

P r a c t i c i n g L a w L i b r a r i a n s h i p

Law-

by Michael Whiteman



Library-Palooza

Academics connect with their colleagues in the high rise world to improve legal research courses



Members of the Northern Kentucky University Chase College of Law Library Staff went on a “Law-Library-Palooza Tour” during summer 2007 to visit local law firm and county law libraries to learn what life is like in the “real world.” From left: Michael Whiteman, bass guitar and associate dean for law library services and information technology; Carol Bredemeyer, drums and assistant director for faculty services; Emily Janoski-Haehlen, vocals and assistant director for research and online services; Claudia Zaher, guitar and assistant director for collection development, acquisition, and serials; and Tom Heard, percussion and associate director for library services.

Sometimes it is hard to know what is going on in the practice of law from behind the walls of my academic ivory tower—although anyone who has visited Northern Kentucky University (NKU) Chase College of Law would know that “concrete tower” would be a more accurate description of the facilities behind whose walls I work. This lack of knowledge breeds frustration on two fronts.



The Clermont County Law Library Association welcomed librarians from Northern Kentucky University Chase Law Library for a tour of the facility and discussion of how users perform legal research in the “real world.” From left: Kim Crowthers, assistant librarian for technical services; Carol Suhre, director of the law library; and Connie Miller, assistant librarian



The librarians and staff of the Cincinnati Law Firm of Keating Muething & Klekamp PLL were also part of the Law-Library-Palooza Tour. From left: Nikki Hayden, library clerk; Connie Song, reference and electronic resources professional; and Shannon Kemen, reference and electronic services professional.

First, my colleagues in law firms (or “the real world,” as my students are so fond of calling the, well, real world) claim time and time again that law students leave law school woefully unprepared to research the law (see the oft-quoted MacCrate Report, which is the catalyst for recent articles on this subject—*Legal Education and Professional Development: An Educational Continuum*, Report of The Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession: Narrowing the Gap, American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, July 1992).

Second, our students wonder why they have to learn anything we teach them, as surely Google and Westlaw/Lexis will answer all their questions when they get into practice.

In conversations with colleagues I know that I am not alone in wondering if I am out of touch with what is going on in the real world. I hear stories of legal writing and research faculty who still “hold back” teaching electronic sources until the second semester so that students can learn “book” research. There are even a few who still teach print *Shepard’s* as a tool for updating cases.

Should we teach students a mode of research simply because it is how we have always done it? If we are so out of touch with what the students will actually experience in the real world, then of what value are we to our students? Well, this summer I decided to reach out to my colleagues in the “real world” and try to get a handle on both of these frustrations.

Setting up the Tour

I contacted some of the local firm libraries, as well as two of the larger county law libraries, and set up appointments to visit their establishments. As the list of places to visit grew, I decided that this had more of a tour feel (much like summer rock concerts) than a simple jaunt across the river, and thus grew the name Law-Library-Palooza 2007. By the end of the summer, I, along with several of the NKU Chase law librarians, had visited seven area law libraries.

My goals for each of these visits were threefold:

- (1) Get reacquainted with the private and county law librarians in the area
- (2) Tour the libraries to see what resources (both print and online) were available to their patrons

- (3) Discuss with the librarians how they and the attorneys, and paralegals with whom they work, do research.

The purpose of the second and third goals was to gather examples to point to in the first-year legal research classes so that those of us who teach research at NKU Chase could illustrate the type of research the students can expect in the real world. The point was to emphasize to the students that what we were teaching them wasn't just "us librarians" forcing them to learn antiquated methods of research for the sake of torturing them.

I was very fortunate that all of the law librarians I contacted thought that they would have time to accommodate my request. In fact, the response was rather enthusiastic; each library we visited was thrilled to showcase its collections and staff to us. In one case the librarian even made sure that one of the partners who headed the law library committee at the firm greeted us.

Each visit consisted of a tour of the physical facility (in some cases the law library is scattered among several floors with key materials located near the departments that would most heavily rely on a particular resource) as well as an in-depth look at the electronic resources the libraries made available to the attorneys and paralegals in the firms or to the public in the case of the county law libraries. Following the tour, we usually sat down for 20 to 30 minutes and discussed how the attorneys conducted research at their libraries, what formats the lawyers used, and what changes in research habits the librarians have observed among their users. Most tours started around 11 a.m. and ended about 12 p.m., after which we went out for a nice lunch where the conversation and networking continued.

