**Not Just for Scouting Anymore:**

Digital Badges for Legal Research Skills

**Opportunities**

Legal education is reinventing itself to better prepare law students for the practice of law. At the same time, the practice of law is being transformed by information technology.

**What do badges have to do with legal research?**

- **Badges** can convey more about the learning path than traditional grades or course descriptions. For example, a student may have taken a course but may not have earned a high grade. A badge may reveal that the student has demonstrated specific skills that were taught.
- **Badges** provide a useful way to present or reward the acquisition of skills.
- **Competitive** for-matic badges, known as merit badges, are used in various organizations to recognize achievement.
- **Digital badges** are highly versatile. People other than instructors can create and distribute badges. Badges can be designed for different purposes, such as an image to enhance a portfolio or as a visual statement of authenticity and honesty.
- **Badges** gain opportunities for instructors. Instructors can issue badges for advanced skills, community involvement, and even for participation in formative or summative assessment.

**Background**

- **Digital badges** are relatively new. In fact, digital badges are most often associated with scouting programs as well as other organizations.
- **Digital badges are not written in stone.** People other than instructors can create and distribute badges. Badges can be designed for different purposes, such as an image to enhance a portfolio or as a visual statement of authenticity and honesty.
- **Badges** gain opportunities for instructors. Instructors can issue badges for advanced skills, community involvement, and even for participation in formative or summative assessment.

**Conclusions**

**Digital Badges for Legal Research Skills**

- **What skills do we need to foster?**
  - **Fundamental research skills** are necessary for all law students. These skills include the ability to conduct research, identify relevant sources, and critically evaluate information.
  - **Advanced skills** are more susceptible to changes in technology. Badges for these skills are more important.
- **Maintenance.** Most of a badge’s data should be static and remain intact as long as the badge exists. This includes the name of the institution and the name of the student. However, some data may change over time, such as the date the badge was earned.
- **Badges** are a symbol of their achievements; on the other hand, badges can also be used to indicate authority (military ranks) or to simply communicate a viewpoint.

**Legal Matters**

- **Privacy Considerations:** Badges may include personal identifying information, particularly where badges are used to represent learning outcomes for students. According to FERPA guidelines, badges may be considered directory information unless students sign a consent form releasing the badge as an educational record. This grants the student control over the display of the badge.
- **Metadata issues** include:
  - **Ownership and control:** The badge owner has full rights over the use of the badge. Other individuals or organizations may use the badge to verify its authenticity, but they do not own the badge.
  - **Legal information:** Badges must conform to legal regulations, such as trademark laws.
  - **Regional and institutional differences:** Requirements for badges may vary by region or institution.

**Future Plans**

- **The Ruth Lilly Law Library is beginning work on a large research badge for law schools.**
- **The goal** is to issue badges for a variety of research skills, including:
  - **Primary research:** Identifying and locating primary sources, such as cases, statutes, and regulations.
  - **Secondary research:** Identifying and locating secondary sources, such as legal treatises and journals.
  - **Citation:** Identifying and locating relevant citations.
  - **Writing:** Identifying and locating relevant writing.

**Digital Badges**

- **Benefits of digital badges:**
  - **Recognition:** Badges provide a way to recognize and reward achievement.
  - **Motivation:** Badges can motivate learners to achieve a goal.
  - **Tracking:** Badges can track learner progress.
  - **Portfolio:** Badges can be used to create a portfolio of achievements.

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**Directory information** is a student’s name, address, major, degrees and other identifying information. Degrees and the visual element of a badge (OBI requires a .png) can be created in any type of image editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop. The OBI logo, which is a database vendor logo or the university’s crest. Avoid using trademarks, obtain permission, and clearly mark your logo. Most badges have the following elements:

1. **Name of the institution**
2. **Name of the student**
3. **Date the badge was earned**
4. **Description of the credit earned**
5. **Visual element**

**Earn a Badge**

- **To earn a badge,** you need to demonstrate a specific skill or set of skills. For example, you might need to complete a certain number of hours of research or write a specific number of papers.
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**Institutional Approval**

- **Institutional Approval** is necessary for badges to be considered legal records. The institution must have: (1) issued a public notice detailing what can be released as directory information; and (2) given students the opportunity to opt out of having their information released.

**Privacy Concerns:**

- **Badges may implicate federal privacy laws, particularly, FERPA.** Libraries issuing badges should have thorough records of how badges are used and with whom the badges are shared. This includes keeping track of who has access to the badges and how they are used.
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