

feature

A Tale of Two Programs

Virginia university and Minnesota AALL chapter offer legal training to library and law school staff

by Timothy L. Coggins, Vicente E. Garces, and Gail F. Zwirner



Corinna B. Lain, assistant professor of law at the University of Richmond School of Law (above left), instructs Kimberly Wiseman, computer services assistant at the University of Richmond School of Law Library, about the finer points of witness examination during Richmond's Law School for a Day program.

Law. To say that it's an integral part of law librarianship is an understatement. It's what sets the profession apart from other information careers. While many law librarians hold juris doctor degrees, more than 70 percent of AALL members do not have formal legal education, according to AALL's 2003 *Biennial Salary Survey*. Obtaining additional legal training, therefore, becomes an essential part of the job.



Recently, two different types of entities, a law school and an AALL chapter, addressed this issue by developing and presenting innovative and exciting programs for library and law school staff, librarians, and other library users. The University of Richmond School of Law Library

put together a “Law School for a Day” program in March. And the Minnesota Association of Law Libraries (MALL) offers biennially a Legal Research Institute to provide additional legal research training to its members and others, such as para-professionals and students.

Reaction from both programs has been overwhelmingly positive. “Awesome ... that was really cool!” says Kimberly Wiseman, computer services assistant at the University of Richmond School of Law Library, about the “Law School for a Day” program.

One of her instructors agrees. “I had a wonderful time conducting the class and am thankful for the opportunity to interact with our staff in a nontraditional way,” says Richmond Assistant Professor of Law Corinna B. Lain.

In Minnesota, Vicente Garces, reference and collection development librarian at the University of Minnesota Law Library,

stresses the importance of offering training opportunities. “The large majority of attendees in the Minnesota Association of Law Libraries’ programs do not have a legal education background,” he says. “To provide attendees with useful background knowledge and context, sessions, such as ‘Introduction to the American Legal System’ and ‘Law School in a Night,’ have been offered by the chapter.” Both programs help to enrich the profession.

Law School for a Day

The Richmond “Law School for a Day” program grew out of a law library staff retreat. The director of the law library asked library staff members for their ideas about non-monetary rewards and incentives for library staff when university funding does not permit substantial pay increases. Gail F. Zwirner, head of access services, suggested

that the law library spearhead a team-building event based on AALL’s highly successful “Law for the Non-J.D.” workshop. Zwirner attended AALL’s workshop in Seattle at the 2003 Annual Meeting and returned excited about how useful the workshop had been.

Timothy Coggins, director of the law library, took Zwirner’s suggestion to the dean’s administrative group and received enthusiastic support for the idea of a “Law School for a Day” program for *all* law school and law library staff without JD degrees. The dean liked the idea so much that he wanted to invite the staff from the entire University of Richmond campus, but was persuaded that the school should first offer this as a reward for its own staff before expanding it. (Later, the dean’s office adapted this idea and developed a series of “Law Over Lunch” sessions for the entire university staff, with the dean presenting issues such as the “Do Not Call Registry” and its implications.)

Once the idea for “Law School for a Day” was approved, with funding from the dean’s office, Coggins and Zwirner assumed responsibility for soliciting and getting law faculty volunteers to teach the sessions.

Zwirner accepted the coordination responsibility for all other aspects of the program. In response to their solicitation, faculty responded quickly and positively. In fact, a couple of faculty members who were not asked to teach a session asked why not. These volunteers will present at future sessions.

Coggins and Zwirner developed two goals for the March 2004 program: (1) connect the law school staff with the educational and instructional mission of the law school by providing the staff an introduction to selected substantive legal topics covered in some first-year courses, and (2) provide the opportunity for intellectual enrichment for law school staff. Faculty members selected their topics to cover, and they provided Zwirner with the materials that they planned to use during their classes—primarily cases to be read and assignments/problems to be discussed.