"Real World" Research

The results of this summer tour were really quite satisfying. I was able to meet up with colleagues I had not seen in a while, and I was able to meet some of the librarians I had not yet had the pleasure of meeting. Through the tours and discussions, I, and those who accompanied me, received a better understanding of what type of research is taking place in the local firms and by practitioners who avail themselves of the local county law libraries.

These tours and discussions reinforced certain perceptions of mine. For example, my decision to stop teaching print reporters

and print *Shepard's* seems to be in line with what is taking place in the firms. I was relieved to learn that lawyers are still using print statutes and secondary sources, and this has really helped when I explain this to my students prior to giving them assignments requiring them to use print sources.

One resource the lawyers uniformly shunned in all the libraries I visited was the print reporters. With unlimited access contracts available on Lexis and Westlaw, combined with lower cost online systems (Loislaw, Lawreader, Casemaker, etc.), it was clear that the attorneys and librarians had turned their backs on the print reporters and corresponding digests.

In fact, none of the firm libraries maintained a current full set of the *National Reporter System*. Some retained one aspect of the system, but even those firms rarely ever cracked the tan spine of a reporter. Given that the county law libraries in our area offer their patrons online access to case law, even the small firm and solo practitioners were steering away from the print reporters.

One resource that our legal research classes give little attention to is loose leaf services. Much to my surprise, these are very much alive and well in the law firms, both in print and online. This is especially true in the specialized departments such as labor and tax. All of the firms we visited had kept many of their loose leaf services due to high demand from their attorneys. Of special note were the *Tax Management Portfolios*. Each and every firm librarian told us stories of how the tax attorneys were horrified when asked if they could do without the print version of the *Tax Management Portfolios*.

Also, all of the firm and county libraries we visited had begun to ramp up their subscriptions to the electronic alternatives to the loose leaf services. The librarians were very encouraging when advising us to begin showing our students these tools, as they are spending a lot of money for the online alternatives to the loose leaf print products, and they would like to encourage their attorneys to use the products.

While we subscribe to such resources at the law school, students rarely use them. It had come to the point where we were not even teaching loose leaf services in our introductory first-year legal research class or in our upper-level advanced legal research

class. Learning of their heavy usage in the firms, we have decided to devote an entire class in our advanced legal research seminar to loose leaf services. And we are making some self-guided tutorials for our students to follow to introduce them to BNA Online and CCH Online.

New and Improved Legal Research Class

The information gathered this summer gave me much food for thought, and, after discussions with the other librarians who teach legal research here at NKU Chase, we decided to de-emphasize print reporters and spend much more time building up our students' skills in online searching.

In the fall 2007 semester, we had the opportunity to put what we learned into use in our first-year legal research classes. First, I related to my class what I had done this past summer and even had a drawing and gave away one of the Law-Library-Palooza t-shirts. It was immediately obvious that the students perked up when I described how I visited law firms this summer to gain a better understanding of the current state of legal research. It placed an immediate connection between the class and the students' ultimate goal, which for many of them is to gain employment at these downtown law firms.

After explaining what I had learned, and then going on to describe what we would learn this semester, I could see that the students were buying into the importance of the class.

We de-emphasized print research for case law (seeing as how most of the firms and county law libraries reported the almost uniform lack of use of print reporters or digests) and added a section on online searching, including exercises on how to master Boolean searching. The results were dramatic.

The students' (who already gravitate toward online research) searching skills improved throughout the semester. I did not experience much push-back from the students, certainly nowhere near what we received when trying to teach print reporters and digests in the past few years. I can only attribute this to the fact that students were equating what we were teaching them with what they would need to know when they started clerking for a law firm after their first or second year of law school.

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A Profitable Partnership

While I believe that the knowledge I gained this summer has greatly enhanced what I now teach to our students, only my colleagues in the “real world” will know for sure if our efforts bear fruit.

To thank my colleagues for generously spending their time with us suburbanite academics, I treated each of them to lunch (after each tour) and then, as an added bonus, I designed and ordered special t-shirts. These t-shirts were done in such a way as to mimic a concert t-shirt. The reaction has been quite positive to these t-shirts, and they serve as a memento to the value of reaching out and talking with our colleagues in the non-academic world.

Overall, Law-Library-Palooza was an excellent way to re-connect with my non-academic colleagues. The benefit to me and, although they may not realize it, to my students, has been enormous. The refresher on how things work in the “real world” has, I believe, given me a great reason to revamp the legal research class to make it more meaningful to my students, and in the end, I hope that it will make my colleagues’ jobs in the firms easier as these students will come into the practice better prepared to research the law. Rock on! ■

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Kentucky University Salmon P. Chase College of Law Library in Highland Heights.

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