

## **Results of the “Student Services in Academic Law Libraries Survey”: From the ALL-SIS Student Services Committee**

*By James G. Durham, Committee Chair  
Head of Public Services, Gould Law Library at Touro Law Center*

The ALL-SIS Student Services Committee collaborated this spring to create a survey, intended to develop a snapshot of student services in academic law libraries during the 2007-2008 academic year. The “Student Services in Academic Law Libraries Survey” is a first step of this inaugural ALL-SIS committee to assess the state of student services, with an eye toward promoting and improving student services in upcoming years.

The Zoomerang survey was distributed in March of 2008, receiving 178 complete responses that could be used to tally meaningful results. The survey consisted of 51 questions, most with multiple choice answers. Nine open-ended questions allowed respondents to submit personalized answers. The survey was distributed through the LAW-LIB and ALL-SIS discussion lists, and was posted on the web site of the ALL-SIS Student Services Committee.

This article presents the results of the survey, including some of the open-ended comments, and concludes with suggestions for future committee action related to the results. (Please note that percentages for some questions add to 99% or 101%, instead of 100%, because percentages have been rounded to whole numbers.) The current members hope that subsequent incarnations of the committee will use these results as the basis for surveys and for projects designed to improve student services in legal academia.

### **STUDENT ORIENTATION**

- 1.) Do the librarians at your school participate in school-wide new student orientation sessions? Yes – 84%; No – 16%
- 2.) Do the librarians provide a separate session during orientation that concerns library policies and/or research? Yes – 62%; No – 21%; Librarians present with others – 16%
- 3.) Do the librarians provide library tours as a part of new student orientation? Yes – 72%; No – 28%
- 4.) Do the librarians provide information (in paper or electronic form) that is included in the general orientation packet distributed by the school at first-year orientation? Yes – 69%; No – 31%
- 5.) Do the librarians provide separate library information packets or electronic files (such as flash drives) during orientation that are not included in the general orientation packet distributed by the school? Yes – 44%; No – 56%
- 6.) *Open-ended question:* Comments about librarian participation in new student orientation.

A common theme of the 70 comments received for Question 6 was “not enough time.” Many librarians felt that the short period (generally ranging from 15-30 minutes) allotted

to library services during orientation was insufficient to cover essential information. Several librarians said that the “spillover” was handled during the first few weeks of LRW classes, when librarians gave required introductory lectures and conducted library tours. Topics covered during orientation included passwords for Lexis and Westlaw, logging into campus networks, wireless access, TWEN, and library policies. One librarian commented, “Students are drinking from a firehose during orientation, and spill some. We must remind them later about the catalog, etc...” At least one library teaches the first session of their legal bibliography course during orientation week. Librarians had varied opinions about library tours during orientation. Some thought orientation tours were “of limited utility,” while others included them regularly. Many libraries use orientation as an opportunity to socialize with students, promoting services and being “among the first friendly faces that new students see.” In this vein, some libraries sponsor refreshment breaks during orientation, host an atrium information table, and hold welcome receptions in the library. One librarian likes orientation because it “presents the librarians...as full working partners within the law school environment.” Another librarian mentioned participating in orientation for L.L.M. students.

## JOURNALS / MOOT COURT

- 7.) Is a specific staff member assigned as the library’s liaison to law journals? Yes – 43%; Shared responsibility – 27%; No – 30%
- 8.) Do the librarians provide orientation sessions for new law journal staff members? Yes – 72%; No – 28%
- 9.) Do the librarians provide law journal staff members with a packet or electronic file (such as a flash drive) of materials about library services to journals? Yes – 35%; No – 65%
- 10.) Do the librarians provide orientation sessions for members of moot court teams? Yes – 20%; No – 80%
- 11.) Do the librarians provide moot court team members with a packet or electronic file (such as a flash drive) of materials about library assistance to teams? Yes – 10%; No – 90%
- 12.) Does the library have a web page (or section of a web page) devoted to services to law journals? Yes – 19%; No – 81%
- 13.) Does the library have a web page (or section of a web page) devoted to services to moot court teams? Yes – 2%; No – 98%
- 14.) *Open-ended question:* Comments about library services to law journals and moot court teams.

Question 14 garnered 49 comments. Some libraries appoint librarians as liaisons to specific journals, while others report sporadic interest of law review editors in training and interaction. Librarians who regularly train journal staffs covered the following topics in sessions: *Bluebook*, cite-checking, interlibrary loan procedures, and establishing TWEN and Lexis Web Courses pages for individual journals. Some journals assign a particular editor to coordinate interlibrary loan for the journal staff. One respondent mentioned the importance of contacting journal editors early in the year to establish a relationship. One library extends hours to accommodate moot court competitions.

## STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

- 15.) Do any librarians serve as faculty / staff sponsors for student organizations? Yes – 14%; No – 86%
- 16.) *Open-ended question:* If so, how many librarians and which organizations?

