

Law Library of Congress Reaches for the World

The world's largest law library looks ahead to the future of information

By John Cannan and Christine Sellers

The Law Library of Congress (LLC) is the world's largest law library, with more than 2.65 million volumes that span the ages and cover virtually every jurisdiction in the world. For most of the LLC's nearly 200-year history, its collections and the wealth of knowledge they represent were primarily available to those who could travel to Washington, D.C., or via requests for loans or mailed copies. With the growth of the internet, access has broadened dramatically as the LLC, like other law libraries, makes more of its resources available online.



The demand for access continues to grow exponentially even as the range of internet-based resources shifts toward more interactive and user-generated services. To ensure that users everywhere in the world have access to the broadest possible range of online legal resources, the LLC is planning an unprecedented level of engagement with the global law library community, in an effort to create unique opportunities for legal research and collaborative legal analysis.

Milestones

The LLC has been an active player in the pioneering world of Web 1.0, creating or participating in a variety of internet-based products and services designed to meet the ever-growing demand for instant information.

The LLC participates in QuestionPoint's "Ask a Librarian" digital reference service, annually answering thousands of legal reference questions from around the world. LLC Legal Reference Librarian Margaret Wood says that the service is not only providing information to patrons worldwide but is also "showing them one of the best advantages of a free society."

The LLC contributed to the Library of Congress's Century of Lawmaking website, which contains a wealth of legislative research material from the first 100 years of the republic. The law library also pioneered the creation of a database of foreign law, the Global Legal Information Network (GLIN), which currently has approximately 30 country participants. GLIN is currently undergoing its first full assessment.

The LLC's Global Legal Monitor news service provides brief updates on legal developments from jurisdictions around the world, while its *Guide to Law Online* provides an annotated guide to sources of legal information for the United States and countries around the world, as well as international and multinational sources. The Law Library's Global Legal Information Catalog (GLIC) (www.loc.gov/mulp) takes cataloging into the depths of comparative law encyclopedias and

treatises, providing more identifying information to researchers than traditional "surface" cataloging. Since 2007, the LLC has archived significant and influential legal blogs (blawgs) and made historical posts available online.

THOMAS, the best known of the LLC's web resources (www.thomas.gov), has made legislative information freely available online since 1995. It is now a crucial source for tracking current legislation and finding recent legislative histories.

Web 2.0 Developments

While the online initiatives listed above are recognized as pillars in the world of legal research and reference services, they largely represent the old internet paradigm, in which users sought out the LLC and its digital resources in order to find information. The constant change that characterizes law librarianship in the age of the internet now requires libraries to reach out to users with the interactive networking capabilities of Web 2.0 services, while at the same time considering the possibilities of an approaching Web 3.0 that can only be imagined. Under the new leadership of Law Librarian Roberta Shaffer, who is well known in the law librarian community, the LLC is already meeting these challenges with expanded web resources and a new level of engagement with patrons from around the globe.

In 2009, the LLC joined the social media universe by adding its own Twitter and Facebook pages. LLC Senior Legal Information Analyst Andrew Weber notes that Twitter is an excellent tool for quickly sharing links to both LLC content and other sites, while Facebook serves a broader audience and allows users to post interactive commentary. Both services are "striving to develop a community of people interested in and engaged with the LLC," Weber says. As of March 2010, the LLC had a growing base of more than 1,600 fans on Facebook and more than 1,100 followers on Twitter.

The LLC is also making its videos more accessible and easier to find by

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e-LLC

The Law Library of Congress has already established a strong presence on the web, both 1.0 and 2.0. Check out these sites for more information.

Ask a Librarian
www.loc.gov/rr/askalib

Global Legal Information Network (GLIN)
<http://glin.gov>

Global Legal Monitor
www.loc.gov/lawweb/servlet/lloc_news

Blawgs Archive
www.loc.gov/law/find/web-archive/legal-blawgs.php

Twitter
<http://twitter.com/LawLibCongress>

Facebook
www.facebook.com/lawlibraryofcongress

YouTube
www.youtube.com/user/LibraryOfCongress#g/c/96401BE3402149B9

iTunes
<http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Browse/loc.gov.3061529668>

THOMAS Orientation
www.loc.gov/law/opportunities/seminar-orient.php

Law Librarian Roberta Shaffer's Vision for the LLC
www.loc.gov/law/news/LL%20Vision.pdf

placing them on YouTube and in iTunes. The “Law and the Library” channels on both services allow the LLC to share significant events with those who would never be able to attend LLC events in person. By subscribing to the channels, users are able to receive videos of LLC events as they are uploaded.

Retrofitting THOMAS

To keep pace with the realities of Web 2.0, THOMAS is also being retrofitted. The service now boasts RSS feeds and e-mail updates for the Congressional Record’s Daily Digest, House and Senate floor schedules, and bills presented to the president. Recently installed features also allow users to keep and distribute permanent links to legislative information on THOMAS via bookmarks, e-mail, or social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook, and users can receive wireless updates from THOMAS via smartphones. THOMAS also provides new user-driven content in the form of the Top Five Bills feature, which lists the five most-viewed bills from the previous week.

