

The Triangle Initiative

Jessica Rowe, an educational technologist from the Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning (CCNMTL) and project partners, Professor Conrad A. Johnson from the Columbia Law School and Associate Professor Susan Witte from the Columbia Graduate School of Social Work, discussed two projects within CCNMTL's new Triangle Initiative. The Triangle Initiative is a series of projects that synchronizes Columbia University's three major goals--research, education and active community engagement--so that research informs and extends into the classroom and beyond. The two projects discussed were the Collateral Consequences Calculator and Multimedia Connect.

Professor Johnson began by giving an overview of his clinical practice course, *Lawyering in the Digital Age*. He explained how his interest in technology led to his collaboration with other judges and lawyers to create a Web site that explains collateral consequences of judgments. This tool helped both his students and fellow practitioners to understand consequences that often go unnoticed or unrealized in practice.

He continued, explaining how it was critical to defendants and lawyers for collateral consequences to be understood and socialized, as consequences can include loss of public housing, child visitation rights and other benefits. Current laws dictate that judges are only responsible to communicate direct consequences, which institutionalizes the lack of information and results in lawyers and public defenders being unable to wholly defend their clients. While the Web site was a good resource, Professor Johnson and his fellow practitioners and students felt that more could be done with the same information, which is how the collaboration with CCNMTL was born.

Jessica Rowe described how CCNMTL and Professor Johnson began to develop a content management system entitled the Collateral Consequences Calculator. Rowe discussed how she and Professor Johnson envisioned the system and the numerous iterations as the project unfolded. They had to analyze different user scenarios and understand how it would impact various stakeholders including lawyers, law professors, law students and judges. Students in Professor Johnson's clinical practice course were encouraged to participate in this project. Many of them contribute to the content and design of the application and help with the verification of the data, which is critical to the efficacy of the Collateral Consequences Calculator.

Next, Rowe recounted their first instincts to use a large database as their data source. However, upon further analysis, Johnson and the CCNMTL team realized that in order to have the system mimic the functionality of the law, results needed to be calculated dynamically. She explained that the law accounts for several interrelated factors that

result in a particular set of collateral consequences. For instance, a judgment would be different for someone who is a first time offender compared to a repeat offender.

Also, Rowe asserted, because rules drive the law, they need to drive the calculator's functionality. Rowe explained that it would be a significant and tedious task to change the data profile for each offense as a reflection in the change of the law. For instance, if a new law dictated that Class C felonies would now result in deportation, then the system would need to reflect this change by producing deportation as a collateral consequence for all Class C felonies. In order to mitigate having to change the profile for each Class C offense by hand, they decided that it would be optimal if the rule could be updated instead. Therefore, a new rule in the system would mimic the law, where the change in law impacts the established set of offenses (ie. Class A, Class B). As a result of these findings, the developers chose to use an inference engine. An inference engine is able to process multiple conditional statements, or rules, in conjunction with analyzing the data related to each offense to produce the set of collateral consequences. This provided the team with the appropriate functionality to move forward.

Professor Johnson then discussed how the calculator not only provides information on collateral consequences of a particular judgment, but it allows users to compare offenses of different degrees and the related consequences. Moreover, instead of listing every potential consequence, the system provides the user with consequences that are definite and others that are likely within different sectors like housing and immigration.

He concluded by outlining the benefits students receive by using the calculator. He stated how students could use the calculator to supplement their existing knowledge about judgments and related consequences and what implications these had on the clients they work with. In addition, the calculator gives students the ability to move past the significant task of looking through numerous cases to determine each collateral consequence. Instead, the calculator frees up valuable time and allows his students to focus on how to analyze and solve a case. He argued that this is an extremely valuable contribution to both students and his clients.

The audience was then given the opportunity to ask questions. A professor from the School of Social Work commented that the Collateral Consequences Calculator could be a useful tool in the social work context. She explained how it is often social workers who work directly with convicted criminals and their families and, therefore, it would help them to have a resource that allows them to understand the subsequent effects of a particular judgment and the impacts that it has on the individual's personal and professional life.

