

Delivering User-Centric Services at the Colorado Supreme Court Law Library

by Robert M. Linz

Technology drives expectations. We expect technology to simplify our lives by meeting actual and anticipated needs. Companies spend untold resources creating user-friendly devices and information services that help consumers accomplish a variety of daily tasks. However, we can be bewildered by the many information resources available to us. Furthermore, it often is difficult to assess the quality of these resources. In this environment, what value do the library and librarian provide to information researchers?

The advent of the information age has not changed the role of the librarian. Fundamentally, librarians still match information seekers to information sources. That is part of the professional, intellectual work of the librarian. However, the librarian is confronted with three challenges in the current environment. The first is to understand the information needs of users. The second is to have a good command of the available research tools. The third is to develop collections and services that meet the needs and expectations of today's technologically savvy users.

Librarians' Work at the Supreme Court

At the Colorado Supreme Court Law Library,¹ we take seriously these challenges to create a more user-centric library environment. In the past year, we have implemented a number of changes that affect our users. First, we reorganized the collection. We studied what materials were used most often by most researchers. We then evaluated how the collection's physical arrangement facilitated (or hindered) access to those materials. We also analyzed what resources were being overlooked by users because they were not readily accessible or were illogically organized. Drawing on this data, we simplified access to the collection by re-

ducing the number of locations of materials, integrating subject-related titles, and grouping materials used in research. This decision has helped to create a more efficient and thorough research process.

We then adjusted the physical layout of the library to complement the collection shift. Where possible, we placed study tables adjacent to heavily used collections. We interspersed shelving units housing statutes, practice materials, and dictionaries beside the study tables. A copy room was converted into a conference room, where we added a current and historical set of Colorado statutes and session laws. We placed the reference desk in a more prominent location. We also added tables and a computer to the reference desk area so that user and librarian can sit together to identify the user's needs and review research results online. Finally, we tripled the number of publicly accessible computers in the library and placed them close to the reference desk.

Serving the Judiciary

Beyond these general changes, we currently are reviewing how we can improve services to the library's user groups. The library primarily serves three groups of users—the judiciary, members of the Bar, and the general public. First and foremost, the library serves the Colorado Supreme Court. By statute, the librarian of the Supreme Court works under the direction of the Court and is responsible to the Court for its collection and policies.² The library's main mission is to ensure the justices and their clerks have access to those legal resources and services necessary for the disposition of cases before the Court. Because the appellate courts share the same location and mission, the library also provides assistance to the judges and clerks of the Colorado Court of Appeals.



About the Author

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State and Federal Resources

As the state judiciary's law library, we strive to build a robust collection of Colorado legal materials. Our collection includes all Colorado primary law. We possess multiple copies of Colorado case reporters. We also hold current and historical sets of Colorado statutes. We have the complete set of the Bradford/Lexis Nexis® *Colorado Revised Statutes* of 1973, with pocket parts through 1996. In addition to the 1973 code revision, the law library holds copies of the 1963 code, the 1953 code, the 1935 code, and various sets of compiled statutes prior to 1935. The library also has a complete set of session laws, dating back to the Jefferson territory of 1860. Furthermore, the law library contains a current and historical set of the *Colorado Code of Regulations*. Along with these primary materials, the law library collects a variety of Colorado practice materials, treatises, form books, and continuing legal education materials.

For other jurisdictions, the library maintains a complete set of the National Reporter System. The library also keeps a current set of session laws and annotated code for the federal government and each state. The library's holdings of historical session laws and statutes varies by jurisdiction. Beyond primary law, the library collects treatises and other secondary materials that add breadth and depth to issues impacting law in Colorado.

Other Services to the Judiciary

In addition to collection development services, the library provides research assistance, current awareness services, and training

to the judiciary. The law library seeks to provide services to the judiciary throughout Colorado. Our review of services showed that Colorado's judicial districts are underserved by the library. To remedy this, we developed the "Traveling Librarian" program, slated to begin in the summer of 2008. As part of this program, the three Supreme Court librarians will be scheduling visits to each of the twenty-two judicial districts. The goal of each visit will be to become acquainted with court personnel, assist in collection development and maintenance, answer research and reference questions, and provide training on using online legal research tools.

Serving the Bar

The Supreme Court Law Library serves all members of the Colorado Bar. In particular, the library benefits solo, small, and midsize law firms with limited collections and no librarians on staff. For these users, the library offers a quiet place to work and assistance in locating and using legal resources. The Supreme Court librarians also are lawyers who have significant experience in legal reference, research, and technology.

