



Photo courtesy of Wisconsin Lawyer.

Law librarians can build a higher profile in the legal community by contributing articles to law-related publications. The Wisconsin State Bar's Wisconsin Lawyer agreed to publish eight articles by members of LLAW.

Write and Reach Out

AALL Chapters Tout the Value of Law Librarians through Legal Journal Submissions

by Carol Bannen and Bonnie Shucha

Law librarians have a lot to say and a lot to teach about legal research. As information specialists, we know the most efficient techniques to find information. We share this knowledge on a daily basis through reference interactions with our attorneys, judges, and law students. Many of us also offer training sessions to assist users in navigating our more complex resources.

Some law librarians have discovered that another effective

way to share our knowledge is to reach lawyers where they are reading: legal journals and publications. By writing articles for these law-related publications, librarians can reach out beyond our own organizations and offer research guidance to a much wider audience.

These articles benefit more than just the readers who learn from the practical research advice that we share. Just as importantly, writing articles for legal journals and publications helps law librarians build a higher profile among the legal community, both as individual authors and as a profession. In a time of budget cuts and library closings, it is essential that readers of these journals, a.k.a. our employers, recognize the value of our skills to the legal profession.

Chapter Initiatives

Recognizing the public relations potential, several AALL chapters have organized article-writing projects among their members. Such coordinated efforts are beneficial for several reasons:

- They encourage recognition of chapters and their memberships as authorities in the field of legal research.
- They offer a group dynamic for brainstorming topic ideas, encouraging authors, and peer reviewing of articles.
- They encourage authorship among members who might otherwise be

reluctant to submit articles on their own.

- They provide a central contact person to communicate with publishers.

One of the earliest chapters to successfully organize such a campaign was the Virginia Association of Law Libraries (VALL). For several years, VALL members have provided content for several full legal research-themed issues of the *Virginia Lawyer*, the official publication of the Virginia State Bar (see related article on page 20). According to VALL, these articles “not only offer attorneys practical research advice, but also serve to increase the bar’s awareness of the wide-ranging expertise of Virginia’s law library community,” reported the October 2002 *AALL Spectrum’s* “Chapter News.”

Another long-standing project is in place at the Northern California Association of Law Libraries (NOCALL). Since 1998, a team of authors from NOCALL has been writing a monthly column in the *San Francisco Daily Journal*, one of the city’s legal newspapers (see related article on page 20).

More recently, the Colorado Association of Law Libraries (CoALL) has successfully offered content for its state bar’s publication, the *Colorado Lawyer* (see related article on page 20). In its column, “Legal Research Corner,” CoALL members provide answers to challenging legal research questions submitted by readers. “CoALL members view the project as a great marketing tool for law librarianship and as a way to promote the value of law librarians,” reported the November 2003 *AALL Spectrum’s* “Chapter News.”

LLAW’s Campaign

This year, the Law Librarians Association of Wisconsin (LLAW) also successfully launched a public relations campaign to place articles written by members in a variety of state law publications. Through the coordination of Articles Committee Chair Carol Bannen, LLAW members have collectively authored more than a dozen articles appearing in numerous legal publications. This initiative has given LLAW members the chance to showcase their skills and afforded the organization beneficial exposure among Wisconsin’s legal community. In sharing our experience, we hope to offer encouragement and advice for other chapters considering this type of project.

At the 2002 AALL Annual Meeting, both Bonnie Shucha, current LLAW president, and Bannen learned of VALL’s partnership with *Virginia Lawyer*.

Recognizing the potential of such a coordinated publication effort, Shucha proposed the idea to the editors at Wisconsin State Bar's publication, *Wisconsin Lawyer*. Fortunately, Shucha had recently written an article for that publication and had established a dialog with its editors.

Because *Wisconsin Lawyer* had previously published articles written by law librarians, it knew what quality of article to expect. The editors agreed to accept for review additional articles to be published as a series from LLAW and its members. Gauging publisher interest is an important early step for any chapter publication project.

Garnering Support

Another very important first step is to present the idea to your chapter's executive board, and upon its approval, to your membership. Having learned of *Wisconsin Lawyer's* interest, Shucha proposed the project to LLAW's Board last November. The board responded enthusiastically and agreed to form a special Articles Committee and appoint a chair to coordinate the project. Soon thereafter, the idea was presented to the membership to determine if there would be enough interest to sustain the project. At that time, Bannen was appointed chair of the new committee.

The state bar editors wanted to see a list of potential articles before they committed to the idea. They indicated that they preferred in-depth articles, rather than those summarizing Internet links by area of law. The editors chose eight of 12 potential articles based on a list of titles and brief descriptions submitted by LLAW. However, they also wanted to gauge reaction to the articles before committing to publishing

more than four. Response has been favorable, and at this time LLAW has published or is scheduled to publish the first eight and has sent *Wisconsin Lawyer* another list of potential titles.

The *Wisconsin Law Journal*, a weekly newspaper for Wisconsin attorneys, has also published several articles, each accompanied by a large LLAW logo. The newspaper enjoys publishing articles reviewing good Web sites by practice area. Several of the topics turned down by *Wisconsin Lawyer* went on to

Administrators newsletter that goes directly to the law firm administrators. This has been a great opportunity to showcase the value of law librarians directly to the decision makers.

A link on the LLAW Web site shows that the chapter has prolific authors who have published in a variety of publications, including members who have recently participated in the article-writing project. Visit www.aallnet.org/chapter/llaw/articles/index.htm to view the full list.

Project Coordination

Each chapter involved with a publication project has discovered the importance of appointing a coordinator to keep everyone on task. Among other things, the coordinator might be responsible for recruiting authors, compiling a list of potential topics, overseeing the editing of articles, identifying and communicating with publishers, and maintaining project momentum.