Another audience member mentioned the newly implemented Chinese system that provides electronic judgments. They questioned whether the management team foresees any negative impacts with such an application. Professor Johnson responded that there has not been a great deal of analysis on the negative impacts. However, he said that perhaps one negative consequence is that in law, you have an advantage over your adversary when you know more than them. A tool like the calculator would equalize the

playing field and this could perhaps result in a disadvantageous situation for some. Professor Johnson also mentioned that if such a system was considered to be a reliable source of information, the verification process could be sidestepped or even, in the worst case, omitted. In order to mitigate some of this risk, the project management team included a feedback mechanism, for users to inform the development team when information is incorrect.

Susan Witte began the second part of the seminar by discussing the importance of media in the dissemination of information about HIV/AIDS. She explained how there is more than a decade of HIV efficacy research, but despite the availability of information, there is a gap between theory and practice. In general, training and counseling materials related to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment is primarily in the form of print media. This makes the information less accessible and informative to practitioners. Witte asserted that the print media tools did not facilitate the process of teaching and learning about good sexual health practices, but that multimedia does facilitate good interactions.

Witte then described Professor Nabila El-Bassel's research that focused on a theoretically supported, relationship-based approach to HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In her research, El-Bassel was trying to deconstruct what major barriers lead to ineffective communication amongst couples that stop them from changing their sexual health behaviors. El-Bassel's research findings showed that educational interventions with couples or with women alone about sexual health resulted in more safe sex practices amongst all couples surveyed. These findings were the catalyst for creating an interactive media tool that would allow sexual health facilitators to work with an online tool during sexual health sessions.

Witte then recounted how the School of Social Work collaborated with CCNMTL to create an application entitled Multimedia Connect. Witte argued that a technological approach to safe sexual health practices helps to bridge the gap between existing manuals and training and technical assistance. For this reason, they chose to take the existing print media activities and integrate them into a multimedia environment.

Next, Jessica Rowe discussed how the development team took efforts to build a tool that would support existing educational interactions. They continually collaborated with Susan Witte and her team to make sure the tool did not detract from the most important interactions, which are the ones that take place between the couple and then between the couple and the facilitator. The development team also made careful considerations in how they could take the existing print media version of activities and translate those onto an interactive site.

Witte then launched Multimedia Connect and demonstrated the various games and interactive exercises that comprise the application. The modules include activities entitled Myth/Fact, Interactions, Explaining HIV with STI Infection, Assessing Risk, Print Journal and the Social Support Network. She asserted that the animation allows the facilitator to make educational information about HIV/STI more engaging when compared to the paper version of the same interactions.

Professor Witte concluded by discussing the benefits of Multimedia Connect. First she talked about how the tool does not require facilitators to have extensive skills or knowledge in the sexual health field. This, she asserted, would allow anyone to act as a facilitator. She maintained that each of the games and activities actually increases the interaction between the couple because it required them to work together to resolve different problems. Moreover, couples enjoyed the online interactive component as it brought a dynamic multimedia component into the sessions.

The presenters then opened up the floor for discussion and questions. One audience member asked whether Multimedia Connect gets pushback from professionals who are not receptive to altering the dynamic during client sessions by substituting traditional methods with an online application. Professor Witte responded that they are struggling with the evidence-based practice movement, as it is challenging to provide evidence-based education. However, their work with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has helped the Multimedia Connect development team to work with community-based organizations and others so that they can cultivate ownership and interest of the tool and try to adapt it based on feedback from these sources.

Other audience members wanted more reassurance about how the tool was perceived by facilitators. Professor Witte stated that the tool promotes high levels of interaction and engagement, despite initial concerns expressed by social workers. She argued that the tool allows facilitators to focus on the couple and less on the preparation. She also commented on the value such a tool could have when facilitators are working with younger couples.

A few people commented that the tool is focused on heterosexual relationships and wondered if this tool would be expanded to different types of couples. Professor Witte responded that this was a growing trend in the social sphere. She recognized the importance of cultural competence and mentioned how she was looking forward to expanding the application to make it relevant to all couples.

The final question of the evening centered on whether the development team had developed a better sense of what multimedia works for a particular purpose. Professor Witte responded by saying she was not sure if they have enough information to answer that question. She explained how there are several factors that contribute to the success of a product. Witte asserted that their work with the CDC was very beneficial in this respect because every product they release is intensively reviewed; from color to navigation style. She says that there is more to be done before they can make any such assertions about what types of multimedia are effective in the learning process.