UCI Law School's Library a Labor of Love
Beatrice Tice Put Painstaking Work into Building It; Now, 60 Strangers Will Wander the Racks

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IRVINE - A week ago, Beatrice A. Tice, the associate dean of library and information services at the UCI School of Law, was feeling quite proprietary about her new law library.

Over the previous six months or so, Tice had, personally, designed the space, lit the paintings, sat in every chair and carefully secreted wisps of electronic spyware called "tattler tape" in hundreds and hundreds of volumes. She'd had one stretch of wall painted 22 times to find just the right color.

As the time drew near for the law school's first-ever students to arrive, Tice wasn't at all sure she was ready to turn her library over to five dozen potentially unappreciative young strangers.

That is, until Wednesday, the first day of orientation, and the first student tour of the library. As Tice led the students to the spacious reading area on the second floor, she heard one student take a sharp breath. "It's beautiful," the woman said.

"Now, I can't wait for them to be here," Tice said.

Tice is a Newport Beach native who worked at big firms like Latham & Watkins and Gray, Cary, Ware & Freidenrich in Orange County and San Diego before becoming a law librarian specializing in international materials. She was in charge of the law library at the University of Toronto when Dean Erwin Chemerinsky asked her to run the library at his new UCI School of Law.

Chemerinsky offered her free rein to create "the ideal law library for the 21st century," including overseeing the build-out of former office space into shelves and reading areas. "It was one of the things that really drew me to come here," she said.

About the first thing Tice had to do was chuck the architect and escape the university office overseeing the project. The design was all wrong, so she fixed it.

Spread over two floors, the library Tice created keeps most books on the first floor, which is sturdy enough to support the load. That level is "cool," she said, and has nooks and crannies for solo studying.

The second floor, engineered originally to bear the load of offices, not books, holds far fewer volumes, but many more comfortable chairs, tables and windows overlooking a canopy of trees in the adjacent green space. Some of the chairs are high-backed Craftsman-style rockers modeled after the chair Tice's mother uses. Other furniture takes its style from them.

Windows surround this "warm" space, and walls without windows have "brushstroke" reproductions of California Impressionist paintings donated by James Irvine Swinden, the vice president of the Irvine Museum. Tice sat in every single chair to ensure the view was either trees outside a window
or of a painting.

Intentionally left out are individual study carrels. Tice said students these days are just as comfortable studying at tables with others, and anyway, the carrels take up too much of her limited space.

The library is only about 17,000 square feet, compared to 40,000 square feet for the average academic law library. At the moment, it has about 10,000 volumes on its shelves, though she eventually plans 160,000 to 180,000.

It has a high-tech research center with 30 computer workstations. Tice said the library is carefully cataloging online resources to make them easily available.

But the law library for the 21st century does not depend solely on computers. "We're not at a point in legal research, or legal anything, where technology will do everything for you," she said.

What makes the library cutting-edge, she said, is having "library staff and programs that marry those two [books and technology] together."

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