23 respondents commented on Question 16. Librarians sometimes are assigned as formal liaisons to moot court boards, alternative dispute resolution groups, and law journals. On a volunteer basis, librarians have served as sponsors for the following student organizations: ACLU, Animal Law, Children’s Advocacy Law Society, Christian Legal Society, Gay-Straight Alliance, Health Law Society, International Law Society, Lambda Legal Society, Legal Democrats, National Lawyers Guild, Native American Law Students, Outlaw, South Asian Law Students Association, and Women’s Law Students Association. Someone also served as the sponsor for the student newspaper.

- 17.) Do any librarians participate in the activities of student organizations? Yes – 28%; No – 72%
- 18.) *Open-ended question:* If so, how many librarians and which organizations?

Even when not serving as official sponsors of student organizations, many librarians attend meetings and assist with special events such as talent shows, food-eating contests, running races, and serving as judges in competitions. Some respondents mentioned multiple librarians participating in student groups such as American Constitution Society, Animal Defense, Black Law Students Association, International Law Society, Lesbian and Gay Law Students Association, Medical Law Society, Native American Law Students Association, Public Interest Law Foundation, Student Bar Association, and various moot court groups. Question 18 received 38 responses.

- 19.) *Open-ended question:* Comments about librarian participation in student organizations.

Most respondents had expressed their views in comments for Questions 16 and 18. Thus, only 22 brief comments were received for Question 19. Participation in student organizations seems to vary from year to year, depending on staff interest and student activism. One librarian commented, “Do it. Good visibility.”

## STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

- 20.) Do any librarians teach or administrate in summer or semester study abroad programs? Yes – 13%; No 87%
- 21.) Do librarians participate in orientation sessions for study abroad sessions? Yes – 10%; No – 90%
- 22.) *Open-ended question:* Comments about librarian participation in study abroad programs.

38 comments were submitted for Question 22. Several librarians conduct guest lectures for professors teaching foreign L.L.M. students. Some librarians teach “resource sessions on the law of the host nation prior to study abroad trips.” One librarian collaborates with the IT Director to teach a joint session before each study abroad program. At one school, two librarians travel each year to teach the legal research component of two study abroad programs (one for each program). At another school, two librarians occasionally serve as program administrators. One person coordinates an annual study abroad program. Several librarians expressed an interest in participating in study abroad programs, but said that librarians currently are not doing so at their schools. One respondent (hopefully, a comedian) said, “We’d love to do this kind of thing, but as it is – well, it is a struggle not to do vodka shots in my office.”

## REFERENCE SERVICES

- 23.) How many hours per week is your reference desk staffed?
- 0 (on call only) – 5%
  - 1-25 – 3%
  - 26-50 – 12%
  - 51-75 – 53%
  - 76-100 – 23%
  - 101 or more – 5%
- 24.) Please estimate what percentage of reference queries (phone, email, instant messaging, and in-person) at your library come from law students?
- 1%-25% - 9%
  - 26%-50% - 31%
  - 51%-75% - 39%
  - 76%-100% - 22%
- 25.) What percentage of student reference queries are addressed by telephone?
- 1%-25% - 93%
  - 26%-50% - 5%
  - 51%-75% - 1%
  - 76%-100% - 1%
- 26.) What percentage of student reference queries are addressed by email?
- None – 5%
  - 1%-25% - 86%
  - 26%-50% - 7%
  - 51%-75% - 3%
  - 76%-100% - 0%
- 27.) What percentage of student reference queries are addressed by instant messaging?
- None – 74%
  - 1%-25% - 25%
  - 26%-50% - 1%
  - 51%-75% - 0%
  - 76%-100% - 1%
- 28.) What percentage of student reference queries are addressed in-person?

- 1%-25% - 4%
  - 26%-50% - 22%
  - 51%-75% - 37%
  - 76%-100% - 37%
- 29.) Are librarians available to assist students by individual appointments? Yes – 97%; No – 3%
- 30.) If so, approximately how many individual student appointments are scheduled each year?
- 1-25 – 50%
  - 26-50 – 28%
  - 51-75 – 12%
  - 76-100 – 4%
  - More than 100 – 6%
- 31.) Does your library provide paper copies of research guides for students, written by the librarians? Yes – 74%; No – 26%
- 32.) Does your library provide online copies of research guides for students, written by the librarians? Yes – 88%; No – 12%
- 33.) Does your library maintain a bank of old exams (paper or online) for students to consult? Yes – 92%; No – 8%
- 34.) *Open-ended question:* Comments about library reference services.

Only 15 librarians submitted comments for Question 34. Respondents expressed an interest in exploring (or expanding) chat and instant messaging as a mode of reference services to students. One librarian mentioned the importance of personal contact with students and said the library held an annual Technology Fair where students attend training sessions and demos of electronic resources, conducted by company representatives and by librarians.

