

Some transatlantic observations on the similarities in services at four academic legal research libraries.

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Every night for ten nights last May, I returned to room 128 in the Westside YMCA (West 63rd Street, New York City – just off Central Park) armed with more behind the scenes insights, professional secrets and first hand accounts of US law library operation and management than one slim A5 notebook could hope to hold. I was fortunate to be in the United States on a two-week placement at Columbia University, visiting some of America's great law libraries – the law school libraries of Columbia itself, New York University and Yale University. Each morning after an orange juice, toasted cream cheese bagel and cappuccino, I would head out with the commuters to join the subway at Columbus Circle – uptown for Columbia or downtown for NYU. Every evening I would admire the energy of the mostly silver-haired athletes in brightly coloured lycra returning to the Westside "Y" after numerous circuits of the Jackie "O" reservoir on the upper east side of Central Park. The park is 843 acres of creative space bound by impressive hotels, apartment blocks and the streets of Harlem. In May it is in perpetual motion from dawn to dusk with joggers, roller-bladers and cyclists weaving their way around the trees, fountains and numerous statues. Indeed it appears to be a huge magic garden, complete with beautiful street lamps that seem to come from C.S. Lewis's Narnia – another world, like the City itself, at once familiar and fascinatingly different.

The aim of this placement programme was to help me to learn more about the varied reader services provision at Columbia, NYU and Yale and to assess how the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library could adopt and adapt ideas to improve its own services. Somewhat naively I assumed before making the trip that the varied histories, larger budgets and attached teaching and research faculties of the US law school libraries would create enormous differences in reader services provision to that available in the UK. However, during the two weeks it became evident that, although there were some significant differences in provision, there were also many similarities with IALS Library in key areas, particularly in future strategic planning. The following observations serve to illustrate how much we have in common and how valuable and useful it is that we continue to share skills and experience into the future, not only in improving reader services provision but also in improving systems services and technical services provision too.

Backgrounds

All three US law libraries have distinguished histories, and have developed their prestigious information services and huge collections (in paper, microform and, increasingly, in electronic format) over many decades. All three provide services for J.D. law students, LLM students and law faculty.

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Interestingly there are very few JSD law students (equivalent to UK PhD students) in any US university.

The Arthur W. Diamond Law Library, Columbia University Law School

Columbia is a campus university on a grand scale with wonderful views of the Hudson River. The Arthur W. Diamond Law Library is located in the Columbia Law School building on West 116th Street. It is one of the largest academic law libraries in the United States, with more than 780,000 books and 205,000 volumes on microform. It subscribes to over 6,000 current journals. Particular strengths, collected in both traditional and electronic formats, are constitutional law, international law, law and economics, arbitration, intellectual property, legal history, and Roman law. The Library's foreign collection is especially broad with over two hundred countries represented. The Toshiba Collection of Japanese Law, for example, is one of the most comprehensive libraries of Japanese legal materials outside of Japan. For more details see the Library's website at <http://library.law.columbia.edu/>

The Law Library, New York University Law School

NYU lies at the heart of Greenwich Village – with the famous Strand bookstore just a few blocks away. In Washington Square scholarship extends into the gardens where the shrubbery is dotted with occasional card games and cryptic crossword schools playing to passing taxi horns and busking saxophones. The Law Library is located in the New York Law School building on the south side of Washington Square. As well as a comprehensive US collection, it has extensive collections of foreign, international and comparative materials. In particular, it concentrates on Western Europe (France, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland), Eastern Europe (Czech Republic and Romania), Latin America (Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador and Mexico), Commonwealth countries, and selected jurisdictions of Asia (China, Hong Kong and Japan). Full details of its collection development policy are available at <http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/collec.html>. More general details about NYU Library and its information services are available on its website at <http://www.law.nyu.edu/library>.

The Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale University Law School

Yale University is a two-hour train journey through spectacular countryside from Grand Central Station in Manhattan to New Haven, Connecticut. The Lillian Goldman Law Library is located in the Yale Law School building on Wall Street, near the centre of the main Yale University campus. The Library has a collection of nearly 800,000 volumes of print materials and approximately 10,000 active serial titles. Special strengths of the collection include materials emphasizing law and social sciences, and a 200,000 volume foreign and international law collection. For more details see the Library's website at <http://www.law.yale.edu/library>.

Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library, University of London

IALS Library is located on the north side of Russell Square in Bloomsbury. It is near to the British Library and the other research libraries of the University of London, and close to the Inns of Court libraries and the law firm libraries in the City of London. It was established in 1947 as part of the University of

London, but was also given a national role to provide library and information services to support legal research throughout the UK higher education sector, and to collect, maintain and service extensive collections of legal literature and information.² Over the past fifty years the Library has grown enormously and is now one of the largest legal research libraries in Europe, with a collection of national and international importance. Currently it has an overall stock of 265,000 items, and subscribes to over 2,700 series of primary legal materials and legal journals. It has extensive foreign, international and comparative collections, and is particularly strong in the areas of UK law, Commonwealth law, US law, Latin American law, EU law, and the individual jurisdictions of Western European countries. It also has excellent collections of Roman-Dutch law, jurisprudence, public and private international law materials, and has coverage of other jurisdictions and subjects for comparative purposes (see <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/collect.htm> for more details). The Library provides free access by postgraduate research students and academics from across the UK and indeed the world, but does not allow access by undergraduates. The Library also continues to play a pioneering role in the rapid distance provision of library services, by electronic and other means, and has a leading role in the training of UK law librarians. For more details see the Library's website at <http://ials.sas.ac.uk>.

Buildings from different eras but similar problems with a lack of space

Reflecting their varied histories, the four legal research libraries are housed in very different buildings. Whilst Columbia University Law School Library occupies a modernist building from 1960, New York University Law School Library is based in the elegant Vanderbilt Hall that was built in the 1950's in Greenwich Village. Yale University Law School Library, on the other hand, was originally built in the 1930's and resembles a beautiful old Oxbridge college. Indeed Yale's spectacular main library reading room is said to be based on Christ Church College, Oxford. IALS Library, as most people know, is lucky enough to be housed in a 1970's "brutalist" concrete and plate-glass building designed by Sir Denys Lasdun (architect of the Royal National Theatre) that has recently been listed for preservation on the recommendation of English Heritage. Despite their very different buildings, over the last few years all four libraries have faced the same problem of an acute shortage of space. Installation of compact shelving and a programme of microfilming some older, little-used, material has helped delay the problem for a few years, but each of the libraries has recently had to develop outside store services to meet the growing space problems. Yale, for example, funded a completely new purpose-built outside store, whilst Columbia and NYU decided to acquire outside store facilities. During 2002 an acute shortage of space led IALS Library to out-house some lesser-used material to the University of London Depository Library in Egham and to establish a regular fetching service. Most of the libraries I visited had also chosen to send some of their extra copies of less prestigious US law reviews to store. This was partly because their

² W.A.F.P. STEINER, "The establishment of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies of the University of London," *IALS Bulletin*, Vol.17, p.6-20.

subscriptions to the Hein-on-line database gave their researchers access to an acceptable full-text electronic alternative.

All four libraries are also busily renovating the internal arrangements of their buildings to maximise their capability to offer a range of necessary new services, from environmentally-controlled rare book rooms to state-of-the-art wireless network services. Between 1995 and 1999 Yale underwent an impressive internal renovation costing millions of dollars, and Columbia cleverly re-designed its entrance area, reference room, circulation desk and rare book room. NYU is currently in the midst of a huge building programme that will give them the opportunity to re-design desk services, seating provision and other services. IALS is also currently discussing detailed plans with architects for an impressive extension of its existing building, including the improved provision of electronic resources and better access to archival material. Camden Council and English Heritage also need to be consulted as IALS is now a listed building. A total refurbishment of IALS Library's existing building and facilities is also planned.

