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Newsletters: One Step Closer

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Newsletters: One Step Closer

Marianne Mason

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How to successfully convey library information to those who use the library is a challenge that we have all faced as librarians. We acknowledge the fact that the quality of communication that exists between the law library and its primary clientele may not only determine the level of usage of existing and future library services, but may also have an impact on the perception of the library and its librarians. One step in solving this dilemma that our library and other academic libraries have chosen is to publish a newsletter for distribution within the local law school community.

We began our newsletter, entitled *Res Ipsa Loquitur*, in the autumn of 1990 with several objectives in mind.

- First, to inform law students and faculty of the library resources, including human resources, available to them. Each librarian in both Public and Technical Services is a regular contributor, writing articles that fall under their areas of expertise.
- Second, to increase the library's visibility by introducing new students to the services available while reminding returning students of the integral part the law library plays in their legal education. In addition, faculty members are given an opportunity to see another dimension of librarians and librarianship through newsletter articles and a special faculty insert entitled *The Slippery Slope*.
- And finally, to serve as a news source announcing changes in library policy, revised hours, notice of special events within the library, and achievements by faculty and librarians.

Continued on page 582

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AALL 85th ANNUAL MEETING
JULY 18-23, 1992

After the first three issues of *Res Ipsa Loquitur* had been produced and received favorable reviews, we were interested to see the format and scope of other academic law libraries' newsletters. We sent a request for sample issues of library newsletters to the director of each accredited law school in the United States. We received thirty-one newsletters in response. While a few of these newsletters had been published for a decade or more, most were young publications of five years or less. There were also differences in the frequency of publication ranging from monthly to one per year. The tone of these newsletters varied as well and this was the aspect that was most interesting.

Though telephone conversations with editors of the majority of these newsletters, I discovered that many have strong convictions regarding the chosen format and tone of their newsletter. While newsletters in general are not scholarly in nature, the sole intent of some of the ones we received is to assist in the scholarship of readers by providing detailed subject bibliographies and research aids. These newsletters certainly reflect the scholarship and professionalism of the librarians who have composed the articles and compiled bibliographies. The length of these newsletters can be as much as twenty-five pages.

Another school of thought is that a lighter approach is just as effective in conveying information to the reader while expressing the professionalism, as well as the humanity, of its library faculty. This second type of newsletter can range from two to twelve pages in length. Some editors firmly believe that publications longer than two pages are less likely to be read by either faculty or students. To a degree, the editor must be able to determine the tone that will be most readily accepted by the student/faculty population and result in the greatest benefit to the library.

The topics addressed are diverse and some sharing of these can help prime the creative well. CALR search information and strategies; descriptions of newly acquired material apart from the usual acquisitions list; availability of training programs; brief research guides that might include informa-

tion on "how to find it," "where to go," and "who to call"; notes on video collections; library policy; automation guides; abbreviated bluebook guides; biographies of librarians/faculty; library hours; answers to the "Suggestion Box"; new technology; job search aids; a regular column from the "Director's Corner"; a question and answer column; subject bibliographies; information on newsworthy cases; and community events of interest to the law school community represent just a sampling of topics addressed in a few newsletters.

Although most of these publications have a primary editor, many share editorial responsibilities with some, if not all, of the librarians on staff and often welcome the contributions of support staff members. One library produces a weekly newsletter solely for the benefit of library personnel. For some libraries their acquisitions list is the primary vehicle to convey library information, with the information pages serving as a preface. The physical production varies as well. Software programs used to produce these publications include WordPerfect, First Publisher, Print Shop, PageMaker, Ready-Set-Go, Ventura Publishing, Harvard Graphic, Microsoft Word, and MacWrite. One universal characteristic of these newsletters is that none are indexed.

Our success in communicating library information to the law school community is sometimes difficult to gauge. For example, we cannot determine if the library is used more effectively or if students are able to research more efficiently due to information provided in our newsletter. Positive comments from both faculty and students are certainly encouraging, but generally it is remarks made at the Reference Desk that tell us that a student has read the most recent newsletter. It is likely that only a few articles per issue catch the attention of a reader, but through several hundred readers, this information is distributed to the whole community. Although the physical cost of the publication is only that of local printshop charges, the cost in terms of the editors'/librarians' time is quite expensive. However, it is generally agreed by the librarians I spoke to that the benefits to the library well repay that cost. ▲

Corrections: The following corrections should be made to the Committee Membership list that appeared in the September *Newsletter*. Under Financial Advisory, add Claire Engel (Ex Officio). Under Minorities, delete Francisco Avalos and add Michael Jones.

The September issue also incorrectly identified a member of the Loyola Marymount University School of Law in the photo on page 478 as Mary DeLashmitt. Her correct name is Eleanor DeLashmitt. The *Newsletter* regrets the error.