Meanwhile, the THOMAS website itself has been modified to make it more user-friendly. The home page was streamlined to make navigating easier. Browse options for bills and resolutions were given their own page instead of being hidden on one of the search pages. In addition, the range of years corresponding to each Congress was added as a parenthesis or a pop-up to make searching and browsing easier.

The LLC is also adding value to THOMAS in traditional ways. LLC Senior Legal Reference Librarian Pamela Barnes Craig has developed a popular orientation called “Get to Know Thomas,” which provides an overview of how to research legislation and the



Photo Credit: Kevin Long

The Law Library of Congress staff gathers in Madison Hall.

legislative process. Craig says the orientation helps people navigate through multiple levels of information and gives them a better understanding of the legislative process.

One World

Perhaps the boldest piece of the LLC’s strategy of engagement is the vision of a “One World Law Library” (OWLL), which will serve as a registry and repository of authentic primary legal materials from around the world. Shaffer envisions OWLL as an interactive process, with the LLC “hosting the site and collaborating with federal agencies; state, local, and foreign national governments; and international organizations to maintain a ‘one-stop’ URL” for all things legal.

As part of the OWLL effort, the LLC is pursuing registration of the “law.gov” domain name. LLC staff have discussed the possible framework and standards under which law.gov should function at various conferences around the country as part of an ongoing conversation.

A Vision for the Future

Shaffer envisions the LLC as “an historic institution rising in stature to that of a ‘National Law Library,’ as well as that of a universal law library that uses the latest digital technologies to make the world’s laws and law-related materials accessible and useable everywhere.” The LLC has made great strides toward realizing this ambitious vision and continues to refine its online offerings to keep pace with the internet’s innovations.

Even the most forward-looking strategies and cutting-edge technologies cannot take the place of traditional outreach, however. In recognition of this fact, the LLC is strengthening ties with its current partners and building bonds with new ones as it moves forward to meet the unique demands of the 21st century. The LLC is exploring ways to have remote participation in the annual

GLIN conference, which will take place in Korea in September, and meeting with the U.S. Supreme Court’s librarians to discuss how to better meet their needs. LLC is also collaborating with the Law Library Microform Consortium to digitize materials in an effort to help Haiti rebuild its national legal patrimony destroyed by the recent devastating earthquake.



Photo credit: Kevin Long

A reception at the Law Library of Congress welcomes Global Legal Information Network (GLIN) trainees from around the world. The Law Library of Congress pioneered the creation of this database of foreign law, which currently has 30 participants.

Shaffer acknowledges the central role that lawyers and law librarians play in helping the LLC fulfill its mission to Congress and the world. She encourages AALL members in particular to continue their engagement with the LLC to help build a truly world-class institution that can ensure access to authoritative, authentic, and accurate information for generations to come. ■

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Photo credit: Kevin Long

Law Librarian of Congress Roberta Shaffer established a diverse and representative strategic planning committee, including executives, senior managers, and key subject matter experts. Pictured from left to right are Liah Love, Cynthia Jordan, Kurt Carroll, Christine Sellers, and Andrew Weber.

Strategic Planning

To evaluate and determine the course of the LLC for the next 10 years, Shaffer has established a strategic planning committee consisting of a very diverse and representative group of individuals from around the law library, including executives, senior managers, and key subject matter experts. Each member of the group was required to complete a prescribed list of background reading before participation as a means of ensuring that the group had a common knowledge base. The group articulated the following guiding principles for the strategic planning process:

- The Law Library of Congress is a unit within the Library of Congress and works with our internal peers to serve the Congress of the United States, other federal entities, the American people, and the world community by providing staff expertise and knowledge, collections, and services.
- Law as a discipline does not exist in a vacuum and is truly trans-disciplinary in nature.
- Legal information must be freely available, easily accessible, and enable end-users to add their own value.
- To effectively meet the needs of legal research, information must be accurate, authoritative, and authentic, as well as current and retrospective.
- The Law Library of Congress recognizes the critical importance of knowing, understanding, and respecting the laws and legal systems of other nations of the world.
- Law libraries and access to legal information are key enablers of the “Rule of Law.”
- The increased globalization of human interaction creates a greater need to understand and have access to laws at all jurisdictional levels, from the local to the global.
- Law plays a key role in bringing resolution to conflict and facilitating innovative solutions to social and economic problems.
- Preservation is key because of disciplinary reliance on past precedents and the “long tail.”
- Other countries view the United States as the leader of the information world and, as a result, model their policies about information access, authenticity, authority, and preservation on our example.

When completed, the strategic plan will be made publicly available on the LLC’s website.