

Librarianship Related Studies at City University – Choices for Law Librarians

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Introduction

Gillian Sands started her career by studying the MSc in Information Science at City University in the session 1998–99. Among the standard skills, she studied in particular legal aspects of library and information work and also services and documentation about the law in general, in other words, information law and legal information.

In this paper we will look at what is available in these two areas currently at City, and also discuss the usefulness of the research projects which over the years have built up a considerable body of knowledge. The course has changed quite a lot since Gillian's time, and we will look at the current manifestation, but put the choices into context by looking at what Gillian studied as well.

Structure of the course

In Gillian's time we had just the Information Science Masters degree. Now, students can also take Library and Information Studies. They differ in their emphasis on information retrieval or on digital collection management respectively, not on any of the topics we will be discussing. For the more systems oriented student there is also the Information Systems and Technology course, now split into three streams one of which, 'Library and Information Management', is the information related one. These details can be pursued on our web page (www soi.city.ac.uk) or in print if anyone is interested.

The main thing for you to know is that Gillian took ten modules; eight core and two electives, while today students take eight modules; seven core and one elective. The modules are larger and we have tried to bring together separate groups of students taking very similar subject matter with slightly different emphases. In this way students on similar courses get mixed together and hopefully learn from each other. This new structure ran for the first time in the past year, 2004–05.

Information law

The major module here is "Information Law and Policy" where we look at the two main blocks of intellectual property and human rights based laws. These consist respectively of mainly copyright, patents and trade marks and of data protection, freedom of information and the Human Rights Act. We look at all these predominantly from the viewpoint of the seeker after information; a researcher or a library user mainly. Additional topics are liabilities of information providers and a short introduction to health and safety and disabilities laws. Because we also have specialist geographical information science students, there is also one lecture on information law with a geographical element.

The policy element of the module is covered by a lecture on government policy and information markets. This lecture looks at attempts to make public-sector information available for as many applications as possible beyond its original use. Currently fashionable market philosophies ensure that these applications are carried out by the private sector, who take the information for free and make a profit from its exploitation. Many though not all information laws are designed under global and international influences and seem to lie beyond national policies.

We also cover a small amount of records management on the "Library and Information Management" module. This includes a look at the public records system which has a strongly archival purpose, and at private sector records and document management concepts. This topic has a strongly legal flavour, as a variety of legal provisions, alongside operational needs, are the main influences on how long various documents need to be held.

Legal library and information services

Legal information used to be taught as a full elective module. In the current version of the course, it is combined with business and financial information as a

“Business and Legal Information Option,” BLI. There are fewer option choices than previously for students – the BLI option covers professional activities, a media and social sciences and a health sciences one, and technical choices of advanced web page design and open source software. The advantage is in having slightly larger student groups to facilitate better discussions and group work.

For students going to work, as Gillian did in academic law libraries like IALS or the Bodleian in Oxford, the business dimension is not that relevant, but for those going to work with practitioners, it is very relevant. For most of the time, the lawyers know their law, and need help with other aspects of their cases, often in a business or commercial context. So this module remains focussed and relevant despite the loss of some of the legal information taught on it.

On the legal side we cover the structure of English and European law and how this is reflected in the literature. Then a contrasting look at the uses of Westlaw and the Lexis part of Lexis/Nexis for legal research. This is interesting as Westlaw covers many journals and links cases with articles written about them. Lexis’ strength is in primary law with its broad and deep coverage of countries and topics. We also survey the free information provided via the Internet with a look at BAILII and also at portals, in particular Lawbore which was developed at City University for use by our law students as well as by other lawyers whether students or not.

We then move on to looking at the computerisation of the civil and criminal justice systems, and we visit a fairly large firm of City Solicitors to see their information provision. They use a good range of information services and they have also taken into employment quite a number of our graduates and also sent us some of their unqualified staff as students. The business side of this module complements this with lectures on the structure of companies, the operation of the financial system as a whole and the information services that support it.

The dissertation project

This takes about three and a half months in the Summer for the full time students and results in a 15 to 20,000 word report on any topic with an information handling aspect relevant to our courses. The student chooses, either from our topic list or from his own interests, or in conjunction with current or past employers a hopefully useful project.

Part time projects used to take an entire third year, but recently our timings have been changed. They are expected to start after Easter in their second year once the last coursework assignments have been completed. They complete the following January and therefore have 27 months. There is a ‘fast track’ process which gets it done in 24 months, but that is little different. Nearly always, part time students do their projects based in their current workplace and their employers benefit from useful studies designed to validate or improve their

services. We have no problems with employers making use of the results, in fact we encourage it as drawing ever closer links. We can also accommodate temporary embargoes on access to a work if it is sensitive at the time of writing.

Over the years we have produced many dissertations, over a thousand in the Department of Information Science as a whole. Sometimes the content gets published by the supervisor and student as a journal article. More rarely, the student will publish by himself. Unfortunately more recently rather fewer dissertation papers have been published than we would like owing to pressures of work and staff being too busy to see to them. Students usually go off at the end, get involved in their first job and don’t participate much in the fate of their paper.

In information law, there have been many dissertations on the characteristics of information relating to patents, both technical and commercial in nature, Eisenschitz (1984) and Eisenschitz, Lazard and Willey (1986). There have been a few on copyright, in particular on attitudes to photocopying by academics, Johnson (1995) and on legal issues of digital preservation of works, Marsterson (2002). Gillian’s dissertation was on Freedom of Information and Records Management and asked whether government documents held as public records would be released more quickly and easily once the Fol Act was in force, Sands (1999). She concluded it would make little difference as it has been policy for some years already to release works early if there was no pressing reason to keep them in store. Those kept for longer, the converse effect, are held under wraps for specific reasons which would generally still apply under Fol. Other interesting topics have concerned data protection in a children’s charity, Ireland (2000) and Fol and local government information, Cordell (2004).

