run a Google search and play around with the results that he finds than he is to browse a shelf of printed material.

New Roles for Law Librarians Can Evolve

The greatest strength of law librarians lies in their deep expertise in using legal infor-

mation.

Working with legal information, at a deep level, is growing trickier.

The use of search engines has blurred the distinctions. A researcher might plug a question into a search engine and receive a variety of sources, which mix primary and secondary authority. My students in Advanced Legal Research have shown me that one cannot assume an ability to distinguish between the authority of a section of the United States Code and a report that appeared in *The Washington Post* on a digital retrieval list. As information proliferates and search engines treat the Code and the *Post* the same, there is an increasing need for experts who know the difference. Speed and ease of use are worth nothing if the end product of research is not valid. Law librarians have the chance to become the real manipulators of legal authority.

Earlier I observed that the leveling of information will make law librarians more like their professional cousins. But future law librarians can choose to grow in the opposite direction and become even more

specialized. Law librarians must be the real experts on legal information systems and the guardians of legitimate legal authority. This calls for law librarians to have more substantive legal expertise and to be more proactive in designing legal information systems. Librarians have always floated above information, knowing how the information was organized, but, with the exception of some reference librarians, not dipping into the heart of the information itself. The time to change that image is now. There is a niche waiting to be filled and law librarians are the natural candidates to fill it.

So here's hoping that there will always be sanctuary in a safe place that is called the law library. Let's hope too that the librarian, rather than serving the cappuccino, is instead explaining to the young lawyer drinking it how to use legal information. •

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