

## **Supervising in Your Pajamas: Clinical Pedagogy and the Internet Generation**

*A concurrent session interactive presentation*

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The internet generation has arrived at law clinics. Our students expect communication to be instantaneous and everywhere. With the advent of internet-based case management, many clinicians see boundless opportunities in constant communication with students and detailed data-based analysis of their work with no boundaries of time or place. Others feel that something is lost on a pedagogical level when we interpose a computer between ourselves and our students. Moreover, many experienced clinicians are reluctant to adapt to new methodologies, fearing it will place more burdens on them than it relieves. All agree that clinical teaching is ideally a deliberative, reflective process. What risks, opportunities, and mistakes do we encounter by adopting this fast-paced technology in our work and how can we do it most effectively?

The presenters will share their experiences in developing a web-based clinical teaching tool, ClinicCases.com. They plan to engage participants about their expectations for internet-based teaching through interactive polling of their opinions and experiences. The participants will be asked to share in discussion on topics such as: What could the internet help you do better? In what ways do you currently use the web in your clinic? What is lost by bringing your teaching online? What do you fear most about new technology?

Incorporating the audience's ideas and concerns, the presenters will then give a case study of how they addressed these issues and identify what are the best (and worst) practices in online clinical teaching. They will discuss the various pedagogical challenges this methodology creates, with real-world examples culled from student experiences. At the conclusion, participants will be invited to create individualized action plans for making the internet a creative complement to their own clinical teaching.

Will the internet bring innovation to law clinics in the same way it has to other fields? In a clinical teaching environment, which relies so heavily on interpersonal communication and real-world experience, this is still very much an open question. The presenters, both clinicians at the Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans, have ten years of experience in adapting the internet to this particular milieu and will share their experiences of the benefits and hazards of integrating the web into clinical teaching.

### **BACKGROUND - Testing the Internet Waters**

Loyola Law Clinic began its web experience with its pro bono and extern programs, designing web-based applications for students to apply for placements, download forms, and submit timekeeping information. Simple data sharing programs like these work well and provide a

positive experience for both student and supervisor. Students naturally prefer to do their data-sharing on the web and supervisors like the dramatic reduction in paperwork and easy access to cumulative data about student performance. These simple systems, however, are insufficient for clinical programs which deal with a greater quantity and variety of information under the pressures of legal deadlines.

Loyola's attempt to create a complex web-based case management system began after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 2005. In the wake of the storm, the law school relocated to the University of Houston Law Center. This created a particular challenge for the Clinic because all client information was trapped in New Orleans. Our case management system was run on a local network and not web-accessible. Clinical professors had tremendous difficulties in getting client data and case documents, making it very difficult to continue the clinic's work in exile.

As a result of this experience, the Clinic faculty resolved to move to web-based case management so that data could be available to those who needed it anywhere and at anytime. The first fruit of this resolution was [hurricanelaw.org](http://hurricanelaw.org), a web-based information and case management system designed to support Loyola's new Katrina Clinic. The Katrina Clinic was dedicated to providing disaster-related legal assistance to storm victims. [Hurricanelaw.org](http://hurricanelaw.org) allowed clinicians in the new clinic to supervise law student volunteers from all over the country. Because of ubiquity of the internet, a staff attorney at Loyola could, for example, assign a storm victim's case to a student volunteer at Harvard Law and supervise that student in real-time over the web. Not only did [hurricanelaw.org](http://hurricanelaw.org) make it easy for Loyola to collaborate with volunteers all over the country, it allowed us to increase exponentially the amount and scope of services we could offer.

Loyola next moved to create a fully web-based case management system for its live-client litigation clinics. A series of consultative meetings were held in which the faculty discussed its expectations for the system. It was generally agreed that existing web-based case management systems had significant drawbacks. As a general rule, they were designed for private law firms and failed to take into account the peculiar needs of the clinical environment. More importantly, most systems had a very steep learning curve, requiring many days of training for faculty, staff, and students. All agreed that a system customized for the clinic setting and which required little or no training was a necessity. The result was the introduction of [ClinicCases.com](http://ClinicCases.com) for the Fall 2007 semester.

### **DEVELOPMENT - Supervising in our Pajamas**

The [ClinicCases](http://ClinicCases.com) system is accessed by our professors, students, and administrators. Students are assigned cases via the system. As they work on a case, students enter case notes which contain the substance of their activity as well as the time spent. A messaging system allows students to communicate with professors about their cases as well as to set deadlines and keep track of important contact information. Documents are drafted and shared online. All of this information becomes part of the case file on the secure server, available anywhere there is an internet connection, including web-enabled mobile phones.

With ClinicCases, professors have access to a wealth of real-time information about their students. After logging in, a professor sees a summary of all of his or her students' recent activity, messages from students, and upcoming case deadlines. Time-keeping, case notes, and journals are entered on the system. Professors can easily generate reports showing student activity and performance, along with other important indices.

### **EXPERIENCE - A Year on the Web**

ClinicCases has just completed its first academic year and feedback has been positive. Not surprisingly, students are very comfortable with the system and professors have found the transition easier and more rewarding than expected. We will share user comments and other feedback during the conference presentation.

### **SHARING - Considering Web-Based Case Management for Your Clinic**

There are a number of issues to consider before moving your clinic to web-based case management:

What is your level of satisfaction with your current case management system (CMS)? Although data can be easily moved from one system to another, keep in mind that changing CMSs is an involved process. If your clinic has a locally-based case CMS (and most do), you may find that the comfort and familiarity of your staff with your current system may be worth keeping

Does your clinic have the technological infrastructure to support a web-based CMS? At a minimum, students will have the need to access a broadband internet connection, scanners, and fairly up-to-date computers.

Give serious consideration to security and confidentiality. How will you ensure that CMS users adhere to ethical standards? Remember, your students are likely to working on cases in non-clinic settings (libraries, coffee houses, etc.). Does the software have robust built-in security safeguards?

Have realistic expectations. Although a web-based CMS can simplify many daily tasks, it cannot - and you would not want it to - automate all of your clinical activities. Ideally, a CMS helps you concentrate on the core activities of clinical teaching and spend less time tracking down students, papers, and information.