

Librarian Trainer

Reports from the Public and Private Sector

An Evolution

by Pamela Gregory

Professional Perspectives—Tools and Techniques of the Trade. *The Professional Development Committee encourages members to continue to explore topics after presentations at the local, regional, and national levels. We welcome your comments and article suggestions. Please contact Mary A. Hotchkiss at 206/553-4475 or hotchma@u.washington.edu.*

In today's jargon we are evolving. We are evolving into or "morphing" into new personae without portfolio it seems, often into realms we never dreamed we'd see. This article is a sequel to the training session in Baltimore called "From Nutshells to Netscape." That program, a panel consisting of Rachel Jones, Pamela Gregory, Dwight King, and Karen Summerhill, was moderated by Nancy Armstrong. Meg Collins, its creator, wanted an overview of what different types of libraries were doing to train users. The program was a rich cross-section of examples from our lives as trainers in our libraries, or how we were coping with sharing technology skills with our various types of users.

As the summer faded and the fall training sessions began again here in the Prince George's County law library, reflection about what we said in July made me listen to the tapes of the session once again. Recalling the ambitious efforts of Dickstein Shapiro Morin & Oshinsky, and the astute naming of Rachel Jones, a law librarian, as its Director of Professional Development and Training, I wanted especially to follow up with Rachel. The interview following is her response to my questions.

Pamela Gregory: Rachel, I'm impressed with your new title and areas of responsibility. What is your history with the firm, and your general background in law librarianship?

Rachel Jones: I have had three distinct "tours of duty" with Dickstein Shapiro Morin & Oshinsky (DSM&O) since 1981, and learned the business of law librarianship from the ground up. I have served in paraprofessional roles, reference librarian roles, staff manager roles, and I now have a newly created position that administers training and continuing legal education for our attorneys and staff. All the experiences I have had along the way have helped to prepare me for this position, by providing a comprehensive view of research demands and user needs, and of course, knowing the work of the firm. The firm also recognizes the value of the experiences that I gained at other law libraries, and most notably, the experience I gained in an academic law library. The academic law library experience provided a perspective and understanding of the research needs of the law student and the evolving process that takes place in becoming a practicing attorney.

PG: What are you doing and for whom?

RJ: Our library staff has offered "cost effective research" at DSM&O workshops for a number of years, which covers manual, computer assisted, and WWW legal research. The workshop is an educational opportunity as well as a marketing opportunity for the department, and it is a whole staff effort. While the actual presentation typically involves three librarians, the rest of the staff updates the content of the research guide and pathfinders. This workshop is typically offered two times a year, once for summer associates, and once to all associates and paralegals and anyone who wishes to attend.

This year, we plan to offer an additional "standalone" Internet program, because of the breadth of discussion we feel is necessary to instruct our users in the appropriate use of the World Wide Web. We were concerned about whether this program would give the Internet/WWW any perceived preeminence as a legal research tool, but we decided that an emphasis on evaluation of sites and sources would tame any inclination. Our Electronic Services Librarian is responsible for the Internet training efforts in our firm, and she is also responsible for our Web site.

PG: How are you benchmarking or measuring success?

RJ: We obtain CLE certification from several states for these programs as a way to demonstrate the value of the course, to add authenticity if you will, and to encourage attendance.

PG: What has worked for you and what hasn't in your training programs?

RJ: The format for our workshop has evolved over the years and technological advances and presentation software have made our programs much more interesting and "real" life-like. We are sensitive to adult learning needs as well as the tight time constraints that law firms face daily, and we try to make programs as interactive as possible. We combine PowerPoint presentations with screen captures from the Internet and our Web site, and screen cam movies for our WESTLAW and LEXIS demos. We seldom go live so as to avoid the likelihood of technological snafus that delay or compromise our presentation.

One-on-one research consultation with attorneys and staff is one of the most valuable, if not the most valuable, instruction I provide. Also called "point of need" training, attorneys and paralegals have the ability to work on a project while at the same time exploring and learning about sources and databases. There is nothing to compare to real life experiences when developing personal research strategies and techniques. Our WESTLAW and LEXIS representatives continue to offer training to our new users, but I meet with them first to provide an unbiased discussion of sources pertinent to their practice, including sources in our library collection and links on our Web site. In other words, we try to provide a whole picture of research sources available at the firm.

PG: What are the firm's plans for the future?

RJ: In the future we hope to provide more practice-targeted programs and develop practitioner's guides. This will require a concerted cooperative effort among the attorneys and the information professionals, and would be a supplement to our general workshop. I am also responsible for bringing in outside programs for our attorneys and staff. Our attorney professional education plan has typically focused on writing and trial advocacy skills. This year, for the first time, we are developing a management curriculum for our managers and staff. DSM&O

A Desktop Learning Opportunity

has had exponential growth in the last few years, and the leaders of the firm have recognized that all staff need to be nourished and educated in this period of institutional growth and change.

