

although they did with the writer, who is teaching the course again and planning on requiring some Internet collaboration in shared research and the editing of written work. If possible, he would like to extend the use of Internet technology by putting up a home page for students to use and using Internet video conferencing to have some real time meetings among the students.

If Internet seminars become widespread, law schools will have to agree on a method of enrolment, credit, tuition and assessment. The ABA currently has no guidelines on Internet classes, so any new regulations dealing with Internet seminars will have to await the arrival of the next century. Nonetheless, an Internet law seminar can offer students a unique learning experience involving ample amounts of legal writing, much of it interactive. In addition, a specialised seminar can meet the subject matter interests of unique student populations who otherwise would be unable to take such a seminar.

The Internet: is it a viable medium in the education of legal professionals?

M Lawrence-Slater

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As business becomes more global, the consequent need for continuing education to maintain the necessary skills of the workforce will start to challenge the resources of institutional education. Recognising this, many institutions of higher learning are developing more flexible means of delivering education through, for example, distance learning and summer schools.

This article seeks to determine to what extent the Internet may be used as an educational medium in the continuing education of legal professionals, about which there is little, or nothing, in the conventional literature.

The specific Internet technologies of interest in this article are e-mail, Computer Mediated Conferencing (CMC) and the use of the World Wide Web (WWW) to enable access to the information available in databases throughout the Internet.

E-mail is extensively used for the interchange of information between people on the Internet. The writer composes a 'letter' on the keyboard, sends it to the recipient electronically with the Internet performing the role of the postman, sorting office and distribution centre. The only requirement for communication is that both receiver and senders be registered as users on the Internet and that they know the electronic address of each other's 'mailboxes'.

The CMC enables defined groups of geographically dispersed individuals to come together, electronically, for the exchange of ideas. The CMC may be 'synchronous', where the users are in simultaneous contact, or 'asynchronous', where communication is conducted through the intermediary of the user's mailbox. There are a number of such 'asynchronous' group conference systems whose principal advantage is that they permit a more immediate means of communication than the traditional method of paper-based correspondence to a wide audience. This permits an interactive transaction of ideas and provides a means of facilitating research amongst geographically dispersed academics. The Internet can also be used interactively in real-time through 'chat' groups, where users can send messages to each other in real time. It is also possible to use the Internet for real-time video-conferencing.

The Internet is being used as an educational vehicle with mixed success. The consideration of its future use must take various factors into account. Since it is likely that many people will be first-time users, the end product must be comprehensible and the process of

technology transfer as painless as possible. This is a question of design. Face-to-face contact is also a significant issue in the delivery of education. Research shows that tutors have an important pedagogical function and play a principal part in linking the learning materials to learning.

The legal profession is already an extensive user of the Internet with the libraries of the significant law schools throughout the world all being accessible through the Internet. In the United States, a number of law firms have set up home pages for information and to promote their business expertise. Accessing the home page of the Rutgers University School of Law provides the user with hypertext links to a wide variety of law schools, law firms and US government sites as well as subject oriented sites and LEXIS.

Educators will have to adjust to changing ideas on alternative educational methodologies. Use of the Internet is technically feasible but may take some time to be accepted as a primary educational tool due to the perceived need for face-to-face contact in the educational process. One possibility is that the Internet could form a component in a new method of education based around facilities such as the Knowledge Centres being trialed in Europe, which are equipped with the latest in multi-media and digital communications facilities. Then the Internet could do what it does best, provide fast global communications and access to an enormous body of information.

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