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Books and Bytes: Bringing a Multimedia Focus to the Law School

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Books AND bytes

Bringing a **multimedia** focus to the Law School

When James Milles, UB Law School's new associate dean for Legal Information Services and director of the law library, started work at his alma mater, St. Louis University, back in the early '80s, there was one computer for that university's law library.

One!

"And," he says, "it was literally locked in a closet."

Well, times change, and perhaps no times have changed as quickly as ours over the past couple of decades. Electronic media, communications and research continue to turn most Americans' lives topsy-turvy. The field of law was a pioneer in the information revolution, with Lexis and Westlaw providing full-text database research, and the teaching and practice of law continue to evolve in a changing environment of information technology.

Law libraries are changing, too, as Milles and his full-time staff of 18 at the Charles B. Sears Law Library know all too well. The Law School's computer lab, for example, soon will move into the law library, a relocation that will bring more students than ever before into the facility.

Another immediate project is establishment of the New York Alcove, a collection of New York practice materials purchased through a generous gift from the Class of 1979.

But progress comes at a price, Milles acknowledges. "One of the problems with computers," he says, "is that it seems so easy and it seems as though you have everything as the result of a search. But you do not know what you are missing. If you look at McKinney's Consolidated Laws, you can see the headings. That is missing in a database search."

Before coming to Buffalo earlier this year, Milles worked as associate director for information and technology, and an adjunct professor of law, at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. There



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he was responsible for the computing functions of the entire law school – a job, he says, that strayed a little too far from library work for his taste.

Before Cleveland, he worked for 14 years at St. Louis University, where he earned both undergraduate and law degrees (sandwiched around master's degrees in English, and library and information science, from the University of Texas). It was in St. Louis, he said, that he “just happened to fall into law libraries” – working full time and plowing through law school part time. But it was a natural fit; as Milles says, “I probably think more like a librarian than most librarians.” Even his CDs are alphabetized.

Milles has published widely on issues

of library science, including a book, *An Internet Handbook for Law Librarians*, and bibliographies on such topics as land-use aspects of group homes, urban housing and neighborhood-investment strategies. He has also taught and lectured nationwide on new technologies and their relationship to law education and practice.

“Buffalo is pretty easy to feel settled in,” he says of his new home. “I really like it. After two months here, I feel like I know the city better than I knew Cleveland in two and a half years.”

At UB Law, the new director has begun a year-long process of reviewing the law library's collection practices – “what can we cut, what can we build?” And he plans soon to begin a strategic planning process, to assess the library's strengths and

weaknesses, threats to its effectiveness and opportunities to do better. “We want to ask, where does this organization want to be in five years?” Milles says. “Then we can decide how to get there. How can we shape our future, rather than just have it happen to us?”

In the Law School in general, Milles – who has been around law schools for a long time now – sees some interesting facets. “The Law School does a lot of very innovative things,” he says. “I really like the whole interdisciplinary focus of the professors here. People who have a wide variety of interests are just more fun to work with.” •