PR for Academic Libraries: Focus on the Faculty

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The faculty is a key constituent of the library. A successful faculty-centric PR strategy not only solidifies the library's position with the law school but also generates buzz and recognition among the university-wide community.

It's All About the Faculty
In the world of academic law libraries, the law school faculty is crucial to enhancing the library's image.

The faculty is a steady user group of the library. Law students, the other core user group of the library, have only a temporary association with the library during their law school careers. By contrast, faculty members will likely stay around and thereby establish a permanent relationship with the library. In research-oriented law schools, the faculty may be the most frequent users of the library.

The faculty possesses great influence over the library's operation. In any law school, the faculty can and will exert its influence over library decisions regarding the budget, personnel, collections and other policies. Certainly such influence will vary from one institution to another, depending on the organization's structure and dynamics.

The faculty has clout with students regarding the library. Not only are faculty members library users themselves, they also influence the attitude of other library users. Because of their status and close contact with students, faculty members are in a superior position to sway the opinions and attitudes of their students toward the library.

Some Proven Ideas
Every library is unique. So a successful PR initiative must fit into the library's particular circumstances. It may take trial and error to get to the right formula. At Texas Tech University, the law school library recently initiated several satisfying PR strategies that catered to its faculty's needs.

Faculty orientation. Last year Texas Tech University School of Law made a concerted effort to lower the faculty-student ratio by hiring five new faculty positions. The arrival of the newcomers presented a unique marketing opportunity for the library to make an impression and initiate a friendly rapport with them from the outset. So the library developed a new faculty orientation program consisting of two parts.

For part one, the library mailed out a "welcome packet" to the new faculty members as soon as they were hired. The welcome packet contained a congratulatory letter from the library director, including a list of key library contacts and the law school Web site. The packet also included a library brochure describing the programs and services offered to the faculty; a set of state, local and campus maps for relocation planning; and a staff-compiled guide to local services and resources.

For part two, the library held an orientation meeting with the new faculty after their arrival on campus. During the meeting, the librarians, computing staff and the faculty members introduced themselves and mingled over refreshments in a casual, friendly atmosphere. The librarians discussed some frequently asked questions, such as how to handle mail and set up computer accounts. The librarians led the faculty on a library tour, highlighting key staff areas and major points of interest. (Due to scheduling difficulties, the library repeated step two until all new faculty were oriented.) The new faculty appreciated the library's efforts to make their transitions easier.

The program worked so well that the law school committee responsible for new faculty orientation contacted the library for advice when it was developing its own orientation program.

Faculty enrichment. Texas Tech University's law library recently hired a new director, who immediately made changes to enhance the organization. The library secured additional funds, added positions to the staff, acquired new materials, adopted a new school-wide e-mail system and installed multimedia technology in the classrooms.

All these exciting changes were happening fast, but much of the faculty was too busy to keep up. So the library set up an enrichment program to regularly inform the faculty of library events and train them on specific topics when needed. To draw a large audience, the library offered the initial program around noon and provided a free lunch. During the program, the librarians introduced new library staff to the faculty and reported on new items to the library. The library staff demonstrated how to use and access several informational databases accessible from the library's Web site as well as a few Web sites useful for legal scholars. Everyone enjoyed the program (and the food too); even the dean came and stayed briefly.

Given the program's successful debut, the library decided to offer it again, with a similar format but different content each time. The enrichment program is now a regular function each semester. As a result, the library gains publicity and recognition by the faculty.

Faculty publications display. Most law schools have a place to exhibit publications authored by their faculty. The display, usually managed by the library, is a good way to promote the faculty's accomplishments and generate positive feelings about the library.

Because Texas Tech University's law school library never had a publications display, the library created one. It began with one small display case. The library staff solicited and received several faculty publications. The small display case filled up so quickly that other published items could not be housed. And the faculty kept sending even more materials. Overwhelmed by the response, the library looked for a larger exhibit area to accommodate the growing number of publications they were sent.

