

## Taking a Load Off Students' Backs: Legal Textbooks in Electronic Form

By Ravi Patel

Law Students may be getting a much deserved break in the amount of money spent purchasing textbooks and their backs will be the ones thanking them for it. A group of publishers and legal professors recently met to discuss how and whether legal casebooks could be made available in an electronic format. The new format would not only lighten the load on students but also allow professors more flexibility in updating their course plans throughout the semester. Currently, the potential vendors are Amazon's Kindle and Sony Reader.

There are numerous concerns with making textbooks available in an electronic format. Publishers are concerned about copyright and piracy of the materials and professors are concerned with the inability to highlight and write in the books as would be possible in a traditional textbook.

Some publishers, such as West, have already launched some electronic versions of textbooks and plan to add six more titles in the upcoming year. While there is concern about the demand for this new format of textbooks, the attendees of the planning workshop plan to launch a new type of student and law curriculum where materials are available on a vast electronic database increasing the potential for a more robust legal education.

The timeframe for this solution to become a reality still seems somewhere about three to five years from now. Ironically, the major push for this format is from professors who want more flexibility in their course structures. Professors feel that books should be provided in an open source format so that changes could be made to the casebook materials directly before passing the material to the students. This would help reduce the number of copyright claims and as the material would be free and open to the public.

A number of students have gone paperless for some time now because of the immense amount of material and difficulty with keeping up during class using a paper and pen. For many, this would be a relatively seamless change to an education already dominated by electronic resources and research. Many questions remain unanswered, however. The change would require many adjustments with how materials are used considering the size difference of a casebook and devices such as Amazon's Kindle.

While this change is much needed for students and professors all over the country, many questions remain unanswered and until there are some definite protections for the method, it will be a while until we see an electronic casebook.

Sources:

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