Print Collections

The library houses approximately 80,000 print volumes—roughly the collection of a small academic law library. In addition to the Colorado and primary law materials already discussed, the library's collection covers most legal subjects. The titles range from more general treatises on the law to practice-oriented loose-leaf services. For example, the library subscribes to the *Bankruptcy Re-*

porter and *Bankruptcy Digest* from Thomson-West, and *Collier on Bankruptcy* from LexisNexis.

The collection is particularly strong in the areas of tax, natural resources, energy, commercial, and labor and employment law, as well as trial and appellate advocacy. Labor and employment law resources include BNA's *Labor Relations Reporter* and other labor and employment treatises, such as *Larson's Workers' Compensation Law* from LexisNexis. The library also has a number of commercial law titles, including CCH's *Banking Law Reporter*, *Consumer Credit Guide*, and *Blue Sky Reporter*. Finally, there are a number of titles on appellate and trial court practice, procedure, and related evidentiary issues. For most of our treatises, we keep both current and superseded volumes.

The library maintains a general reference collection. This collection includes the *Restatements of Law*, *Uniform Laws Annotated*, form books, *American Law Reports*, and the two main legal encyclopedias, *American Jurisprudence 2d* and *Corpus Juris Secundum*.

The library also holds a large collection of documents on microfiche. This collection includes state session laws, the Code of Federal Regulations, the Federal Register, Bar journals (including *The Colorado Lawyer*), various government documents, and older versions of case reporters.

Digital Collections

The library also strives to provide users the convenience of electronic research and document delivery. The library has six computer workstations, and provides each user one hour of free electronic research per visit.

The library subscribes to Westlaw® and LoisLaw® legal databases, as well as LexisNexis. The Lexis subscription offers federal and state primary law, which broadens our electronic collection of Colorado materials, and provides access to the entire array of Shepard's citations.

In addition, we recently have begun to transition our CCH loose-leaf collection to its Internet platform. This platform gives users a unified, integrated environment to locate explanatory articles and link to the primary law referenced in them.

We also subscribe to HeinOnline,³ a collection of legal materials from the William S. Hein Corporation. This database provides law journal articles in the portable document format (PDF). Other titles in the collection include state session laws and various historical treatises, all of which can be delivered to a requestor via e-mail.

The library is building/expanding its collection of tools to digitize documents, including the recently acquired Minolta microfiche scanner. The scanner converts microfiche images into PDF images, making the library's microfiche collection more accessible. The library also is exploring digitizing its large historical collection of Colorado regulations. Though a challenging task, we are certain the result will be helpful to any researcher who has to navigate the muddled maze of historical regulations.

The value of these electronic solutions lies in the improved service we can provide our users. If a practitioner is unable to come to

the library to do research, we can bring the library to the user, so to speak. For example, if a practitioner has a citation to a document, including law review articles, and that document is available online, we can e-mail a PDF copy of that document, or we can fax a document to his or her firm.⁴

Serving the Public

The Supreme Court Law Library also serves members of the general public. For example, many individuals who may be acting in a *pro se* capacity have a unique set of needs. They require resources that assist them in understanding the legal system (and legal processes) by clearly explaining the law in an area and providing guidance to solving very practical problems.

The library provides members of the public access to all of the primary and secondary resources in the library. Often, practice treatises with forms are most useful. For example, the *Colorado Practice Series*⁵ is a great resource for helping nonattorneys understand and respond to practical legal problems. The library also provides access to online resources (such as court websites) for forms and contact information, or legal aid organizations for additional assistance.

To further meet the needs of public users, the library is working toward improving its self-help center. Located within the library, the self-help center contains self-help guides, treatises written for the layperson, and forms for common legal problems. Most important, the library staff is on-hand to provide ready-reference service and assistance. Although the staff does not give legal advice, we can help patrons locate legal information.

Conclusion

At the Supreme Court Law Library, we take a user-centric approach to creating library collections and services. Indeed, the heart of our program is service. Librarians who are proficient in information technology, legal resources, and research methods add value to their organizations. Librarians are not merely caretakers of dusty collections; rather, we serve as the link between the information seeker and the resource. Library staff members appreciate their role as legal information providers. We hope the judiciary, the Bar, and the general public will continue to regard us as a valuable legal research resource.

Notes

1. The Colorado Supreme Court Law Library is located in the Colorado State Judicial Building, 2 E. 14th Ave., Denver, CO 80203. Users can find the library's website at www.state.co.us/courts/scplib, and the online public access catalog at www.csclibrarycat.state.co.us.

2. CRS § 13-2-117.

3. HeinOnline is available at www.heinonline.org.

4. The library charges a modest fee for these services.

5. Available from Thomson-West Corp. at west.thomson.com. ■