Zwirner and the law library staff compiled a notebook with the materials to be covered during the day and distributed notebooks to the attendees several days in advance with instructions about their homework. “I got a few strange looks directed my way when I handed out notebooks and told them to study and that certain faculty members were renowned for their Socratic-style instruction,” Zwirner says.

Challenging Curriculum

The schedule for the day included a welcome by the dean and an introduction by Zwirner. She provided a brief introduction to the U.S. legal system, courts, legislatures, regulations, and other general types of basic information, all intended as a way to put the program into context. Following Zwirner’s session, Richmond’s associate professor for academic success conducted a class on “preparing for class” and discussed how to brief a case, prepare for the professor’s questioning, and other issues. The students then moved to their next class, civil procedure, where the case that they had read and talked about with the previous professor was the subject matter for the class. After a short break, students participated in torts and contracts classes; each class lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Lunch was next, but not a break. The contracts professor distributed an assignment at the end of his session, and each table at lunch had to discuss the assignment and answer questions. For example, one assignment read, “D, father, conveyed property to his daughter, P, and stated that it was a Christmas present.

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—Kimberly Wiseman, computer services assistant at the University of Richmond School of Law.

Sample Curriculum for Legal Training

- Introduction to the U.S. legal system, courts, legislatures, regulations, etc.
- Research training for locating cases, statutes, and administrative rules and regulations
- Sources of law and other legal publications
- Subject-specific areas, such as Civil Procedure, Torts, Contracts, Property, Constitutional Law, and Trial Practice (witness examination)
- State-specific legal research

As part of the same transaction D agreed to continue to pay off two mortgages that encumbered the property. Is D's promise enforceable?" Imagine attempting to answer this after a 45-minute class and discussion during lunch.

The afternoon courses included property, constitutional law, and a practical exercise dealing with witness examination. The property professor was faced with the first, "I'm sorry, professor, I am not prepared today." The professor, in a disapproving manner, responded, "We call that 'a pass,' which doesn't exactly gain you any favor from the professor!"

In other classes, participants shined. "My topic was basic trial advocacy," says Professor Corinna Lain. "I decided to teach the art of cross-examination." She presented a brief lecture and then introduced a hypothetical trial problem. She brought in a law student to play the role of the star witness, 80-year old Ella Grimm, who had an unfortunate encounter with six to eight teenage boys attempting to "trick or treat" at her home on Halloween night. "Ella was fantastic," Lain says, "and my 'students' were great! I was surprised at how adept they were in their questioning techniques and reminded what a bright and talented staff we have at the law school."

After a brief wrap-up session handled by Zwirner, everyone adjourned to a reception for the attendees and the faculty who had taught during "Law School for a Day," as well as others at the law school. "One of the most interesting things about the day to me," Zwirner says, "is the excellent

cross-section of teaching styles used by the faculty volunteers. Attendees experienced lectures with presentation software, team teaching, the use of the Socratic dialogue, enthusiastic use of props to explain torts, and some role-playing. I still hear comments from staff members about how much they enjoyed the program, how much they learned, and how much fun they had."

Kimberly Wiseman sums up the sentiments of many who attended the program. "What a great opportunity to do something different than what we do daily," she says. "Not only did I learn a lot, I thoroughly enjoyed the process of analyzing the cases and learning how to apply the material. I hope that we have other opportunities in the future like this one. I came out of the day's activities and simply said to myself, 'Wow!'"

Legal Research Training for All

The vision statement of MALL is, "To facilitate the administration of, and access to, justice through the dissemination of legal information and through education of its members and the public." MALL members strive to achieve this goal by promoting legal research training for people working within the legal community, including attorneys, paralegals, and law librarians, and for librarians who work in public libraries. MALL's efforts to promote legal research training for those within the legal community are best illustrated by its Legal Research Institute.

Offered biennially, the Legal Research Institute typically consists of a curriculum developed and taught by faculty composed of MALL volunteers. The curriculum covers the traditional areas of legal research instruction, such as cases, statutes, legislative history, administrative law, and state law, and advanced and specialized topics, such as elder law, international law, and labor law. Continuing legal education credits are usually available for bar member attorneys and law librarians who attend institute sessions.