Similar modern staff structures

Interestingly, rather than continuing with a traditional hierarchal staff structure, with a Librarian and Deputy Librarian jointly managing the strategic direction of the information services, all four law libraries have chosen independently to manage their libraries using a more modern flatter staff structure, and to organise their staff into overlapping teams. All now have three or four Associate Directors or Managers who head the main departments (e.g. reader services, system services, computer services and technical services). These Associate Directors report to the Director of Library and Information Services or Librarian who ensures that the teams work together efficiently for the maximum benefit of the library as a whole and the user communities they support. The Director and Associate Directors make up the library senior management team and contribute to future library strategy. The advantages of the flatter team structure are that responsibility is delegated more efficiently and more senior staff are given the chance to develop and manage their own teams. In addition, through regular team discussions and appropriate delegation of new responsibilities, all staff are more empowered and are encouraged to suggest new ideas and improvements. One potential problem with this flatter staff structure is the question of who provides the management of the library office administration. Within the traditional hierarchical staff structure, library-wide policies such as consistent recruitment practices, the fair division of staff training budgets, staff time-keeping and other personnel matters were often the responsibility of the Deputy Librarian who had the authority to take fair and consistent decisions across all departments. With a new flatter team structure, Directors have sensibly tried to filter the number of administrative decisions coming to them in different ways. At Yale, they have appointed a librarian to the senior post of Associate Director of Administration. This seems to work very well and leaves the Director much more time to spend on other matters. At NYU the Director has two (more junior) staff that manage most of the administrative matters. At IALS Library, the staff in the library administrative office are managed by the Reader Services Manager.

In addition to adopting a more modern staff structure, I was also impressed by the way Directors used imaginative and flexible staff changes to motivate their staff and widen the skills base in their libraries. For example, at NYU job descriptions have been altered by mutual agreement to give enthusiastic staff the opportunity to investigate “cutting-edge” projects that could bring long-term benefits to library services. At Columbia, rather than recruit a permanent Circulation Manager to oversee the junior staff on the circulation desk, it was decided to allow this post to rotate every couple of years between the reference librarians and thereby give these staff a chance to gain some useful management experience.

Another way that US research libraries motivate their long-serving staff and create long-term service improvement is by offering extended sabbaticals. NYU, for example, offers experienced reference staff the opportunity to spend six months or even a year researching and concentrating on a particular library project. Building on the success of recent projects, the library is now in a much better position to offer new services such as virtual library tours and interactive legal research guides. Currently, it is very rare for UK research libraries to offer extended sabbaticals to library staff. Bearing in mind the huge demonstrable benefits of sabbaticals, perhaps this imaginative improvement tool is something we could usefully adopt from our US colleagues.

At Columbia, NYU and Yale I discovered that it is very unusual for Technical Services staff to be included on the reference desk rotas. The main argument for keeping the two departments separate seems to be that both sets of staff can concentrate on developing skills and expertise in their respective areas. Another reason given for this more rigid departmental structure is that in the US Reader Services staff usually have a J.D. law degree (which commands a better salary and supports an involvement in teaching), whilst Technical Services staff often have language degrees. It seems to me, however, that US law libraries could benefit from using enthusiastic Technical Services staff on reference desk rotas. At IALS we have found that the legal information skills and knowledge developed in the acquisitions, cataloguing or serials sections are readily transferable to enquiry work. In addition the variety of experience gained from being trained and having worked in more than one department helps expand staff interest and stretches their capabilities to the full. In effect IALS aims to train, and benefit from, experienced law librarians with transferable skills, rather than develop staff that only work and gain experience in one section.

Merged library and IT services

IALS and Yale have developed merged library and IT services where the Director of Library and Information Services is in overall charge. At Columbia the two services are not merged under the Director of Library Services, but under his manager, the Vice Dean of Administration. Similarly, at NYU the Director of Library and Information Services does not manage the IT services provided for the library. There appear to be advantages and disadvantages to

both models and much depends on investment, accountability and real awareness of library and information needs.

