

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

### History of the Course

During the evening our honourable secretary, Catherine McArdle, gave us her memories of the beginnings of the course, which was in the process of being set up when she was graduate trainee at the Polytechnic of Central London (now the University of Westminster, with whom BIALL still runs the course). In that first year there were 26 places costing £60 each – we are now able to offer 40 places a year, and charge £385 for 24 two-hour lectures, which we consider is still excellent value. Gillian Sands attended the course between October 2000 and April 2001. Much of the content of the course remains very similar to that first year, covering general areas such as criminal law, contract law, tort and property. This coming year we hope to reintroduce lectures on the EU and international law, as well as more corporate law. One element that has been dropped since the early days of the course, and since the ten-year-review articles in the *Law Librarian* of June 1997, is that of legal research, as it was felt that this was now covered in the separate Legal Reference Materials course.

### Attendance

As Catherine also mentioned, attendance on the course has been steady over the last 20 years, proving wrong those who thought demand would peter out after a couple of years. Numbers for the last few years have remained at between 30 and 40 a year, with the usual last-minute cancellations and additions balancing each other out.

Avis Whyte, the current course leader at the University of Westminster, also kindly spoke at our reunion evening. Avis was instrumental, along with Jennifer Barrow, in revamping the course seven years ago in response to increasingly negative feedback from attendees. Since then it has been taught at the law school on Little Titchfield Street in central London, and Avis arranges all the practical elements of the course, including the room and facilities, and most importantly the lecturers. Avis sends out questionnaires the morning after every lecture, which are returned to myself and enable us to keep a check on any problems with lecturers or facilities and ensure they are addressed as soon as possible during the course.

### Change of name

The Legal Foundations Course will continue to evolve in response to the feedback gathered on the whole course at the end of the year, and taking into account developments in the legal and information professions generally. A major change this year was the name of the course itself, as for a long time people had found “Law for Librarians” confusing (how could a course on copyright last for 24 weeks?!). We felt that “Legal Foundations” struck the right note in summarising what the course is about – each lecture covers the basics of a certain area of law, providing attendees with a foundation to help them in their work, and to provide a building block for their own learning. The course attempts to cover the areas most relevant to the work of the majority of attendees, while still covering a broad base of law. Avis is also not afraid to discard unsuccessful lecturers and go in search of new ones, and has managed to find some excellent new speakers this year, who we hope will return next year, along with some of the old stalwarts who love their annual librarian lectures!

### Regional course?

While the course continues to change and develop, one thing BIALL's Professional Standards and Development Committee (PSD) has been unable to resolve, despite various research reports from committee members and extensive discussions at committee meetings, is the issue of offering the course to BIALL members outside London. Issues of cost, the level of demand, the suitability of the course for online delivery and the technologies required have all been debated and no solution as yet found. PSD will continue to look into alternative delivery options, and volunteers from outside London will be welcomed with open arms...

### Conclusions

The Legal Foundations Course remains the remit of PSD, and Emma Tate will be taking on responsibility for the course from this year. Jennifer and I, both ex-PSD members, hope to continue to help in the development of the course and to work alongside Avis and Emma in ensuring it remains of use to the profession for the next 20 years.