

Some Reflections on the Electronic Casebook Concept

A major limitation of print casebooks is confinement: the student user is practically although not theoretically limited to the material contained in the book which is artificially truncated to meet space/weight/price constraints. The student/user is also confined in how she moves through the material or accesses points in it.

An E-casebook should have a dramatically lower barrier separating it from the rest of "law land" -- references in cases or even ideas evoked by it should be readily followable into law material not charted by or contained in the casebook itself.

The current services and products that make up the student work experience include:

- syllabus/course outline
- casebook
- supplements (2 kinds: teacher prepared cases, problems, notes and separately packaged statutes, regulations, or court rules designed to be worked with in parallel to casebook)
- student prepared notes
- computer-based exercises
- commercially prepared student aids (nutshells, outlines, etc.)
- library (both print and electronic resources)
- classroom lecture, exchange, problem-solving
- student performances with feedback -- papers, memos, exams

The e-casebook should not only reduce the barrier between the casebook and other legal information resources (see above), it should also reduce the barriers/improve the connections with these other components. For example, the e-casebook should make it easy for the student to bring to class all source texts needed for the class exchange along with all pre-class annotation or selection and to pull together in personal workspace student notes from class and before. The student will want it to allow ready importation of outlines and other study aids prepared by classmates or commercial publishers.

Print casebooks confine not only confine the student they confine the teacher. Teachers can and do select, reorder and add to materials in the casebook they assign but all those tasks would be facilitated by the right electronic environment.

Some tentative specifications:

 e-casebook should combine hypertext and full-text search capability but of the two hypertext is the more important.

 students should have access to material in hypertext mode with the capability of extracting chunks complete with links and the ability to link their own annotations to material in the e-casebook

students should be able to export chunks in wordperfect and gwp format

e-casebook should allow simultaneous access to Westlaw or Lexis and importation of found material back into its workspace