Using the same automated library management system software

Although the public names of the law library catalogues are different, i.e. Columbia's is called "PEGASUS", NYU's is called "JULIUS", Yale's is called "MORRIS", and IALS is part of "SASCAT", in fact all four research libraries now use the same automated library management system software (Millennium Innopac). This is another key area where the sharing of skills and expertise has been helpful. For example in March and April 2002 Mary Jane Kelsey, Associate Director for Technical Services at Yale, held the Visiting Fellowship in Law Librarianship at IALS Library, and during this time helped the Library to plan for the eventual successful upgrade of the system.

Improving reference services

Columbia, NYU and Yale all provide users with complementary circulation and reference services through separately staffed desks. To create a slightly quieter area, Columbia has sensibly glassed in its reference desks (and rapid reference resources) into a large and comfortable "Reference Office". Reference telephone calls are handled at the separate public reference desk or diverted to specific reference staff. The post of International, Comparative and Foreign Law Librarian is common in US legal research libraries, and non-US reference enquiries are often forwarded on to this person. Currently, with a much smaller reference staff, IALS Library still combines circulation and reference on one central enquiry desk, although reference telephone enquiries are handled separately. However the rapid growth in the portfolio of electronic legal resources over the past few years has created an increased demand for one-to-one reference help. Although the physical layout of the listed building and conflicting demands on staff resources create challenges in developing a separate public reference desk, IALS is currently investigating the possibility of also staffing separate circulation and reference desks in the near future.

Developing value-added information services accessible via the web

With many basic queries about library services being answered by the FAQ sections on library websites, all four research libraries are now allocating far more staff reference time to developing value-added services on their websites. All are increasing the number of guides to their own electronic resources, creating foreign and international legal research guides, and developing web gateways and free web databases. IALS Library, in particular, has created, or contributed to, a whole range of useful free web gateways and web databases over the past few years. For example, SOS/G (Social Science Information Gateway at <http://www.sosig.ac.uk>) is a nationally funded web gateway, to which IALS Library and the University of Bristol Law Library contribute all the descriptions and links to high quality legal information

sources.³ *BAILII* (British and Irish Legal Information Institute at <http://www.bailii.org>) is a national service on the web providing free access to public legal information, primarily legislation and law reports, from all the jurisdictions of Britain and Ireland. This project is managed by the *BAILII* charitable trust, and IALS Library hosts and assists the project. *FLAG* (Foreign Law Guide) was a national collaborative collection management project led by IALS Library. The other project partners were the Bodleian Law Library, the British Library, the School of Oriental and African Studies Library and the Squire Law Library. The project was funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme, and the Project Manager, Dr Peter Clinch, completed all the work in 2002.⁴ The main result of the project is the *FLAG* searchable web database describing the collections of primary foreign, international and comparative law materials held in UK national and university libraries. The library collections described in this database include the British Library, the Advocates' Library (national Library of Scotland), the National Library of Wales and all the major legal research libraries in the UK. The *FLAG* database will continue to be updated, and is available at <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/flag/flag.htm>. The national collaboration on foreign law collections will continue through the *FLARE* initiative (see <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/flare/flare.htm> for more details). Two equally useful, but much smaller, web databases have also been created by IALS library staff. *CALIM* (Current Awareness for Legal Information Managers) at <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/caware/caware.htm> is a searchable database created by myself and Steven Whittle from the current awareness columns published every quarter by *Legal Information Management*. At present the database contains bibliographical records for articles and books relevant to legal information professionals from December 1994 onwards.⁵ The *CLRT* (Current Legal Research Topics) database at <http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/clrt/clrt.htm> was created by Gerry Power in 2002, and will be updated on an annual basis. The purpose of the database is to provide a comprehensive listing of legal research currently being undertaken in British law schools at MPhil and PhD level. The database is most useful for postgraduate students who are undertaking, or thinking of undertaking, a law research degree.

More training sessions offered to researchers

Columbia, NYU and Yale all have impressive, start-of-the-art, training rooms and facilities. They are therefore able to offer intensive training programmes in legal information research skills and “hands on” database training to students and faculty. All three libraries also make extensive use of free technical support and daily reference help offered by Lexis and Westlaw customer

³ For more information see Steven WHITTLE, “Finding law in the 21st Century: an introduction to the SOSIG Law Gateway,” *International Journal of Legal Information*, Vol.29, No.2, p.360, (Summer 2001).

