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Law via the Internet: Report on the Conference

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LAW VIA THE INTERNET 2012: REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE*

By Yemisi Dina**

Cornell University, located in Ithaca, New York hosted the LIVI (Law via the Internet) 2012. The conference also marked the twentieth anniversary of the LIIs (Legal Information Institutes) of the world, which have grown exponentially. The anniversary was not a cake-eating celebration but a two-day deliberation with members of an open access society who have been striving to make legal information freely available on the Internet. Many of the speakers at the sessions shared their experiences from the different projects they have been working on over the past twenty years or more, and the LIIs continue to improve. It was a great experience to see how many of these LIIs have grown, are still growing and are using technological advancements to make legal information freely accessible.

Delegates at this conference were not just librarians but also information scientists, legal practitioners, programmers, software developers, academics, government officials, members of non-profit and for-profit organizations, and policy makers. All continents were represented at this unique gathering, with participants from 36 countries of the world. It was

a great opportunity to be a part of the deliberation at this event, particularly given that I passionately follow the trends and activities of the LIIs of the world.

The opportunity for me to participate at this great event came about as a result of the Janine Miller Fellowship of CALL/ACBD and CanLII. My main motivation for attending this conference was to build further on my current research plan: reporting and digitizing the case law of customary courts in Nigeria. I was able to meet and speak with other people at the conference who are currently working on similar projects.

The following is my account of the sessions I attended at this conference. Sessions were held concurrently and divided into five thematic tracks. The organizers of the conference have made presentations and videos available on the conference website, and in the footnotes I have provided links to each session I attended.

Liberating the Law Yet Further **Richard Susskind**

The keynote speaker for the first day, Richard Susskind, explained that the future of the legal information world lies in finding creative ways to satisfy customers/clients; therefore, we have to invent new ways of delivering service in order to make the law available to everyone all the time. Furthermore, he added, technology is the great driver of change in the legal profession—it will help lawyers enhance their profiles and performance as well as provide free legal information (via the internet) along with outsourcing and delivering information.

Using his typical predictive style, Susskind said that tomorrow's lawyers must use alternative work methods to deliver services to their clients. He identified new jobs for lawyers, such as commoditization of information using disruptive technologies. In order to achieve the changes in the legal profession, Susskind suggested the following models:

- Bespoke model: Members of the legal profession can use this model when dealing with their clients following this order: standardized→systematized→packaged→commodities. According to Susskind, this model will present a better and cheaper way for clients to find legal information.



LVI 2012 Conference Banner

* © Yemini Dina 2013.

** Yemisi Dina was the recipient of CALL/ACBD's 2012 Janine Miller Fellowship, which enabled her to participate in the Law via the Internet 2012 Conference. She is Associate Librarian/Head of Public Services, Osgoode Hall Law School Library, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

- Decomposing model: To Susskind, this model is vital for any piece of law. This model allows legal information to be broken down to reduce costs and allow free access to law.

He concluded by noting that governments should use both reactive and proactive approaches to making law accessible.

Bedfellows: What Open Access Has to do with Public Engagement and Why

Thomas R. Bruce, Kerry Anderson & Andrew Rens

The speakers discussed how open access provides a means of engaging the public and how it can be improved. They suggested that user-friendly interfaces are critical and observed that providing technical help is a general problem. They called for a highly-developed, user-friendly infrastructure that involves more traditional research and is developed by the members of the public.

Securing sources of funding was identified as a structural problem for many open access projects: the speakers have found that governments are limited in what they can support and researchers are limited by what they can undertake. The speakers shared the implementation prototype for seylii.org, in which the open source software Drupal was used successfully.

When the Dog Catches the Car: CanLII's Evolution from Free Law Concept to Cornerstone of Canadian Legal Research to Potential Commercial Competitor

Colin Lachance¹

Colin Lachance discussed the history of CanLII, highlighting its widespread and growing use. He outlined future plans for CanLII, based on its strategic plan, and focussed on permanence, content, technology and policy. Lachance spoke of the importance of partnership and collaboration, citing the success of links between CanLII and its partners: Lancaster House, Maritime Law Book, Slaw.ca, and the British Columbia Provincial Courts.