The large majority of attendees—law librarians, paraprofessional law library staff, paralegals, interested non-law librarians, and students in library or paralegal programs—do not have a legal education background. But these individuals are interested in improving their knowledge about legal research and the legal process. To provide them with useful background knowledge and context, MALL presents its "Introduction to the American Legal System" and "Law School in a Night" sessions.

MALL's "Law School in a Night" is similar to Richmond's "Law School for a Day." The chapter offers an overview of the subjects studied by first-year law students, including contracts, torts, criminal law and procedure, constitutional law, and civil procedure. The sessions focus on basic principles and concepts and terminology used in these subject areas.

In recent years, however, MALL's "Law School in a Night" session has been replaced by "Introduction to the American Legal System." While this session covers some of the same principles and concepts as "Law School in a Night," it does not delve into the first-year law school subjects. Instead, this program focuses on the structure of the U.S. legal system and its relationship to the sources of law, legal publications, and legal research.

MALL first offered its Legal Research Institute in the 1980s when it was then known as the Legal Bibliographic Institute. "The popularity and longevity of the institute over these years is the best testament to its success in providing legal research education to law librarians and the legal community in Minnesota," Vicente Garces says.

Training the Public

The chapter also provides legal research training to those outside the legal community, especially to public librarians who frequently respond to law-related questions from the public. Recent efforts by MALL to provide such training include a workshop series titled "Legal Research @ Your Library," which was presented in the spring of 2003. Its current workshop series is titled "Locating Legal Information on the Web."

The workshops provide librarians with training about selecting legal reference and self-help publications for their collections and locating law-related resources and information available on the Internet. An important issue always covered in the workshops is the potential liability and professional ethics concerns that can arise in handling law-related questions from pro se patrons. Presenters emphasize that the librarians should avoid holding themselves out as experts or inadvertently providing legal advice. MALL presenters also discuss tips for handling pro se patron questions and provide advice on developing a pro se policy.

MALL conducts these workshops in public libraries located outside the Twin

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Cites metro area to reach the librarians in rural areas. For those librarians and library users, access to a county law library can be difficult. And even when access is available, the library collections are limited in scope and reference assistance, if available at all. Former MALL member Paul Healey developed the curriculum for and presented the original “Legal Research @ Your Library” workshops, which were held in three different public libraries outside the Twin Cities. The current workshop series is being held at public libraries in 12 locations outside the Twin Cities and one location in St. Paul. A task force comprised of current MALL members, Aimee Blatz, Sara Galligan, Liz Robb, Jan Stone, Trina Tinglum, and Karen Westwood, has taken over the development and presentation of the program.

MALL has been very fortunate to obtain grant funding for the workshops. Without the grant funding it would be impossible to present these workshops free of charge throughout Minnesota. The “Legal Research

@ Your Library” series is funded through a grant provided under the *Library Services and Technology Act*. The current workshop series, “Locating Legal Information on the Web,” is part of a larger project by the State Library Agency of the Minnesota Department of Education to provide workshops to public librarians on legal, medical, and health electronic resources. Funding for these workshops is provided by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

“Adequate funding is certainly essential to presenting education and outreach projects such as these workshops and the MALL Legal Research Institute,” Garces says. “However, these projects would also not be possible without the time, effort, and desire on the part of MALL members to share their knowledge and expertise with colleagues and others within the legal community as well as with non-law librarians who serve the public. Through efforts such as these, MALL members are able to fulfill the chapter’s vision statement.”

Clearly, there are differing goals represented by the Richmond and MALL programs, but both recognize the importance of training in legal research and other legal-related areas. The programs might vary, but several things remain consistent. Training is absolutely necessary for library staff and users to develop their skills and knowledge, as well as to keep up-to-date with recent developments. Second, training can be fun and still be effective. Richmond “Law School for a Day” participant Kimberly Wiseman offers encouraging words, “I can’t wait for second-year!” ■

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