

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 160, No. 50

In-house studio helps JMLS grow online classes

BY JACK SILVERSTEIN
Law Bulletin staff writer

Some law school professors dissect cases. William K. Ford dissected an arcade game.

The John Marshall Law School professor was teaching video game law as an online course in summer 2013 and wanted to discuss a case centering on whether or not a chip in the 1979 game "Galaxian" could be modified.

Instead of merely lecturing his online students about the case, Ford took the videography team from the law school's media services department to the Galloping Ghost Arcade in Brookfield. They filmed an employee dismantling a "Galaxian" machine so Ford could show his students the chip.

"It gave us the opportunity to do something that we could never do in a normal classroom," said Chris Bevard, John Marshall's assistant director of educational technology. "We're always looking for opportunities for that kind of thing in our online classes."

These opportunities will continue to increase, Bevard said, since the department's goal is to continually develop new courses each semester. This summer, the school will offer 11 online courses, including six J.D. courses — the largest slate of online classes at any Illinois law school.

American Bar Association regulations allow second- and third-year law students to take a total of 12 online credit hours for their J.D. and no more than four

hours per semester.

John Marshall has offered a limited array of standard online courses since 2009 but changed its model in early 2013 by creating an in-house video and animation studio through the school's media services department.

Four members of media services collaborate with professors to translate classroom activities such as lectures into interactive Web content. Similar to the process of, say, adapting a book into a screenplay, the professors outline the course for the media services team so it understands the course's structure and essential elements.

The department then reimagines that content as an interactive Web class, with tips from the professor on areas of instruction that could benefit from a new visual component — something the professor would not do otherwise in a physical classroom.

That's how you get Ford overseeing the filmed physical dissection of an arcade game.

Once the media services department and the professor have agreed on a visual strategy, the team films the professor delivering a semester's worth of lectures along with any additional demonstrations, such as the video game example.

The team then chops each lecture into topic-centric chunks and the professor inserts a critical thinking question into the end of each section.

As students complete each section, they enter a group discussion forum and respond to



Chris Bevard

the professor's question. Students can see each other's responses and bounce ideas off of their peers; the professor tracks those responses and chimes in when appropriate.

Since all content is pre-recorded, the time demands on students and professors are more flexible. Students can watch the lecture at any time of day, and professors can check in throughout the week to respond to student comments on a particular lecture.

"Our courses are asynchronous for the most part, which means they don't happen in real time," Bevard said.

"Even though there are deadlines in the course, like due dates, it's not the sort of thing where students are expected to sign in at a certain time or risk 'missing class.' With that, we have a little more freedom to look at new technologies ... to figure out what we want to use."

The courses use video conferencing tools such as Google Hangouts and Blue Jeans. Because these technologies are constantly evolving, the media services team plans to regularly update and re-evaluate its program design.

The school first started J.D. online courses in summer 2013 with Video Game Law as well as Constitutional & Military Law. The program expanded this spring with seven J.D. courses online: Video Game Law, Constitutional & Military Law, Consumer Law, International Business Transactions, Entertainment Law and two courses in elder law.

This summer, the school is adding the Right of Publicity IP/J.D. class to its slate, pushing the total schoolwide credit hours offered to more than 50.

Only two other Illinois law schools offer online J.D. courses — Loyola University Chicago School of Law has seven, and Southern Illinois University School of Law averages about three per semester.

With the ABA considering raising the number of online courses a student can take during law school, Bevard sees John Marshall's offerings expanding.

"It opens us up to people who might not otherwise have thought about coming to John Marshall," Bevard said.

"When students have the opportunity to suddenly say, 'I can go to school and it doesn't matter that I have a full-time job,' they can actually entertain the possibility of a degree."