The library was intrigued with the idea of a wall-to-wall, custom-built glass exhibit case placed in the library's foyer. The display would brighten up the library's front entrance while giving maximum exposure to the publications on display. Although that exhibit would be costly, the library was convinced that the benefits to the library would make costs worthwhile. When the new display case was finally built, the faculty and students alike were pleased and eager to supply additional publications to the exhibit. The faculty now has a place to showcase their scholarship to students, colleagues and visitors. And the library generates more publicity and goodwill from the faculty.
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From the Secretary continued from page 24

and no burning social issues requiring resolutions and speeches. The large number of people recognized for their contributions, however, indicates that much work was completed in the preceding year so that the speeches and resolutions were obviated. Full information about the business meeting, including a transcript of the proceedings may be found in the Fall 2001 issue of the Law Library Journal or online at http://www.aallnet.org/products/2001-30.pdf.

President Bob Oakley, issued

Presidential Certificates of Appreciation to the following persons and institutions:

Northern California Association of Law Libraries for its excellent work in the development of advocacy programs on behalf of law libraries and law librarians in California, particularly the workshop on lobbying in the spring of 2001. Sue Welch, president of NOCALL, and Sam Trosow, the workshop coordinator, accepted the award.

Sarah (Sally) Wiant for her hard work and leadership in opposing the Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act in Virginia.

Keith Ann Stiverson for her extraordinary leadership on public policy issues at the state and national levels, including her work on the Nolo Press case in Texas and her work opposing UCITA in Texas.

Nancy Johnson and Craig Leleskny for their extraordinary research efforts supporting the 2001 AALL Economic Study on Law Book Pricing.

Tom Reynolds for his significant contribution, achievement and sustained effort in producing a unique resource for the law library community, the Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals.

Kim Rundle, executive assistant to the AALL executive director, for supporting the president of AALL and assisting the executive director of AALL in everyday activities.

From the floor, Ruth Hill presented a certificate of appreciation to Pam Reisinger, the AALL meeting manager, for her time, energy and patience in supporting the SISs in arranging their Annual Meeting programs.

The standard reports of the president, vice president, treasurer and executive director were also presented. I commend these to your perusal, as they highlight several important projects during 2001, but do not have the space to discuss them further in this column.

Finally, a moment of silence was held in memory of the deaths of members and friends of the Association during the past year. These included Harry Bitner, Bill Breyfogle, Maria Cap, Dorothy Chamberlain, Lou Ella Ingram, Libby Jessup, Veronica Maclay, Rhonda Oziek, Curtis Robbins, Bardie Wolfe and Barbara Stapp.

If you have any questions about these matters, please contact me or any member of the Executive Board.

Trends in Law Library Public Services continued from page 7

reassessed. Reducing walk-in service hours or staff at public service desks when usage is low can provide a way to respond efficiently to remote requests and to develop new electronic services. Such a strategy must be marketed carefully to assure that financial supporters and patrons alike understand that this is an improvement, not a decline in service.

To effectively deploy public services staff, law libraries must carefully analyze workloads and demand for service. It should thoroughly examine the amount of time invested in providing electronic services. In addition to tracking the traditional services delivered from central service desks, methods need to be in place to track the number of remote requests received via e-mail and voice mail and the time spent responding to them from workstations in separate staff offices. Similarly, for unmediated services where it is not possible to track transactions at the point they are used, law libraries should take advantage of software counters that monitor activity on Web sites and statistical data from vendors about usage of integrated library systems and databases.

It is difficult to gauge how well law libraries are responding to the needs of users when they use remote library services. Law librarians typically do not receive the same verbal and physical cues from remote users as from in-person patrons; law librarians might assume that they are providing them with needed services when, in fact, they are not. Thus, law librarians must actively solicit feedback from remote patrons. They should use online surveys and electronic comment forms on their Web sites and online catalogs. As law librarians find that they are serving a wider and more diverse audience than ever before, they should adjust their services to match different backgrounds and skill levels than those which they might be accustomed to serving. Similarly, as law librarians find increasing demand for "live" electronic services around the clock, they should develop ways to collaborate with colleagues in different time zones.