⁴ For more information see Peter CLINCH, “*FLAG*: The new Internet gateway to foreign law holdings in UK national and University libraries,” *International Journal of Legal Information*, Vol.31, No.1, p.62, (Winter 2003).

⁵ See David GEE and Steven WHITTLE, “*CALIM*: Current Awareness for Legal Information Managers web database,” *Legal Information Management*, Vol.2, No.3, p.55, (Autumn 2002).

services teams. From the suppliers point of view this free training support for academic institutions makes commercial sense as most of the law school students will eventually work in law firms and will want access to these expensive legal databases to help them in their commercial work. For the same reason Lexis and Westlaw academic subscriptions are also considerably cheaper than the commercial rates offered to US law firms. In line with most UK law libraries, IALS Library has also significantly increased the number of training sessions offered to researchers over the past few years. All of the reader services team have successfully developed training skills and experience in the numerous electronic legal databases (including Lexis and Westlaw UK) offered to researchers. Although lack of available space is a real challenge, IALS has successfully drawn up detailed plans and costings for a new dedicated training suite based within the library and is currently making bids to various grant-making bodies for funding.

Extensive support services for faculty

With large attached law school faculties, Columbia, NYU and Yale have all developed extensive and sophisticated library services specifically for faculty staff. NYU, for example, allocates a specific member of library reference staff to each faculty member to help with regular research needs and to explain library reference services and resources. One to one training on new databases is provided on demand, and lists of relevant new acquisitions are routinely emailed to faculty members. Faculty liaison librarians also email details about new library services, and strive very hard to cultivate a long-term professional working relationship with their assigned faculty staff. NYU also offers faculty a 48-hour document and book request service accessible via an online request form or priority hotline telephone. Deliveries and collections to faculty offices are made twice daily during the week. Columbia and Yale have developed similarly impressive (though equally labour-intensive) library services for their law school faculties. With only a very few academics and researchers on the Institute staff, IALS Library has had less need to create a similar network of sophisticated faculty support services, although we do provide one-to-one support services and training for our few academic research staff as required. This difference in approach reflects our different funding sources and mission statements. Whereas the main focus at the law libraries at Columbia, NYU and Yale is to support the research needs of their faculties and the curriculum requirements of their students, IALS Library is mainly funded by grants from national bodies with the aim of providing library and information services to support advanced legal research throughout the UK higher education sector and to complement the library and information services provided by other university law libraries. IALS Library does, however, receive some direct funding from University of London colleges to provide tailored library and information services for the intercollegiate LLM programme.

Similar fee-paying services for legal practitioners

Of the three US libraries I visited, currently only Columbia advertises document supply services to legal practitioners. It set up a commercial

subscription service in 1982 to try to meet the ever-increasing demand from New York law firms for access to its world famous law collections.⁶ Anecdotal evidence suggests that even today other East Coast academic law libraries are happy for legal practitioner demand to be concentrated on the commercial services at Columbia. Other libraries seem to take the view that Columbia was the first to offer a successful commercial document supply service to legal practitioners and that there is probably not enough demand in the system to warrant a second academic law library setting up a rival service.

