

1986

In Step with the Times: Law Library Keeps Up with Changes in Legal Research

Margaret A. Leary

University of Michigan Law School, mleary@umich.edu

Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/articles/1713>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/articles>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leary, Margaret A. "In Step with the Times: Law Library Keeps Up with Changes in Legal Research." *Law Quad. Notes* 30, no. 2 (1986): 8-10.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact mlaw.repository@umich.edu.

In step with the times

Law library keeps up with changes in legal research

by Margaret Leary

Change is constant in legal research. Plucknett's work describes, for example, the modern textbook replacing published case reports as the most important form of legal literature. More recently, A. B. W. Simpson has argued that the law review article has displaced the treatise. Apart from these changes, the law itself has continued to embrace concepts from other disciplines and deal with facts and methodologies of an increasingly technological society.

These changes are readily apparent when we examine a contemporary topic such as hazardous waste disposal, which only recently has appeared in legal literature. A library user in the 1970s would have found comparatively little on this subject, since a comprehensive system for regulating hazardous waste did not exist until the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976. Since then, publications have burgeoned in the form of federal statutes, regulations, court decisions, books, articles, and government documents.

The earlier user would have found fewer than 50 monographs in the Law Library dealing with hazardous waste. By the mid-1980s, the number had approximately doubled. Since 1976, 850 publications from the U.S. government printing office alone have dealt with the topic. Approximately 15 law review articles were published on hazardous waste in 1973; the number was close to 1,000 in 1985.

The Michigan Law Library has responded to the demands gener-

ated by these changes in a number of ways. The need for more book stack space, better study space, and more efficient library staff areas stimulated the drive that culminated in the Law Library Addition, occupied in 1981. The increase in available research resources has been matched by improvements in resources and finding aids and by the physical facilities of the Law Library.

Compare the process of finding an appropriate introductory monograph and some key journal articles; or a federal statute and the hearings which preceded it and the regulations that followed it; or citations to materials not purchased by the Law Library. In each of these standard steps, students and faculty in the 1980s have a sub-

stantial advantage over their peers a decade ago.

The first step—finding pertinent descriptive, or secondary material—is fundamentally easier now. In the Addition, reference librarians and the public catalog are visible and accessible, not hidden as they were in their former locations in Legal Research. Moreover, an automated circulation system and the capacity to retrieve books in circulation greatly improve users' ability to find out about, and get their hands on, needed material. During the hours when professional reference librarians are not available, printed handouts on doing research allow the researcher to get a productive start. A new index to periodical literature, *Legal Resource Index*, provides in a single cumulation references to some 6,900 articles on the topic of hazardous waste published between January, 1980 and September, 1985. The reel microfiche is updated monthly and is much speedier to use than the printed counterpart with its many paper supplements.



Margaret Leary

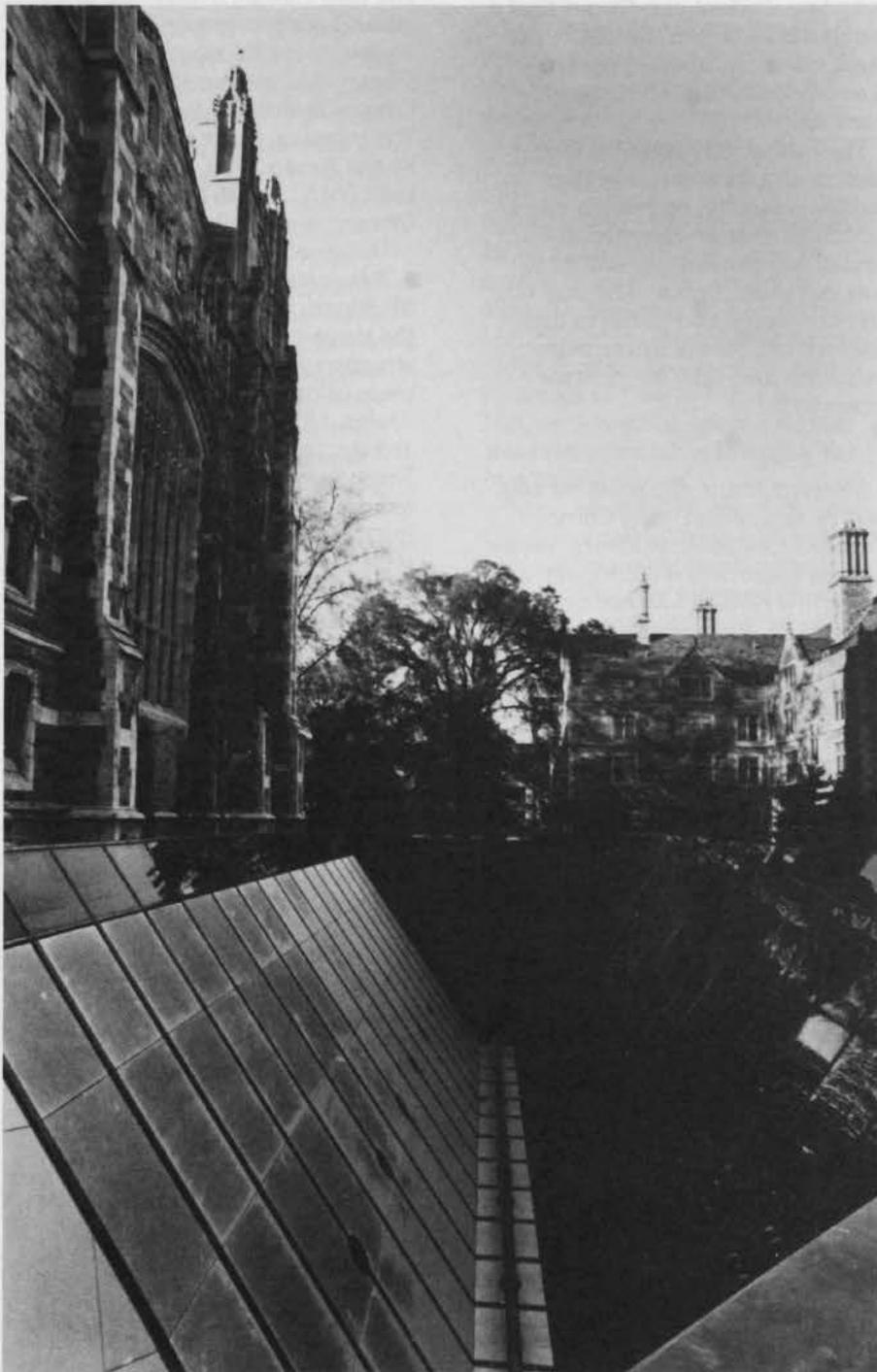
The method of finding federal statutes, hearings, and regulations has also changed substantially. The Law Library has both the current CIS *Congressional Index and*

