

A Tale of Two Countries
Behind the Scenes Stories of Two Unique, But Newly Created Law Libraries
Peking University School of Transnational Law in Shenzhen

Duncan Alford
Consulting Director of the Law Library
Peking University Shenzhen
School of Transnational Law

Slide 2

I want to speak with you today about the School of Transnational Law Library. The School of Transnational, or STL, which I will use as a short form name is located in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.

STL is part of Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School which is part of Peking University Beijing. Its first class received their degrees last summer in July 2012. The graduates receive two degrees a U.S. style J.D. and J.M., a masters degree in Chinese law. The faculty consists of both permanent faculty and visiting faculty, such as myself, who were for the most part trained in the United States or China. Faculty have several different nationalities.

Slide 3

The STL Law Library, like most academic law libraries, supports both the curriculum of the law school and the research of the faculty.

Because of the emphasis on transnational law at STL, the collection focuses heavily on international and comparative law. Its foreign law collections focus on U.S. law and the law of the PRC. Its unique strength in Asia is its heavy emphasis on the law of the United States.

The format of the collection will be heavily electronic. One reason for this format is the definite trend in legal publishing towards electronic material. Some titles are only available in an electronic format. Another reason, particular to STL, is that the law library has a very limited physical space.

Slide 4

Another unique aspect of the development of the STL Law Library is its close partnership with the University Town Library, a branch of the Shenzhen Public Library system. The University Town Library, also known as UTL, is located in an area in the Nanshan District of Shenzhen called University Town. Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School is located there as are Tsinghua University Shenzhen and Harbin Institute of Technology Shenzhen. All of these institutions enjoy excellent academic reputations. Each has a separate campus within the larger University Town campus.

UTL serves all of these campuses and emphasizes science and technology in its collections. UTL also serves the general public, but because of its location within UTL, it has the feel of an academic research library.

Slide 5

Here is a photograph of UTL. As you can tell it is in the shape of a dragon. Most of the collections are in the dragon's tail. It is built over a canal that runs through the University Town campus.

Slide 6

What are the components of this partnership between UTL and the STL Library? UTL provides the technical services for STL Library. They order, catalog, and process both print and electronic materials. They devote a portion of their acquisitions budget to STL. They provide the online catalog. UTL has set

aside a dedicated space within UTL known as the Legal Research Center that houses a portion of the STL Library print collection. As the partnership has developed, UTL and STL are beginning to jointly purchase databases.

STL uses its funds to supplement the print collection housed in the Legal Research Center. STL library staff work at a specialized reference desk in the Legal Research Center. STL personnel provide expertise in U.S. and international law and add to the social science knowledge generally of UTL.

Slide 7

A new building is under construction for STL – about 9000 square meters or 95,000 square feet for U.S. attendees. It will still be located in University Town and a bit closer to UTL, which is good for library patrons.

The law library space will be small. It will hold principally a reserve and reference collection. Again, the collection is heavily electronic. Some seats for readers are located in the library – about 50; there are many more seats throughout the rest of the building in group study rooms and student lounges on all four floors of the building.

The large portion of the print collection, principally scholarly monographs, will be housed in the Legal Research Center, about a block away.

A primary reason for the bifurcated collection is to keep costs down and, thus, STL tuition down.

Slide 8

Here is an architect's drawing of the front of the STL building. A large plaza extends in front of the building. The law library will be on the lower right on the ground floor of the building. Behind the building is the canal that runs through University Town campus.

Slide 9

Here is a drawing of the law library interior. A limited print collection will be housed along the walls and in free standing shelving. It is primarily a study space and provides access to the course reserve collection and reference services.

Slide 10

With the operation of any new (or existing) law school there are challenges. That is the case with STL. The first challenge is the cumbersome and slow acquisitions process. By law, all foreign material must be purchased through an export-import company – a “middle man.” This causes delays because a third party is involved. It may be a technique to review and censor material also. Thus far, we have not had an issue with censorship.

Also, foreign currency restrictions and controls can also slow down the purchase of foreign materials. The Internet speed can be slow. PKU Shenzhen is on the university network which is not quite as up-to-date as commercial Internet networks in China. This will be changing soon at PKU Shenzhen. HSBC Business School will open its new building in late summer of this year 2013. They will have a new “pipe” to the Internet. STL will have access to the new pipe.

Another reason may be the “Great Fire Wall” of the Internet set up by the Chinese government. By monitoring and blocking some Internet web sites, the Internet within China can be slower than in the West.

A service provided to STL students is the lending of casebooks used in courses. U.S. law schools are unfamiliar with this practice. STL library purchases a sufficient number of casebooks for the law students in their courses. The students check them out for the term and then return them at the end. Again, this service is intended to keep tuition low.

Slide 11

There are also opportunities associated with these challenges. The creation and operation of STL with its curriculum that consists of both U.S. and Chinese law provides the opportunity to learn about and compare two very different legal systems and their sources of law. This occurs within the curriculum as well as in the development of the library collections.

Developing a collection that consists of both Chinese and U.S. law gives the library staff the opportunity to learn deeply about the sources of law of another legal system – sources they are likely unfamiliar with, at first.

The operation of the law library, teaching legal research courses and being part of the STL community will necessarily develop a cross-cultural understanding of different legal systems and of the different conceptions of the rule of law.

Thank you for your attention. During the breaks, I hope to have the opportunity to answer any questions you may have about the STL Library.