Computer Aided Instruction

Are Law Schools putting on AIRS?

Co-operation between CLIRS Ltd, a research group of legal academics and the New South Wales and Commonwealth Attorney-General's Departments has resulted in the creation of an information retrieval training system which will be used to introduce information retrieval to the next generation of law students.

AIRS is a free text retrieval program which can operate in a mode which emulates all the retrieval features of STATUS, the software used by CLIRS and the Commonwealth's SCALE system.

An additional shell duplicates the CLIRS and SCALE interfaces, with similar logon/logoff, menus etc., so users can obtain realistic experience in CLIRS and SCALE use.

AIRS was written by Andrew Mowbray, Lecturer in Law at the NSW Institute of Technology, as part of DataLex, a research project into computerised legal information.

Planning and development of the overall project is shared by Andrew Mowbray, Dr Alan Tyree of the University of Sydney and Graham Greenleaf of the University of New South Wales.

AIRS stands for "Another Information Retrieval System".

Training System

The AIRS Training System comprises the AIRS software, databases of Australian legal materials (the AIRS Training Databases), and a 200 page *Australian Legal Information Retrieval Handbook* and set of exercises to teach and test the use of CLIRS commands and retrieval skills, written by Graham Greenleaf and Andrew Mowbray.

The Training System has been in use at the three Law Schools since the start of this year.

New South Wales launch

The New South Wales Attorney-General, The Hon. Terry Sheahan launched the AIRS/CLIRS NSW Training System at a reception at the NSW Institute of Technology Law Faculty on May 1 this year attended by representative of the Law Faculties, CLIRS and the judiciary.

The AIRS NSW Training Database is compiled from a selection of NSW cases, statutes and other materials taken from the CLIRS databases, and aims to provide a coherent database suitable for teaching purposes, subject to a size constraint of about 20 MB.

It is based around full text materials on the law of torts, criminal law, and statutory interpretation, supplemented by the titles of a wide range of other materials.

CLIRS and the NSW Attorney-General have agreed to make available material in which NSW holds copyright for this purpose.

Commonwealth materials next

The Commonwealth Attorney-General has recently agreed to make available to DataLex Commonwealth statutes and cases from the SCALE system, so an AIRS/SCALE Training System can be created.

It is intended the Commonwealth training databases will be completed and tested by the end of 1987 and will concentrate on the same areas of law as the NSW Training databases, plus material on technology and information law.

Other State Training Databases

The consent of other State Governments, CLIRS and other copyright holders will be necessary before materials from other jurisdictions may be used to develop other training databases.

With such consent and the necessary research and development funding, DataLex will develop Training Databases containing legal materials from other States.

Computer-aided instruction

AIRS is also being integrated with an expert systems/ computer-aided instruction shell, LES, which has been developed as part of the DataLex Project.

Once this integration and the Training Database are complete, it will be possible to include a computer-aided instruction component which gives interactive instruction in CLIRS use.

Computer facilities

Because AIRS and LES are both written in the C computer language, they are very transportable between different computers.

At present, they run on VAX/VMS, Cyber and Amdahl mainframes, IBM compatible microcomputers, and some others. Some Law Faculties may have access to a mainframe and a teaching laboratory, whereas others will only be able to use a Training Database which can operate on a microcomputer with a hard disk (such as an IBM XT).

The Training Databases are being developed for both purposes.

Availability to other Law Faculties

The DataLex researchers have decided to make the AIRS Training System available to other Law Faculties on a non-profit basis.

Law Faculties will only be required to contribute to the research and development costs of the Training Databases that they wish to use and to pay the costs of DataLex installing the Training System on their computer facilities. These costs will vary between institutions.

For further details, interested Faculties should contact one of the DataLex researchers.

Stage 1 of the AIRS Project (1987) involves modification of the AIRS retrieval software to include features to assist in teaching and assessment; development and compilation of Training Databases of NSW materials for retrieval under AIRS; development of a Handbook designed for use with the Training Databases; installation and testing at NSWIT, UNSW and Sydney Law Faculties; and development of AIRS and Training Databases for both mainframe and IBM XT versions.

Subject to the availability of funding, Stage 1 may also involve development of a computer-aided instruction (CAI) program integrated with AIRS; development of a floppy disk version of the CAI program and AIRS; and development of Victorian Training Databases (subject to availability of data) and materials and installation at Monash University.

Stage 2 (1988) may involve DataLex making AIRS available to other Law Faculties, subject to sufficient funds being available to cover the costs of database development and system installation, and on the availability of data from CLIRS and copyright owners.

Interested Law Faculties should contact one of the members of the DataLex project for further details.