Online Legal Resources and their potential for Visual Learning Inclusivity

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Abstract
The motivation behind this piece was to discuss the factors which relate to forms of legal education. In particular, this poster hopes to examine the concept of the online legal resource. For the purposes of this discussion, the legal research tool under consideration is JustisOne.

The argument of this poster is that legal research tools which are available online mark an important milestone in the advancement of legal education. This benefit emanates from the benefits the online resource format imparts on students, and how it affects issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality.

Keywords
Legal education, Social Media, Online.
Online Legal Resources and Their Potential for Visual Learning Inclusivity

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Abstract

The motivation behind this paper was to discuss the factors which relate to forms of legal education. In particular, this paper hopes to examine the current online legal resources. For the purposes of this discussion, the legal research tool under consideration is JustisOne.

The argument of this paper is that legal research tools which are available online mark an important milestone in the advancement of legal education. This benefit stems from the benefit the online resource format impacts on students, and how it affects issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality.

By diversity, inclusivity and equality, this paper argues that online resources contain the ability to implement and prioritise visual learning elements. This visual learning approach supports the traditional, and limited, approach to the teaching of law which many universities follow. Studies have highlighted the importance of visual learning in legal education. If visual resources can help to improve learning opportunities in those suffering from conditions such as dyslexia then the international nature of many courses, and the attempts by many colleges to include non-English speaking students, a visual depiction of information can also help to combat issues surrounding language proficiency.

It is important to note that all of these benefits are afforded on a widespread nature to all students enrolled on a course that subscribes to legal research tools, such as JustisOne. This further helps to challenge the issue of socio-economic imbalance. It accomplishes this through two channels. Firstly, the large amount of archived material is provided free of charge to the students, through a college subscription, which is preferably to costly textbooks or pay-to-read online articles. Secondly, online legal tools are also more accessible as a source of law, compared to the traditional concept of a library, which creates issues around travel and opening hours, both of which can hinder the opportunities of students who have other commitments, such as childcare or part-time employment. However, this paper will focus on the visual learning advantages of online learning and research platforms.

Visual Learning

One of the most inclusive aspects of the legal research platform JustisOne is that it affords students the opportunity to benefit from visual learning mechanisms. It is interesting to note, given that it is technically a secondary aspect to the platform, JustisOne has not been designed around visual learning, as is modelled on the conventional model of case digests and full text reports. However, it is this visual element that is important for a discussion of legal teaching, because it stands as an example for other platforms, and for legal teaching more generally, to follow.

It has been widely documented that visual learning offers a more nuanced approach to the intake of information. By presenting legal cases in a visual learning form, students are better able to intake the huge, and often quite dense, amount of legal information. This approach is a strong example of an electronic resource accomplishing something to aid students, which conventional hard-copy resources would be unable to achieve. The idea of precedent maps and colour-coded case judgements, which update effectively in real-time, can change as new cases and judgements are introduced, allowing for dynamic and up to date visual legal learning opportunities. For the purposes of this discussion, this paper will examine four facets of JustisOne’s visual learning approaches. The first, and the most in depth visual feature, is the precedent map, which incorporates several distinct visual identifiers.

1- Precedent Map

The Precedent Map Structure: The precedent map is a visual display method by which the outcomes and the inter-references of cases can be displayed in a succinct visual manner. The case being studied is placed in the center of a circular frame, with the cases that have gone on to discuss this case arranged chronologically in a clockwise order around the case. Within the case is a smaller circle, however, these cases are the cases which are discussed within the main case. All of this information would be tedious and almost impossible to complete in an offline format. There is no easy way to determine every subsequent case which has referenced a case you are studying, but this map provides a comprehensive list of these cases in a single click. At the top of the precedent map is a simple traffic-light system, which allows for cases to be actively followed and tracked where they were treated by later courts. This is broken down into three key areas, positive treatment, neutral treatment, and negative treatment.

2- Highlighted Passages

Colour-Coding: This feature of the JustisOne platform offers users an opportunity to bend visual learning with technological advancement. Using this system, users have the option to enable a highlighting system operated by JustisOne. Using this device, the platform will highlight key points in the text that are included in external sources. This allows users to quickly identify the relevant passages and the pieces of text which are benefits for an initial reading of any text. This approach also compliments the research which shows that students can more readily recall information which is written on different colour pages to white. It is also another example of technology which improves upon traditional approaches to the study of law, where tracing every other quotation after a case would be almost impossible.

3- Traffic Light System

The Colour-Coding System: This visual element, again, is used to quickly outline a crucial aspect to any case, its treatment by a court. Even though one need not read an entire case to determine its outcome, in this example the colour system turns the determination of 184 cases into something which can be interpreted by a user in merely seconds. These three categories can also be further broken down with each case:

Green: Positive Treatment (Affirmed, Applied etc.)
Orange: Neutral Treatment (Considered, Referred to, etc.)
Red: Negative Treatment (Distinguished, Disapproved, etc.)

4- Jurisdiction Icons

The simple Jurisdiction map icons are also an example of visual elements to assist in learning and accessibility. Here, the maps again aid users who have language barriers, and further, they help to set out the legal jargon which might pose an issue for non-law educated or early stage law students. In the example below, the jargon of “Court of Appeal (Civil Division)” is made much easier to understand through the simple addition of the map.

Conclusion

To conclude, there are many elements which should be considered when looking to the concept of advancing legal education. Although there are many advancements being made through online legal resources, it is crucial to study these advancements, to ensure they are being used to suit a diverse and inclusive audience. Mark Reaser makes a powerful argument when he discusses cybercrime, and many of the sentiments translate well to the idea of technology focused legal education. He argues, "Computer crimes have analogues in traditional crimes (like trespass, larceny, destruction of property), but these common law concepts are inadequate to proscribe the new, high technology crimes." Following this logic, although online legal research tools have analogues in traditional legal education, we must ensure that these are not simply transplanted onto technology. For the legal educational institutions of the future to be diverse, inclusive and equal, their platforms for learning must reflect these qualities, and it my argument that through its focus on visual based learning JustisOne represents a positive step in achieving this goal.

References:
1. Steven Delly. “The effectiveness of teaching strategies for students with dyslexia based on their preferred learning styles.”