Columbia offers practitioners access to either a Subscription Service or a separate “pay-as-you-go” Document Delivery Service. The Subscription Service provides large law firms and other corporate members in the New York metropolitan area with special privileges such as priority photocopying at reduced rates, the option of using a web-based order form to place requests, dedicated fax and telephone hotlines, a separate email account, six free reading passes a year for on-site use of the library, and free borrowing of up to two monographs at any one time. Subscribers can also pay more to access the “Rush Service” which guarantees notification of availability within twenty minutes and transmission of photocopies by fax within a further twenty minutes. If an exact citation is not available, a timed “Search Service” is also offered, with the reference librarian undertaking a comprehensive subject or keyword search of in-house indexes and a check of secondary sources. Charges for this service are calculated in fifteen minute time periods. For licensing reasons, Columbia is not permitted to supply legal practitioners with copies from electronic databases such as Hein-on-line, Lexis and Westlaw. It is also always made clear to subscribers that reference librarians can never give legal advice. Currently about forty large firms are members of this annual subscription scheme. Alternatively, the “pay-as-you-go” Document Delivery Service is aimed at small businesses and individuals who are unlikely to need large amounts of photocopied documents during any one year, and who would not benefit financially from paying an annual fee to gain access to the reduced rate photocopying offered as part of the Subscription Service. Documents copied under the “pay-as-you-go” scheme can be sent quickly to anywhere in the world. Legal practitioners can also pay extra for a “Rush Service” which guarantees notification of availability within forty-five minutes and transmission of photocopies by fax within a further forty-five minutes. Columbia Law Library is registered with the Copyright Clearance Center, and passes on the full amount of royalty fees.

Independently, but for very similar reasons, IALS Library developed a Subscription Service for law firms, sets of barristers’ chambers and legal departments of commercial organisations in the late 1980’s.⁷ Previously, increasing demand from commercial users for reference help and document supply was starting to affect the quality of reference services for academic researchers. It was decided, therefore, to hive off the services for legal practitioners into a separate section, and to charge the true commercial cost

⁶ For more information see Janet Rhodes PINKOWITZ, “Fee-based services at the Columbia Law School Library,” *The Law Librarian*, Vol.27, No.2, p.88, (June 1996).

⁷ See David GEE, “Charging for information services at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library,” *The Law Librarian*, Vol.30, No.3, p.169, (September 1999).

of these services. Today IALS Library subscribers are entitled to similar services (with a few minor variations) to those on offer to Columbia Law Library subscribers. Combined with unlimited on-site library access for any member of the subscribing organisation, an IALS subscription also entitles any member of staff to have access to the exclusive enquiry service and rapid document supply service. Subscribers have access by direct telephone hot-line, email and fax to professional reference staff who operate the enquiry service from 9.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday. The enquiry service does not charge extra for basic searches of our catalogue and in-house indexes if the subscriber does not have an exact citation. Indeed the role of the enquiry service has always been to help subscribers identify requested items from incomplete references. Speculative or extended searches are, however, beyond the scope of the present service. Also reference staff are not allowed to give legal advice to clients. Rapid document supply is normally provided with options for sending the photocopied documents by fax, courier or first-class post. Clients can also ask for the items to be collected by one of their own messengers. As at Columbia, licensing restrictions mean that document supply is not possible from commercial electronic databases. Depending on how busy the service is, requested items are often located, photocopied and despatched within half an hour. At present, therefore, there is no need for a "Rush Service" like at Columbia. One other minor difference with the subscription services at Columbia is that IALS subscribers have no day-to-day borrowing rights. This is mainly because IALS Library tends to have only one copy of each monograph in its collection, and needs to have the book available for its academic researchers. Columbia, on the other hand, has had the financial resources in the past to buy more than one copy, and can therefore be more generous to its commercial users.

A year or so ago, IALS Library intended to introduce a new "pay-as-you-go" document supply scheme. In turn this would have resulted in a wide-ranging review of the current services offered to subscribers. However these two new initiatives have been prudently delayed until after the impact of the recently negotiated CLA licence (a consequence of the recent EU Copyright Directive) can be properly assessed.

International cooperation initiatives

Previous Librarians at IALS Library such as Howard Drake, Willi Steiner and Muriel Anderson were always very keen to foster close international cooperation with legal research libraries in other countries. The present Librarian, Jules Winterton, has continued this enlightened policy with various imaginative initiatives. In particular, he established the annual IALS Fellowship in Law Librarianship. This non-stipendiary fellowship has proved enormously successful in attracting distinguished law librarians from countries such as Canada, Italy, Norway, Australia, Nigeria and the USA to research an aspect of law librarianship whilst being based at IALS Library for a month or more. Fellows are given free use of a library study carrel and full IT support (see IALS website for more details). In terms of concrete achievement, previous fellows have written articles, contributed to national conferences and given presentations to local library staff. However the benefits of the