In legal information there have been many dissertations based on the particular activities of the information services of particular firms of solicitors Ellison (2000) and O’Connor (2000), and also occasionally of barrister’s chambers too Roberts (1999) and Sayers (2001). The names of firms are usually held confidential, but not always. Sometimes they don’t mind or are positively keen to be identified with having been helpful to students. There have also been studies concerning law and current awareness services, Carew (2001), knowledge management, Taylor (2001) and Simpson (2002), publishing McVitty (1998) and the exploitation of electronic resources Hayns (2001). Another area studied was the development of the legal system, Garlinge (1999). These examples are only some of many possible topics to discuss.

I. Uses of the dissertation collection

Our collection of dissertations is exploited well. We use the results of various studies as examples in lectures and when teaching research methods. Evaluation of the

strengths and weaknesses of a past dissertation is good training for a student before making his own contribution. Some dissertations are joint ventures with outside organisations and they will use the results as they see fit within their enterprise.

Finally, many dissertations relate to our research interests, and some will feed into the larger picture of research carried out in the Department.

2. E-learning

The department, as part of the wider school and university systems, has a thorough ongoing e-learning development programme which has revolutionised our learning and teaching. At the most basic level we have electronic journals in the library accessible to students with a copyright coding system (Athens) so they each copy what they need covered by licences. There are also extensive computing facilities providing analytical and teaching software, word processing, spreadsheets etc. This is now quite conventional.

City has gone beyond this to adopt a Virtual Learning Environment based on a proprietary software called Web CT. Our implementation is named City Space. Each course and group of students has an enclosed system. Only enrolled students and staff can access it and so there are lots of private domains for different cohorts of students all over the university. Full texts for lectures are written, exercises are provided and students can work together, discuss and question on discussion boards and they hand in their assessed work via City Space and get their marks and feedback that way too.

It operates in this mode for distance learning students who never come to the university. But it also works as an extra service for face to face and 'flexible' students both full and part time. They attend the lectures, but can also read the texts which operate as in-house text books. If they miss a lecture, or even a whole module, they can keep up. Part-timers can still do group work and assessment hand-ins are not dependent on the student's presence and do not need much form filling and box ticking.

For academics and support staff, it is a huge amount of extra work setting up the texts, manning the discussion boards and interacting with students. But it has advantages too. City Space has its own electronic library containing recent dissertations and also selected papers. These and the electronic journals and use of the internet means that all students have access to lots of background materials. In law, the Westlaw database in the library has law from many countries, plus a lot of journal articles hypertext linked to cases and statutes they refer to. We also have in the library our own law portal, Lawbore, maintained by our law librarian, Emily Allbon, who is an ex student of our information science course.

These facilities ease the processes of learning but we also try to keep personal contact. By the time we get to the electives, the classes are smaller. The dissertation work is of course individual, and there we really do get to know those students with an interest in a particular field.

Further course information

Full details of departmental offerings are on our departmental website DIS (2005 + continuing) and we have an enquiry email address pgenquire@soi.city.ac.uk.

We run open evenings throughout the year for a general look round, and all UK students are interviewed in the Department. The application form and details of courses, open evenings etc are all on the website. Those people who accept a place get access to another website with such items as pre-course reading lists, news and enrolment information available.

There are some bursaries available for support and fees. There is also one award specially for a law student, the Alex McVittie Award, worth £1,500. It is intended for someone who will become a law librarian or other legal information specialist and is to relieve hardship. Details of how to apply for this and other awards are available on the website.

The future

We have a distinct place on the spectrum of library and information work courses, which involves working with the technology, whether concerned with digital libraries and collection management, or with creating information stores and researching questions for users, or with enabling the most suitable technologies for users to work with.

For law librarians and information workers, we concentrate on the resources with an indication of the subject matter of law and the structures of legal systems. Some of our students are now working in law firms and barristers' chambers and academic libraries around the country.

For information law we concentrate on the subject matter and related policies. It is more academic, but some students have gone to work in rights management for copyright, in the UK and European Patent Offices and in the patent information services of both large companies and small consultancies.

We need to increase student numbers to a satisfactory level as the economic situation for higher education improves. We also need to work at research as a background and baseline for the teaching and as meaningful in its own right. The Department has formed a Centre for Information Policy Research as there are several staff with related interests. This should accelerate and strengthen both our research

and teaching. Duplication of teaching interests allows me to try out my ideas on colleagues before the

students see them. Progress is incremental, but it is definitely positive.

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A Change of Name at Twenty – BIALL's Legal Foundations Course

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1984-2004



Introduction

As ever, it started with an innocent looking email. "Idea" stated the subject line, but who could be emailing ideas to me on a sunny Wednesday lunchtime in June? Jennifer Barrow, as it turned out, had not

been spending her lunch in the park drinking too much Pimms, but had been browsing through Mary Blake's *History of BIALL* (as a good Council member does) and discovered that the Law for Librarians course (as was) had been running for 20 years. The very first course had started in the Autumn of 1984, meaning that our 2004/2005 year would be the 21st year of the course, surely reason for celebration! After much deliberating over what would be most suitable for such an esteemed and valuable part of BIALL's portfolio of courses, a special logo was created for the year's course materials, and a successful evening reunion was held in April. This took place at BPP's new law school at Waterloo and was attended by over 30 past and current law librarians, including a brave few who attended that very first year.