

Faculty news

Updates from Thomson West for law school faculty

Spring 2006

Did You Know?

- 166 law schools use The West Education Network (TWEN)
- 81 law schools employed TWEN in 21 or more courses last semester
- In Fall 2005, faculty had more than 4,300 active courses in TWEN

For more information on TWEN, send an e-mail message to West.twenteam@thomson.com, or call 1-800-306-9378. You can also contact your school's Westlaw Account Manager for more information.

See for yourself why more professors, adjunct faculty, law librarians, law reviews, journals, clinics, and student organizations use TWEN.

Interview with Marie Stefanini Newman

by Michael Shaughnessy



Marie Stefanini Newman

Marie Stefanini Newman is the Law Library Director, as well as an Associate Professor of law, at Pace University School of Law in White Plains, New York. She has a J.D. from Rutgers University School of Law, Newark, and an M.S. degree in library science from Columbia University.

Marie has worked as a law librarian for 23 years, and teaches a course on advanced legal research. In Spring 2005, she published an article in the Journal of High Technology Law: Not the Evil TWEN: How Online Course Management Software Supports Non-linear Learning in Law Schools, 5 J. High Tech. L. 183. In the following interview, she shares her observations and insights on the learning processes of today's law students, and on course management software such as The West Education Network® (TWEN®).

You are the director of the law school library, but you also teach, don't you?

That's correct, I teach a course on advanced legal research. Actually, I've taught a similar course at three different law schools.

Is this also a legal writing course?

No, legal writing is a first-year required course. My class is an upper level elective course. It focuses on research skills; writing is a minor part of the course.

You've taught classes with and without TWEN, or other course management software. Do you notice a big difference, either in your teaching experience, or in the experience of your students?

I've found it's much easier to communicate with my students with the e-mail features of TWEN. It's much easier to get course materials to students because of the hypertext links I can build into the online syllabus, and into my outlines and other course materials.

I'm assuming that—in addition to online legal research—you still teach the old fashioned "search the stacks" legal research: going to the library, using the catalogs and indexes, etc.?

That's right, that's part of the course. But I tell my students, at the end of the day, an encyclopedia is an encyclopedia, whether you find it online or in the stacks. The important thing is that they know how to use the resources. Format is immaterial.

In the late 1980s, when online legal research classes were first becoming a law school staple, a lot of professors and attorneys worried that students would neglect traditional legal research skills. Is this a real danger?

The reality is that the war is over, and the computer has won! That's probably putting it a little too strongly, but we're kidding ourselves if we think this generation of students is going to access the materials exclusively in hard copy. Most students in their late teens or early twenties are not working in a print environment. It is important for them to know what *will* work online, and what won't.

Does TWEN help with that learning process?

TWEN provides a point of access to resources that a lot of students might otherwise ignore. It's important that students know when to go to an encyclopedia, legal dictionary, law review, or other secondary source. Too often, students and attorneys waste time on wrong turns and dead ends in research, by heading straight to the case law, statutes, or other primary authority. Students come away from my course saying, "I never realized there was so much stuff out there!"

Do you find that TWEN enriches your course materials?

Yes, it does. I post my course outlines, which are rather elaborate. (In fact, they're a form of scholarship for me.) The outlines contain hypertext links to all sorts of things. For instance, my outline on secondary research sources contains links to legal dictionaries, legal encyclopedias, library catalogs, *Books in Print*, legal periodicals, and many other materials.

What effect does TWEN have on the actual classroom experience?

Students who bring laptops to class can access the materials as I'm talking about them. The links to Westlaw® are very valuable, and make it easy for me to demonstrate features like ResultsPlus® and Graphical KeyCite®. They are a lot easier to explain and demonstrate when students can see them in action during class.

Do a lot of your students hold down part-time or full-time jobs?

Yes, a lot of my students attend classes at night to accommodate day jobs. I've taught in the night and day divisions, but even day students have demanding jobs outside of school. By accessing TWEN, working students can review the syllabus, access course materials, and communicate with their fellow students and me without having to make one more trip to the school or the library. These students are juggling a lot of responsibilities, including jobs and family obligations. TWEN makes it a little easier for them to spend time with their families, without cheating sleep or cutting other corners.

Has it changed the substance of the course or the experience of the class?

Actually, not a lot.

When I went to law school, computers and online research were relatively small parts of the curriculum. Do you find that your students in recent years are already comfortable with TWEN or other course management software?

Yes, many of my students are already familiar with TWEN, or something like it, particularly students coming to law school directly out of college, or just a few years after. Some of my older students, or students with a larger gap between college and law school, are initially less comfortable with it. Still, TWEN is pretty intuitive, so the learning curve for faculty and students is almost always fairly low.

Do you actually have to train your students on TWEN, or can you just point them to it and let them pick it up on their own?

We do train them on TWEN as part of their law school orientation. During that first week of school, we have a mandatory computer orientation, where the Westlaw academic rep comes in and spends a few minutes training the new students on TWEN. They get their Westlaw passwords about a month before orientation, however, so many of them don't need the TWEN training because they are already familiar with it.

What TWEN features do you use most often?

The calendar feature, and posting things like the syllabus, course materials, outlines, sign-up sheets, and instructions for my research guide. [*Marie's course requires students to write a research guide on information resources about a particular legal topic.*] And I use the group e-mail function in TWEN to let my class know about course changes, class cancellations, room changes, or about an interesting article I'd like them to read.

Do you use the Live Forum feature or the chat room?

No, but the class I teach is more of a skills class, and not so much a substantive class like constitutional law. There's not a lot of controversy to fuel that type of discussion. My passions run high about information technology and free access to information, but I suspect that makes me part of a small group. Now, if my class were full of other librarians, there'd be lots of heated discussion about free speech and the first amendment, copyright, and the other "hot button" information issues.

When you have problems with TWEN, where do you go for help? Reference attorneys? West technical support?

Actually, our Web master (who is also a reference librarian) is the first resort for TWEN problems, for both students and faculty. If he can't solve the problem, he calls TWEN support at West. ■

News From West

Why are so many law school faculty members turning to TWEN?

- TWEN allows you to have live discussions, which is useful for online office hours and exam reviews
- The new Look Up feature lets you quickly and easily add students to your TWEN page.
- With the free InstaPoll and Customized Polling features, you can conduct online polls of your students during or after class
- Using the Course Creation Wizard, you can design your own TWEN pages in mere minutes