#### LEGAL RESEARCH INSTRUCTION

- 35.) Do librarians serve as co-teachers (with legal writing professors) in first year legal research and writing courses? Yes – 40%; No – 60%
- 36.) Do librarians teach legal research as a separate course to first year students? Yes – 22%; No – 78%
- 37.) Do librarians serve as guest lecturers in legal research and writing courses, at the request of individual professors? Yes – 75%; No - 25%
- 38.) Do librarians teach legal writing (as opposed to legal research)? Yes – 4%; No – 96%
- 39.) Do librarians teach a separate Advanced Legal Research course? Yes – 76%; No – 24%
- 40.) Do librarians teach separate specialized legal research courses (such as foreign and international law, business law, or state-specific research)? Yes – 40%; No – 60%
- 41.) Do librarians teach LexisNexis and Westlaw research instead of company representatives? Yes – 20%; No – 43%; Responsibility is shared – 37%
- 42.) Do librarians offer special sessions (for example, brownbags) on legal research? Yes – 67%; No – 33%

- 43.) Do librarians offer special training sessions for new law clerks or summer associates? Yes – 47%; No – 53%
- 44.) Do librarians provide special training for faculty research assistants? Yes – 61%; No – 39%
- 45.) *Open-ended question:* Comments about librarian participation in legal research instruction.

Some of the 27 respondents to this question replied with, “Sore subject,” “No comment,” or (more delicately) “This is an area where we see lots of opportunities for more involvement.” Another person commented, “This is an extremely heavy demand on the library staff time... because of the staffing levels of the library and the size of the student body...” Other librarians reported successful collaboration with LRW professors or satisfaction teaching specialized legal research courses. Staffing levels were a repeated concern, as was occasional poor attendance at brown bag sessions.

## YOUR SCHOOL

- 46.) How many reference librarians do you have at your school?
- 1-2 – 13%
  - 3-4 – 33%
  - 5-6 – 39%
  - 7-8 – 10%
  - 9 or more – 4%
- 47.) How many librarians (total) do you have at your school?
- 1-3 – 2%
  - 4-6 – 27%
  - 7-9 – 34%
  - 10-12 – 24%
  - 13 or more – 14%
- 48.) How many students do you have at your school?
- Up to 300 – 7%
  - 301-600 – 31%
  - 601-900 – 32%
  - 901-1200 – 16%
  - 1201 or more – 14%
- 49.) Is a librarian at your school designated as a student services liaison or coordinator? Yes – 8%; Responsibility is shared – 21%; No – 71%
- 50.) *Open-ended question:* Do you have an innovative method of providing service to students in your library? If so, please share details.

Our comedian once again commented, “We don’t do anything innovative here. It isn’t allowed.” Nonetheless, nine librarians provided suggestions: blogs with new postings daily; a Second Life branch library; a digital sign in the library with information, news, and resources; and an “Academic Success” collection created in conjunction with the Assistant Dean for Academic Outcomes that is located strategically for heavy student use.

51.) *Open-ended question:* Do you have special projects or issues that you would like the ALL-SIS Student Services Committee to address? If so, please share.

In response to Question 51, seven librarians provided thoughtful suggested courses of action. One respondent proposed an in-depth law student survey about how law students conduct research, what sources they prefer, how librarians can teach electronic sources successfully, and how librarians best can prepare students for academic work, summer positions, and permanent jobs. Some respondents suggested marketing and outreach guidance for student services. Someone also requested that the Committee draft policies for dealing with law journals and interlibrary loans (particularly regarding “extreme Bluebooking”). Finally, a librarian asks, “How can we best communicate with students...what is the next new wave?”

At the end of the survey, the ALL-SIS membership was invited to contribute electronic versions of documents, as well as links to library web sites, that directly address the needs of law students. Numerous members responded to the call with new student orientation materials and publicity documents. As an extension of our survey effort, an online bank of materials is being assembled for posting by early June on the web site of the ALL-SIS Student Services Committee at <http://www.aallnet.org/sis/allsis/committees/students/index.asp>. (Special thanks goes to Diane Murley, the ALL-SIS Web Administrator, for constructing the online bank.)

Survey respondents have provided an array of practical and innovative ideas for further action. In particular, the 2008-2009 ALL-SIS Student Services Committee may wish to explore the possibility of conducting a survey to assess the legal research habits and needs of law students. Also, members may wish to draft model policies and recommendations for handling services to law journals, paying special attention to citation needs and interlibrary loans. Finally, the Committee certainly should continue to develop the online bank of student services documents and publicity materials, to serve as templates and inspiration for other academic librarians.

In conclusion, thank you to all survey respondents who made this report possible. Here's to increased awareness of student services needs for the upcoming academic year! Please contact James G. Durham, Committee Chair, at [Jdurham@tourolaw.edu](mailto:Jdurham@tourolaw.edu) with additional comments.