PG: Where do you think we are headed as a profession? Is this trainer/educator role a direction we should be taking?

RJ: As a profession, law librarians constantly struggle to find common ground in our varied law library settings. I am convinced that as more research instructor/training librarian positions are created in our various settings, we as a profession will begin to realize and maximize the intellectual capital of our profession. Law librarians can and should play an integral part in the lifelong educational process that begins in law school and carries through an attorney's entire career, wherever that career takes them...

The Prince George's Experience

We have so much that is similar to the DSM&O example that one library could be the mirror image of the other. The primary differences are in our resources in the government, both staffing and technological. While in the private sector DSM&O has an Electronic Services Reference librarian who also takes care of the Web site, we have a staff of two professionals who can offer training in between administration, budgeting, taking a turn at the reference desk, and fixing the photocopier machine. Training has taken a relatively structured format, which has included bench, bar, law clerks, and interested staff. We have sponsored WESTLAW and LEXIS training for many years, for both new and experienced users. In recent years we have added CD-ROM search training days, taught primarily by vendors, but followed up by library staff.

Until fairly recently the only benchmarking or measurement of success in the training efforts we did was to track the return of law clerks who had attended a training session. The warm glow of seeing them return to use the CD-ROM after they had been trained was the reward ... what is the true case however, is that they seemed to be using it soon after training, but not well into their clerkships, which made us question just how much they got in the hour sessions they were given. Hoping to better respond to the "point of need" requests has meant that we are getting frequent calls to come to judge's chamber's to help with research requests, which means we have to leave the library. Better to go to them at the point-of-need with ways to get to the answer than have the question go unanswered, or to make them feel the library has "walls." With luck, we will soon be networked. The role of the library will continue with a healthy respect for a librarian's ability to be a legal problem solver.

The training demands of law clerks in a court are not at all dissimilar to the training demands of law firms and summer associates. We too ask for real life examples of problems, so that we can do a little team building with the law clerks, and to establish a market base for the library's services with newer clerks. Long hours of waiting to get connected in the old days to slow modems have brought a set of canned or CD-ROM questions to use. These examples also serve for training paralegals in both court and community college educational programs supported by the library. Best of all though, is the real life

example. Nothing exemplifies the need for legislative history training as the law clerks' need to examine an older statute for a case file. The "teachable moment" is then present.

The biggest difference between the public and private sector law libraries in training needs is the diversity of users in the public sector. Access to the courts now includes access to all types of judicial and legal information, which is constitutionally freely available to all citizens. We have all kinds of library users. We serve citizens, lawyers, judges, elected officials, county and state's attorneys, law students, law clerks, paralegal students, and children who are on school field trips. Many of our users are sophisticated with respect to computer usage and many are not. Most who are familiar with WWW resources assume that other legal resources are similar. While the private sector concerns itself with the bottom line, the public sector concerns itself with access issues, user diversity issues, and staff training and skill levels to cope with an ever-changing technology environment.

Our profession has always known that we teach all the time. We need to acknowledge that we are among the best possible resources of our organizations to do just that. Judith Meadows in her presentation in Sacramento at the winter 1996 State, Court & County Midwinter Institute discussed the needs of adult learners. Judy presented to us some characteristics of adult learning, to heighten our awareness as trainers. Adults draw on their life's experiences and need to be able to relate them to what you are teaching. Adults learn what they need to know. Ninety-two percent of all learning is visual. The old adage of a picture being worth a thousand words is true, so long as the picture is good. Adults need a variety of places to look. Use a monitor, a marker

board, a speaker, other students, overheads, handouts. Adults will not be controlled. The trainer, or facilitator, can merely guide them. Adult learners will arrange the chairs the way they want. Adult learners will get out of your presentation what they need. Trust them to take what they want, even if it was not what you intended. The first 15 minutes establish the rapport between the trainer and the students. If you don't have them by then, you never will. The best of trainers of adults have in their bag of tricks: 1) knowledge of the content of the

subject, 2) flexibility, and 3) ability to put people at ease. You have to be able to adjust your agenda based on the participants and the environment. Adults need permission to learn just one thing. Training is hard work. One hour of training is the equivalent of an eight hour day. Be rested when you train, be prepared. Build in time for students to talk to each other, even five minutes. The learning pyramid: we learn and retain 5% of lectures; 10% of reading; 20% from audiovisuals; 30% through demonstrations, 50% from discussion groups; 75% by doing what we have been taught; and 90% by teaching others.

Pamela Gregory (pgregory@capcon.net) is Law Librarian at the Prince George's County Law Library in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. She is a past president of the Law Librarian's Society of Washington, D.C., and has been an active AALL member since 1970.

Coming in May:

Laura Olsen Dugan, Library and Information Services Manager at a large law firm in Madison, Wisconsin, identifies the essential presentation skills all librarians need, and offers tips and techniques for successful public speaking.