

## DRALE: AN ONLINE ROLEPLAY SYSTEM FOR TEACHING LAW

### KEYWORDS

Law, Ethics,  
Dispute Resolution

### CONTACT

Matthew Riddle,  
La Trobe University  
[m.riddle@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:m.riddle@latrobe.edu.au)

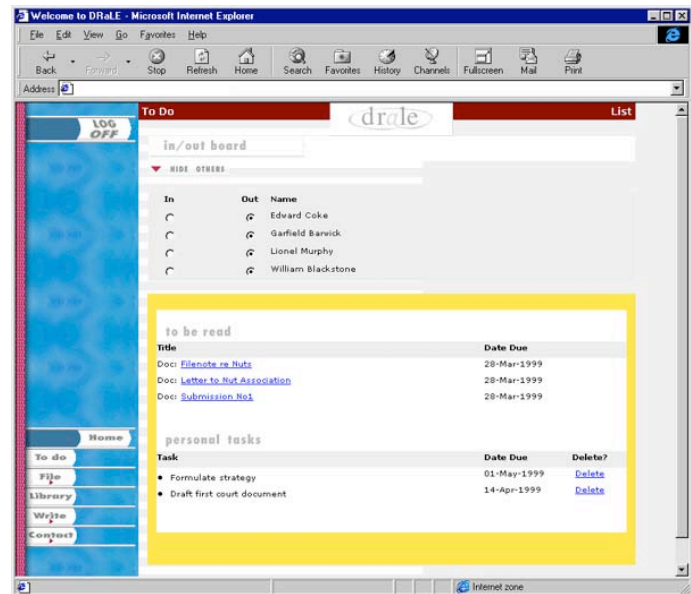
### ABSTRACT

*DRALE Online is a system developed in 1997 to simulate the practical aspects of a dispute resolution process using a web-based roleplay environment.*

### DESCRIPTION

The aim of the subject Dispute Resolution and Legal Ethics is to give students the necessary background on the resolution of disputes, the ethical responsibilities of a lawyer, and the duties owed to the law, the court and the client. This involves practical things such as handling case files and communicating with other parties, including opposing law firms, senior partners, the client, the court, and other agencies. Students need to learn the mechanics of the dispute resolution process as well as the ethical issues involved in the process. For example, clients must be asked for direction at critical stages, and all documents which go out of a law firm should be signed by all partners in the firm.

- Students formed legal firms, acting as plaintiffs or defendants, and the teams were matched in pairs
- Lecturers and tutors played the role of the 'senior partner' of the firms



### AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

- Approximately 250 students working in groups of 5 used the system for a full year course (40% assessment).
- Developed for Dispute Resolution and Legal Ethics, a subject taught by Prof Martin Davies in 1997
- Students were in their final year of Law

### LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This learning design aims to:

- Give students a practical knowledge of the dispute resolution process in the Australian legal system
- Improve understanding of the ethical considerations of legal practice, such as consulting with clients before taking action on their behalf, or obtaining the consent of legal partners before corresponding with opposing law firms
- Develop students' team-working skills

### TIME AND SETTING

DRALE Online was used as a major part of the students' assessment:

- In a subject taught over one year
- Using a blended learning approach, i.e. the online simulation was in addition to their lectures and seminars, and students spent a significant amount of time meeting each other in person as well as interacting online
- The system was used in this way with minor modifications over several years, between 1997 & 2003

### ASSESSMENT

- Students are assessed on the basis of the 'File Note', which represents an authentic way of summarising the case
- Individually assessed
- Each 'File Note' represents 10% of total mark
- Students run 4 cases, so the roleplay represents 40% of the mark for the subject

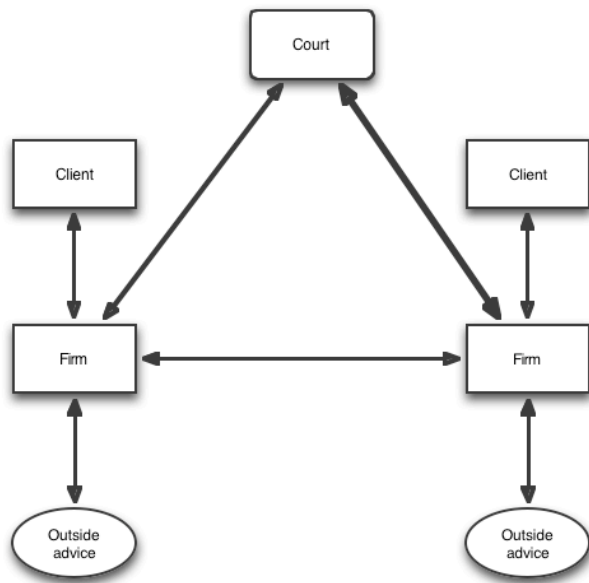
## RESOURCES

The DRALE Online system includes:

- Support for teams
- A 'To Do' list
- An 'In/Out' board showing who in each team is currently logged in
- Communications tools allow students to send messages, file documents with the court, & serve documents as writs
- 'File' which contains all of the documents relating to the case, including those being worked on by the students
- Template documents & web letterheads ('with compliments' slips) to identify each firm
- Tracking of student actions (available to the lecturer and tutors)

## STUDENTS ENGAGE IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

### *DRALE Online* PROCESS



The connections simulated by the DRALE Online system.

### Students form legal firms

- Students assign themselves to a team of 5 and make up a name for their legal firm. This firm name is used by the team in their correspondence.
- The system automatically assigns the teams the role of plaintiff or defendant, and matches teams to each other.

### Read documents relating to the case

- Students must read the case file, which includes documents relevant to their team role.

### Read and create 'To Do' items

- Students consult the 'To Do' list, which includes new messages from the system, the lecturer/tutors and other students.

### Make contact

- Students can contact others using the 'contact' button.

### Countersign documents

- Students must send documents to the other partners in their firm (students in their team) and have all official correspondence countersigned.
- 4 of 5 students must mark the document 'OK to send', and if 1 or more mark it 'Don't Send' the document cannot be sent.
- Documents should then be sent to the court (through an office called the Prothonotary) for authentication before being served.

### Write a 'File Note'

- At the conclusion of each of the 4 cases, students must individually write a 'File Note', which represents 10% of their mark for the subject (40% total).

## FACILITATOR ISSUES

- The DRALE Online system and the scenario is introduced during a lecture early in the year.
- Lecturer and tutors must actively monitor student progress, provide feedback on issues such as whether they have consulted their client, and assess the 'File Notes' upon completion of each case.
- Lecturer/tutors also play the role of 'senior partner', answering questions from the students in their role as partners of a firm.

## REUSABILITY

The DRALE Online system is no longer under active development, but was reused with minor modifications over 7 years.

## REFERENCES AND LINKS

Riddle, M. and Davies, M., 'DRALE Online: A Computer Mediated Communication Environment For Teaching Law', Proceedings of ASCILITE98 Conference, Wollongong, December. Last accessed 7 July 2009 from: <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/wollongong98/asc98-pdf/riddle.pdf>