

Cookie policy: This site uses cookies to simplify and improve your usage and experience of this website. Cookies are small text files stored on the device you are using to access this website. For more information on how we use and manage cookies please take a look at our [privacy \(URL=http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/privacy-policy/\)](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/privacy-policy/) and [cookie \(URL=/cookie-policy/\)](/cookie-policy/) policies. Your privacy is important to us and our policy is to neither share nor sell your personal information to any external organisation or party; nor to use behavioural analysis for advertising to you.

Agree



AT THE HEART OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION DEBATE

This is an international case: legal students go global

10 February 2011 | By [Sarah Cunnane \(URL=/sarah-cunnane/1056.bio\)](/sarah-cunnane/1056.bio)

As technological advances continue apace, university students are being offered the opportunity to experience a “global” education without leaving the lecture theatre.

One noteworthy recent venture in the field is LawWithoutWalls, a collaborative academic initiative that brings together students, faculty members and legal practitioners from a number of countries around the world.

Michele DeStefano Beardslee, associate professor of law at the University of Miami, said the project was born when she was asked to organise a global conference. “But I didn’t want to do that,” she recalled. “I wanted to do something that includes and challenges students to innovate and produce projects of worth.”

The resulting scheme has six participating institutions on three continents. Twenty-three students are involved in the first project. Based at the School of Law at Fordham University in New York, Harvard Law School, Miami’s School of Law, New York Law School, Peking University School of Transnational Law and University College London’s Faculty of Laws, they have been tasked with solving real-life problems encountered by practising lawyers.

They meet online using software that enables them to see and take part in live discussions and group work, and at the end of the project they will present their conclusions at a symposium that will combine traditional panels with real-time online interaction.

In addition to attending a virtual class once a week, the students will contribute to a wiki on the topic they have been asked to investigate, which will summarise their research and make their findings available to a wider audience.

Professor DeStefano Beardslee said she hoped that the project would mark a change from “talk into action” within the legal community and encourage it to take note of the advantages offered by new technology.

“We talk about technology and globalisation, and business working with law, but we don’t currently embrace it,” she said.

“Lawyers are perceived as not innovative, but that’s not accurate. They may not have changed with the times as quickly as other service providers, but that doesn’t mean that students and lawyers lack entrepreneurial spirit and skills that can be harnessed.”

Professor DeStefano Beardslee likened the development of the project to the folk tale of stone soup, in which hungry strangers convince townsfolk to add ingredients to a meagre broth, providing a lesson in cooperation in times of scarcity.

“Everyone’s brought what they’ve got and put it in the pot,” she said. “It’s grown so much better because of the contributions of others.”

Predicting that the online classroom model could become widespread, she said the ultimate aim would be that “people think about legal education differently”.

The project is not the first to use technology to link lecture halls globally.

The Earth Institute at Columbia University launched its own “global classroom” project in the field of sustainable development in 2008 for a master’s course titled Integrated Approaches to Sustainable Development Practice.

Speaking at the time of the launch, Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute and an internationally renowned economist, said the idea was “simple yet profound”.

sarah.cunnane@tsleducation.com

Postscript:

The full version of this article first appeared in the digital international edition of *Times Higher Education* magazine. To subscribe, visit: www.subscription.co.uk/thed/digital/ (URL=<http://www.subscription.co.uk/thed/digital/>)