

*An Interview with*

**Fred Lederer, Chancellor Professor of Law, William and Mary Law School and  
Director of Courtroom 21 Project**

*On the Subject of*

**Law School Connect**

*Following is the transcript of an interview between Richard Herrmann, Director of the Delaware Bar Association and Fred Lederer, Chancellor Professor of Law, William and Mary Law School and Director of Courtroom 21 Project*

RH: Tell us about the relationship between Courtroom 21 and William and Mary Law School and your role within each.

FL: Well, I'm happy to say that I am a member of the faculty of the law school. More specifically, I'm Chancellor Professor of Law and teach a variety of courses, including Criminal Procedure, Evidence, Legal Technology, Technology-Augmented Trial Advocacy, and our Legal Skills program. I serve as Director of the Courtroom 21 Project, which is part of the law school. We say that our institutional parents are the law school and the National Center for State Courts. The mission of the Courtroom 21 Project, which takes its name from the Courtroom of the 21st century, is to learn how to use technology to improve the world's legal systems. The Courtroom 21 Project has existed formally since 1993.

RH: When did Courtroom 21 start using videoconferencing technology, and when did the law school begin using it for interviews?

FL: We started using videoconferencing technology very soon after the beginning of the project. Our original goal was to use it for remote witness testimony and then for remote appearances by judges and lawyers. And we've done a great deal of research and experimental work in that field. It occurred to us rather soon, however, that we had an obvious use here in the law school, so in 1995, we started using our equipment to enable our Career Services Office to offer remote interviews between our students and a variety of employers around the world -- primarily around the United States.

RH: How did that evolve into the idea for Law School Connect?

FL: We had been doing remote interviews for quite a few years, and they had proven to be very successful. Things were so successful; in fact, we wanted to expand the technology beyond our law school. (I remember one of our students landed a job in London as a result of one of our initial remote interviews.) That led us to the idea of Law School Connect, a program that would leverage the infrastructure created by Courtroom 21 and the technology, network and support of our partner, Courtroom Connect. The result is a reliable and scalable video conferencing network that connects law firms, non-profits, and judges with legal talent across the country. Our long-term goal is to ensure that every accredited law school in the country has access to videoconferencing equipment to broaden the potential pool of employers for their students. There are, of course, other good reasons for doing this.

RH: Such as...?

FL: Such as giving law firms, non-profits, and judges a larger pool of potential new lawyers. We don't expect, nor do we wish, to change the number of on-campus interviews. Instead, we're trying to give law firms that do not

customarily interview in person at a given law school the option to interview students they would ordinarily not have available to them. We see this as being the first screening interview, after which the firm may decide to do a second interview in person. We are especially interested in broadening the opportunities for judicial clerkships. Videoconferencing levels the playing field by allowing students who cannot afford to travel an opportunity to interview for clerkships in other jurisdictions. This also makes it possible for judges to reach a wider and more diverse pool of clerkship applicants.

RH: Based on your work with courts, what are the unique challenges of judges seeking to fill clerkships?

FL: Judges, of course, are looking for the best clerks that they can get. They're looking for people who have great legal talent, personalities that will allow them to work effectively with the judge and sometimes to enrich the atmosphere in chambers. They're looking to broaden diversity. They are looking to get the best work that clerks can do. To do this, they need access to the broadest range of applicants possible.

RH: How much research, testing, and planning went into launching this program?

FL: Well, of course, we have been doing empirical research and informal testing since the first remote interview, but we have been working on this program for well over a year. The video conferencing technology, equipment, and network provided by our partner, Courtroom Connect, has been extensively used and proven very successful for other legal communities.

RH: What has been the role of the William and Mary Career Services Office in this process?

FL: We, of course, could not have done our remote interviews without the intimate involvement of our Career Services Office. We view the technology as an adjunct to the Career Services Office. Their expertise in the employment process was integral to designing the program so that it would support the goals and objectives of career services offices on law school campuses throughout the country.

RH: What has been the reaction of law firms to this program?

FL: I think it's fair to say that initially law firms that have not done these types of interviews have been cautious. However, the firms that have used the service have been very pleased with the success.

RH: What about training and technical support? Will this put a strain on law firm I.T.?

FL: This is an incredibly simple process. Functionally, it's very much like making a telephone call. You agree to a call time. You press the button, and you sit there and talk. We don't anticipate any significant impact on the I.T. staff of either firms or law schools or, for that matter, courts, first because it's so simple and second because Courtroom Connect provides comprehensive network and user support. With this program, there is one point of contact across all the schools. In addition, each new site that joins the network must be certified to ensure ease of use.

RH: Is there a solution for judges who don't have their own videoconferencing equipment that will allow them to participate in Law School Connect?

FL: Yes. We have a variety of means of providing judges with the ability to remotely interview clerkship applicants. If they do not have their own equipment, -- and they do not have access to other government equipment, which is almost always close by-- Courtroom Connect has a large network of videoconferencing rooms available to LSC members, which will be made available to the courts free of charge.

RH: How do you see the future of Law School Connect?

FL: I think that as more and more law schools and legal employers begin using this technology, it will become an invaluable way of enriching the current interview process. It will never substitute for in-person interviews, but it will certainly permit a much broader number of applicants. It will enable employers to interview people they have

never been able to reach, and it will allow students to interview with judges, law firms, government agencies, and nonprofits, that they had never thought possible. We see nothing but a bright future ahead of us all.