Abstracts and the fiche which contain the indexed Congressional publications. The Library provides duplicate fiche free, on request, to users, as well as both reading and

paper-printing equipment. Congressional Information Service, which publishes these reference works, also publishes the *Federal Register Index*, a substantial improvement over any official finding aid. This index is particularly necessary for research on hazardous waste regulation or any other area where changes and additions to regulations are frequent. In addition, the Library subscribes to on-line versions of the *Federal Register* and the *Code of Federal Regulations*, which provide yet another research approach.

Much of this research is also facilitated by use of LEXIS or WESTLAW. Students and faculty use LEXIS and WESTLAW about 400 hours each month now; neither was available at all until 1976. Faculty have access to both systems either through terminals in the Faculty Library or from personal computers in individual offices. Student access through personal computers may be available in the next year.

Hazardous waste is clearly an area in which legal principles may matter less than do scientific facts and principles of chemical and mechanical engineering. The Law Library, just as clearly, cannot house adequate libraries for these other disciplines. But our ability to discover citations and deliver documents for our users in even these unfamiliar areas has been substantially improved by two relatively new applications of computers to information data bases. One such data base is a commercial resource, the other a non-profit library consortium. The commercial resource is DIALOG, a machine-readable data base of bibliographic citation indexes, which is the equivalent of print indexes to the periodical literature of all disciplines. Our librarians conduct searches and create bibliographies for students and faculty, and then give advice about how to obtain the articles.



B R I E F S

The Research Libraries Group, a non-profit consortium to which The University of Michigan belongs, provides roughly the same sort of machine-readable index to separately published monographs. Member libraries cover the intellectual spectrum in their book collecting policies. Since we can search the data base by subject, we can locate material we would never be able to buy. We can also request an interlibrary loan through the system at the same time, if need be. Agreement among member libraries also allows us to obtain free photocopies of articles, and allows members of the Law School community free access to other member libraries, including Harvard, Yale, and Columbia.

Improvements in the physical facilities affect even those users who read only their own notes and casebooks, but especially those who do original research. Students now have better access to library resources than ever before. Instead of competing, as they did in 1975, with 1,100 peers for 400 seats in the Reading Room and the dark, hot, and dusty old

stacks, students are now assured a one-third share of a study carrel in the location of their choice. The Library restricts access to the Addition to those who need to use the books there, which means that a law student can always find a seat in the Addition. Students can check out as many as 15 books to a carrel, so everyone can do research.

The interaction between the Library and its users, whether students, faculty, or practitioners, continues despite changes in the kind of information we collect or how our users find it. The way our users conceive and perform their research affects the information we collect and how we provide access to it.

Margaret Leary, director of the Law Library, holds a B.A. from Cornell University, an M.A. in library science from the University of Minnesota, and a J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul. In addition to her position at the Law School, she also serves as a lecturer in the U-M School of Library Science. ❖