From the questions and discussion that followed this session, it was obvious that many of the delegates saw CanLII as a LII success story and wanted to learn from its team.

Can We Trust What is Online? Conclusions from the National Inventory of Legal Materials

Tina S. Ching, Emily Feltren & Judy Gaskell²

This presentation was based on a project that took an inventory of legal resources in all formats, including print, microform, CD-ROM, and online from federal, state, county,



Colin Lachance Presentation Slide

and municipal levels in the United States. Volunteers from across the U.S. did most of the work, and the Library of Congress conducted a federal inventory. The inventory covered 7,000 titles. One of the highlights of this project was the promotion and enforcement of the *Uniform Electronic Legal Material Act*, which requires that “online state legal materials deemed to be official will be preserved and made permanently available to the public in unaltered form.”

The Promise and Peril of Using ICTs to Advance the Rule of Law and Access to Justice

Rebecca Vernon³

The speaker at this session shared her experience with two projects using information and computer technologies (ICT) to advance the rule of law and access to justice in Asia. One project was carried out virtually and the other in person. “Training of Criminal Defense Lawyers in China” was carried out mostly online. The project showed criminal defence lawyers in China how to use information technology in their day-to-day activities.

In contrast, “Digitization and Automation of Cases in Manila, Philippines” involved direct resourcing and training for judges in the high court in Manila. It provided a kiosk in the court for members of the public to access digitized resources through an online portal. Vernon noted that the project encountered obstacles from stakeholders who opposed modernization.

Vernon shared tips she learned from developing the concept and design of the project. She observed that it was important to identify and understand the problem being ad-

¹ Presentation available at <http://blog.law.cornell.edu/lvi2012/presentation/when-the-dog-catches-the-car-canliis-evolution-from-free-law-concept-to-cornerstone-of-canadian-legal-research-to-potential-commercial-competitor/>.

² The preliminary report is available at <http://www.aallnet.org/Documents/Government-Relations/2011-2012-Preliminary-Analysis-of-AALLs-State-Legal-Inventories.pdf>.

³ Presentation available at <http://blog.law.cornell.edu/lvi2012/presentation/the-promise-and-peril-of-using-icts-to-advance-the-rule-of-law-and-access-to-justice/>.

dressed, to know the system you are working with, and to use local designers and key experts. She emphasised the need to monitor and evaluate the project, paying attention to what is working and what is not. Other important aspects were the introduction and training, showing a high level of support, and augmenting all this with traditional methods.

Working with Free Access to Law Initiatives: Narratives from Africa (Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Malawi, Seychelles, Nigeria, AfricanLII)⁴

This session featured representatives of Legal Information Institutes from various African countries who spoke about current and future developments in their countries. The speakers all reiterated that they were very keen to collaborate with libraries across North America to digitize materials from the African countries that might be in their collections as many of these materials are no longer available in their original jurisdiction.

A librarian in the audience proposed following up with me on the idea that North American libraries should consider

adopting and partnering with some of these projects. Food for thought!

Library Tour

A conference like this cannot happen without a library tour. Our tour was of the impressive Cornell Law Library. The library collection includes a collection of the Laws of Liberia, which are not available anywhere else in the world. One of the delegates at the conference, a representative of the Ministry of Attorney General, Liberia, was particularly excited to know about the existence of these materials.

Conclusion

The opportunity given to me as a recipient of the Janine Miller Fellowship has been a fulfilling experience. It opened a lot of windows of opportunity! In addition to librarians, I met a lot of other professionals who had a lot to share and are willing to continue networking and exploring.



Cornell Law Library Reading Room

⁴ Presentation available at <http://blog.law.cornell.edu/lvi2012/presentation/working-with-free-access-to-law-initiatives-narratives-from-africa/>. Other videos and presentations at this conference are available at <http://blog.law.cornell.edu/lvi2012/video/> and <http://blog.law.cornell.edu/lvi2012/schedule/presentations/>.