Recruiting authors to write can be a challenge. One method is to simply ask for volunteers to write articles. Sending an e-mail out to the chapter with the list of potential topics worked well for LLAW. CoALL coordinator Mariann Storck started with three volunteer writers and assigned each of them topics. VALL, however, found that although this method initially produced a rush of writers, enthusiasm has since lessened.

Another good strategy is to ask good writers directly. People who may not volunteer will often write if asked, and they will probably feel flattered by the suggestion. It is also helpful to ensure potential authors that they have lots of lead time before their articles are due. If they don't have a tight deadline, people are much more receptive to writing.

Potential Topics

To encourage authorship, it is helpful for the project coordinator to maintain a selection of potential topics. One good place to start is to review the topics of articles that have already been produced by other chapter publication projects (see related article on page 20). Another good place to look for potential topics is the Law Library Resource Xchange (LLRX) at www.llrx.com.



The Wisconsin Law Journal publishes pieces by LLAW members and includes the LLAW logo on each article.

become articles for *Wisconsin Law Journal*. Taking into account copyright issues, chapters may be able to modify the same article for use in several publications with different audiences.

LLAW has also received permission to publish each quarter in *Class Action*, the Wisconsin Association of Legal

Some librarians find that attorneys and professors routinely ask about the same issues; these answers can become great topics. Lyn Warmath from VALL explained that her chapter aspired to choose article topics that readers would archive, similar to those that appear in *Practical Lawyer*. Then, each time they refer back to the article, they are reminded that it was written by a law librarian.

You can also suggest that members draw upon materials they have already prepared, such as pathfinders or virtual library collections. These items can often be used as the starting point for full-length articles. Librarians do a lot of in-house marketing and may already have several pieces completed. Also consider asking those who speak at meetings to contribute an article based on their presentations.

AALL Chapter Article Writing Projects

Colorado Association of Law Libraries (CoALL)

Monthly column, "Legal Research Corner" in *Colorado Lawyer*. Legal research questions submitted by readers are answered by a panel of CoALL members. Articles available at www.aallnet.org/chapter/coall/corner.htm.

Law Librarians Association of Wisconsin (LLAW)

Coordinated effort to place articles written by LLAW members in a variety of Wisconsin law-related publications. Articles available at www.aallnet.org/chapter/llaw/articles/index.htm.

Northern California Association of Law Libraries (NOCALL)

Monthly column "NOCALL Update" published in the *San Francisco Daily Journal*. Articles available at www.nocall.org/update.html.

Virginia Association of Law Libraries (VALL)

Provides content annually for legal research themed issues of *Virginia Lawyer*. Articles available at <http://law.richmond.edu/vall/valawyer.htm>.

LLAW authors started by brainstorming topic ideas via e-mail. Then the coordinator wrote summaries of the discussions and the final topics were chosen. Authors created titles and single-paragraph descriptions of potential articles and these were sent to publishers for review.

Editing

After identifying topics and recruiting authors, coordinators may want to establish a system for editing completed articles. CoALL requests that potential authors submit writing samples to the project coordinator. Next, a team of three volunteer editors with superior writing skills reviews the submitted articles. VALL also has regular editors who make suggestions for its writers. LLAW authors route articles among themselves via e-mail for comment. The legal publications may also do editing. The State Bar of Wisconsin, for example, has an editorial board that scrutinizes all submissions before publication.

Communicate to authors the importance that articles be completed on a timely basis so that editing can be completed before submission deadlines. Experienced editors know that it can be difficult to review an article quickly, especially if you are not familiar with the author's writing style.

Publishers

Most publishers actively seek content and are very receptive to law librarian writers. Some, like *Wisconsin Lawyer*, will carefully scrutinize every topic suggested, while others, such as the weekly *Wisconsin Law Journal*, are eager to publish a wide range of quality legal information.

Connecting up with your local chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators is another good idea. Contributing content to its newsletter is especially desirable, because your audience includes the people with the power to support your library directly. Like many local associations, legal administrator

newsletter editors are on the lookout for quality articles. Similarly, local bar association publications are good candidates for submitting content.

The coordinator should monitor deadlines for each publication to ensure that enough articles are written and that they are submitted on time. When you deal with several publications with differing deadlines, detailed and accurate coordination is critical.

Keep the Momentum

In addition, the coordinator of the project has the added responsibility of keeping the momentum going. People naturally do not think to volunteer to write in the course of their busy days. Reminding chapter members about the project and publicizing successes are critical. Good coordinators will invite individuals to write if no one volunteers.

Librarians are wonderful teachers—they constantly explain to people how to find

information. Having librarians document this information in written articles seems natural. Fortunately, many librarians are already experienced writers, whether they realize it or not, having prepared pathfinders and guides for use in their own libraries. With a coordinated effort from an AALL chapter or group, a wonderful publishing campaign can be born.

"[Law librarians] need to be in the 'faces' of our clients all the time, whether the clients are those only met through our employment or the larger body of clients beyond the confines of our work place walls," said CoALL's Mariann Storck. Chapter article writing campaigns can be a great way to meet that objective. The more often lawyers and legal administrators see written expertise of law librarians, the more often they will think of us as sources of information to be valued.

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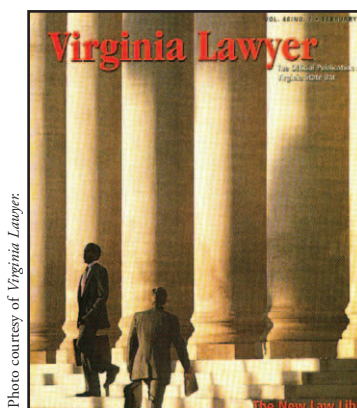


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