

BALTIMORE!

TEACHING LEGAL RESEARCH REDUX

by *Pauline M. Aranas*

The 1997 Annual Meeting presented a series of educational offerings devoted to teaching legal research: "Teaching Legal Research in the Digital Age: Are We Really Covering All the Waterfronts?," a half-day workshop, and a two-part program, "From Nutshells to Netscape." Part One looked at "Covering the Basics through Research Instruction Programs," while Part Two examined "Covering the Details in Advanced Legal Research Courses." Each educational offering sought to present more effective and creative approaches to teaching legal research, and for the most part, each succeeded in reaching its prospective goals.

Programs on teaching legal research often remind me of "Rocky" sequels. The plot doesn't vary much: our hard-working and earnest protagonist (i.e., librarian) fighting the constant battle against ignorant and under-skilled researchers (i.e., hapless law students/clerks/associates). Each sequel will have a different spin on this basic plot. With legal research, earlier sequels, for example, have focused on the impact of electronic information formats and the development of Advanced Legal Research courses. Unlike "Rocky" sequels, however, legal research programs are not a dying or dead franchise. Instead, they are a viable and vital core of AALL educational offerings as evidenced by the perspective and approach offered by this year's programs.

One critical difference with this year's programs relates to perspective. In past years, programs focused on the failure of academic institutions to teach effective research skills and created an "us vs. them" approach. This year, the programs reflected a partnership perspective and fostered the recognition that we all educate, regardless of environment. This evolution, I suspect, probably stems from the work of the Research Instruction Caucus (now part of RIPS), which encouraged partnerships among librarians in all sectors to work collaboratively to improve legal research skills training.

The Workshop on "Teaching Legal Research in a Digital Age" examined the impact of digital information formats on teaching research in a concentrated format. The first half offered a debate on whether digital information resources had a positive or negative impact on teaching. **Professor Maria Perez Crist** (University of Dayton School of Law) argued on the positive side while **Professor Molly Warner Lien** (IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law) on the negative aspects. In actuality, both speakers supported rather than opposed each other's views. Each emphasized the importance of process and critical analysis. Both identified ways in which the digital format has broadened the researcher's knowledge base and expanded the potential for communication and discussion. It's questionable whether this topic merits a "debate" per se. A debate format implies an either/or perspective. The speakers themselves did not really take sides. The real question, as addressed effectively by the speakers, is how to adopt methods of learning, teaching, and working with all information formats.

The Workshop's second half offered panelist presentations. The speakers discussed their teaching philosophy and methodology and offered their perspectives on integration of information formats. **Professors Robert Volk** (Boston University School of Law) and **Virginia Thomas** (University of Miami School of Law) discussed teaching research from an academic perspective;

Nancy Tuohy (Clausen Miller, PC, Chicago) represented the law firm perspective; and **Professor Yvonne Chandler** (University of North Texas, School of Library and Information Sciences) offered the library professional school perspective. The panel approach worked well. By sharing teaching methodologies in their respective teaching environments, the speakers helped stimulate ideas for curriculum changes and offered insights to improve learning. Speaker highlights include Volk's emphasis on issue spotting and analysis; Thomas' focus on teaching research principles vs. teaching research tools; Tuohy's legal research assignment form and analysis of research results; and Chandler's utilization of technology in an information curriculum.

Originally, the Workshop scheduled time for small group sessions. However, the debate and panelist presentations used most of the allocated time. Generally, with workshop formats, most participants expect some interactive component. If time had permitted, small group sessions to exchange ideas or expand on the Workshop themes would have enhanced the program. The coordinators, however, did provide adequate time for audience questions. Overall, the Workshop was a worthwhile experience and effectively met its learning outcome goals.

The "From Nutshells to Netscape" program offered a two-part series examining both basic research skills offerings and advanced legal research courses. The program used a roundtable discussion format. Speakers gave very brief descriptions of the programs at their law schools, law firms, or county law libraries. More detailed program descriptions were located in the *Educational Program Handout Materials* booklet (distributed to all AALL registrants). Following their brief descriptions, the roundtable discussion began with panelists answering predetermined questions from the moderator.

Part One dealt with "Covering the Basics through Research Instruction Programs." With **Nancy Armstrong** (Northwestern University School of Law) moderating, Part One featured **Pom Gregory** (Circuit Court for Prince George's County Law Library), **Rachel Jones** (Dickstein Shapiro Morin Oshinsky), **Dwight King** (Notre Dame Law School Kresge Library), **Karen Summerhill** (Georgetown University Law Center) and **Mary Whisner** (University of Washington Gallagher Law Library). It was a fascinating glimpse at the broad spectrum of instruction opportunities. As an academic librarian, I particularly valued learning about the teaching methodologies in the firm and county library settings. My course content very much depends on the research expectations held by law firm partners and judges. It was also informative to learn what types of learning opportunities different law schools provide—e.g., 1L courses, upper division electives, topical seminars, voluntary classes, etc.

Part Two examined "Covering the Details in Advanced Legal Research Courses." Armstrong again moderated, with **Robert Berring** (University of California School of Law), **Penny Hazelton** (University of Washington Gallagher Library), **Chris Noble** (Ohio State University College of Law), **Roberta Shaffer** (Covington & Burling), and **Gretchen Van Dam** (IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law Library) as panelists. As with Part One, the Advanced session discussed a wide range of classroom

offerings, from seminars to large lecture-style courses. Again, I personally found the law firm perspective illuminating, particularly the discussion on cost-effective research.

Both program sessions featured interesting speakers and content. The speakers successfully combined humor (e.g., King's poetic description of Notre Dame's program and Berring's "we wait for them to die" observation) with substance. The program format used its allocated time effectively. The brief descriptions of each instructional program provided a good framework for the general discussion. If audience members required more course specifics and details, they could locate such information in the handouts. The roundtable discussions generated thoughtful responses on a variety of important issues, such as constructive ways to integrate diverse information formats, cost-effective research and the impact of flat-fee pricing arrangements, the learning behaviors of current law students, advantages/disadvantages of different class formats, and the challenge of the ever-changing information universe.

As a veteran attendee of research curriculum programs, I found the perspective offered by both the "Digital Information" workshop and the "Nutshell/Netscape" program refreshing. Sharing information on different instructional programs from diverse environments focuses attention on effective teaching rather than who is an effective teacher. Both the Workshop and program successfully challenged experienced and novice educators to reconceptualize their theoretical basis for teaching legal research.

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ANNUAL MEETING TAPES AND HANDOUTS

Audiocassettes: If you know the event number of the program(s) you want, you can call Mobiltape directly and place your order (payment by credit card): 800/369-5718. All the programs are preceded by the code "97AALL." (For example, to order program A1, you would ask for 97AALL-A1.) For a full listing of other programs available, and for other payment methods, get a tape order form from AALLNET (<http://www.aallnet.org/products/>) or from AALL's Fax-on-Demand service: 908/544-5901—request document number 650. Ordering information for the Program Handout books is also available from AALLNET and Fax-on-Demand (request document number 610).