fellowship scheme are, of course, far more wide-ranging. The individual gains valuable time to think about a whole range of current issues away from the pressures of working in a busy library, whilst IALS library benefits from useful advice, detailed expertise and helpful fresh perspectives across a range of areas. The long length of stay also encourages friendships with IALS staff which continue to benefit the individuals and their libraries long after the fellowship term has finished. Senior law library staff from both New York and Yale have been appointed to IALS Fellowships in the past few years, and the fellowship idea has proved so successful that other law libraries (e.g. Yale) are seriously thinking of establishing similar programmes in the near future.

The dynamic Director of the Law Library at NYU, Professor Kathie Price, has also been encouraging international law library cooperation through the Legal Information Transfer Network (ITN). This exciting and prestigious project is funded by a generous grant from The Starr Foundation (established in 1955 by insurance entrepreneur Cornelius Van der Starr), and aims to establish a global network of law libraries which can offer a 24/7 virtual reference service, both to its own partner libraries and to the academic legal communities in the developing world. Currently the list of law library partners include NYU, Washington University in Seattle, Toronto University in Canada, IALS Library in the UK, Leuven University in Belgium, Tilburg University in the Netherlands, Konstanz University in Germany, Cape Town University in South Africa, Melbourne University in Australia, Yerevan University in Armenia, and Tsinghua University in China. Stimulating annual workshops in such cities as New York and Lausanne in Switzerland have given senior librarians from ITN partner libraries the opportunity to meet and make progress on issues such as establishing a global 24/7 virtual reference desk, sharing database access across the partner libraries, developing interactive legal research guides, and creating imaginative training programmes for local law librarians in China and Southern Africa (see <http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/itn> for further details). Between workshops the exchange of ideas is continued by email discussion.

Finally, the Librarians at the law libraries in Columbia, IALS, NYU and Yale all see it as important to fund and encourage staff to attend the annual course on international law librarianship organised by the International Association of Law Libraries (see <http://iall.org> for further details). In terms of the number of librarians attending, these conferences are much smaller than BIALL conferences. They have proved extremely beneficial, however, in giving staff from law libraries around the world the unique opportunity to meet and discuss common challenges and to share possible solutions. Senior staff at both Columbia and IALS are currently IALL Board members, and help to organise the annual conferences. The successful 2002 IALL Course on international law librarianship was hosted by the law librarians at Yale Law School, and the 2003 IALL Course will be held in Cape Town, South Africa.

Conclusions

During my two fascinating weeks in New York, despite the differences in the buildings, in staffing, in budgets, and in the size of attached law faculties, reassuringly I was able to identify many familiar reader services. Indeed all

four legal research libraries seem to have developed similar key strategic priorities to meet the changing needs of their different user groups. These include creating a modern library environment to provide state-of-the-art wireless network services, making the best use of limited space, developing flexible modern staff structures to encourage and develop staff, exploiting the enormous potential of Millennium Innopac, improving one-to-one reference services, developing value-added web information services to help researchers at a distance, and offering more training to researchers in legal information research skills. Large academic research libraries in different countries already have a long history of discussing common challenges and sharing ideas for possible solutions. Bearing in mind our similar priorities and services, it seems to me that we are always much more useful to our various user constituencies when we share our skills and experience. Hopefully, in the future, we can build on the firm foundations already established in forums such as the International Association of Law Libraries and the Information Transfer Network and expand this valuable cooperation still further, particularly into sharing responsibility for creating a possible 24/7 virtual global law library.

Finally I would like to thank all the library staff I met on my placement for taking up so much of their valuable time and making me feel so welcome. In particular I am most grateful to Silke Sahl and Kent McKeever at Columbia, Kathie Price at NYU, and Mary Jane Kelsey at Yale for helping me to organize my hectic schedule so efficiently, for their wonderful hospitality, and for making my two weeks in New York so very memorable and enjoyable.