Finally, law librarians need to find ways to competently provide new subject matter and to effectively use new technology. As the interests of the legal and nonlegal professions increasingly intersect, their focus also becomes more multidisciplinary. Law librarians should reach out to colleagues in nonlaw libraries and find creative ways to collaborate for the good of all patrons. Jointly administered Web sites, research guides and knowledge bases are just some of the ways librarians can better serve patrons' diverse interests. In addition, law librarians should consciously build their skills base so that they are equipped to find nonlegal information that may be needed by patrons. Job exchanges between law and nonlaw librarians would prove to be helpful in that arena. Likewise, it is essential that law libraries provide continuing opportunities, including time and financial support, for public service law librarians to develop technology skills to create new remote services and to assist patrons in their use. Supplemental training and course work might be required and should be supported by law library administrators.

The coming changes in public services are both exciting and intimidating. Dealing effectively with new types of users and new technologies provides law librarians with great opportunities but will challenge their skills and established practices. If law librarians can meet the challenges, they will be providing better services to a wider range of library users. And that, in the end, is what it's all about.

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and placed on the agenda following procedures developed by the board’s Governance Committee. (The committee is fully described at http://www.aallnet.org/board/committee_gov_charge.asp.) The Governance Committee oversees and makes recommendations to the Executive Board on all aspects of how the Executive Board conducts its business. In particular, it assists all board members in understanding the board’s ongoing or “perpetual” roles, its values and practices, and its decision-making guidelines or model, as found in the Executive Board Governance Model at http://www.aallnet.org/board/governance_model.asp. The Governance Committee is dedicated to ensuring that the Executive Board functions smoothly.

If the board approves the widget proposal as part of the final budget, and assuming the production of new and improved widgets does not need approval by the membership, it will be referred to either the original committee or Headquarters for implementation. New widgets could be in production in less than a year from the time the proposal for a new method was suggested.

The reality is that for an organization our size, things move pretty quickly. The AALL Executive Board is a careful and deliberative body with a clear process through which agenda items progress. The board is a diverse group, bringing different perspectives and experiences to the table. Members prepare for each meeting by reading through hundreds of pages of background documents; ask any current or former board member about the “Board Book” for more information on the pre-meeting reading! When dealing with the widget issue, as well as all other issues, each board member is expected to have read the background documents, clarified any questions and concerns, and arrived at the meeting prepared to deal with the matter. The board’s own committees — F&B, Governance and Strategic Planning — perform a great deal of work, allowing the Executive Board itself to focus on the policy-making decisions. All this preparation and work ensures that proposals are fully discussed and virtually guarantees that all the opinions on an issue that could be formed by AALL’s members are explored. Decisions are not made in a rush.

I hope this has been a useful explanation of the Executive Board’s procedures. The group works under the principles that it should be a wise steward of Association resources and an active representative of AALL members’ interests. And AALL members are always welcome at board meetings because, after all, those widgets are for you!

PR campaigns will differ from library to library. Yet the common thread of all successful PR strategies is that they are always tailored to the uniqueness of the individual libraries and are specifically focused on the libraries’ key constituents. Sticking to those tenants of public relations will result in goodwill and publicity.

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Letter from the Editor by Paul Healey, phealey@law.uiuc.edu

The Future of the Profession Is Up to Us

Needed: Greater Visibility, More Law Library Programs

Finding a job is one of those life activities that we all dread but must do from time to time. As law librarians, most of us are fairly specialized in our training and experience. Indeed, one of my friends, after finding out that I had earned both an M.A. in library science and a J.D., pointed out that I had “educated myself into a hole.” So be it. I like law librarianship, and I feel that I have more options now than I did before I got my M.A.

But if we’re going to be so specialized and continue to thrive as law librarians, we need to be sure that the profession itself is thriving and growing. Otherwise there won’t be any jobs in this wonderful little hole I’ve educated myself into. This issue of AALL Spectrum looks at the current state of the profession as seen through the lens of hiring and getting hired. We have articles on the current state of the job market and about some of the issues in library education for law librarianship. We also hear from a lawyer now in law school about how he came to pursue law librarianship.

If you don’t mind my editorializing for a minute, I think that the articles in this issue of AALL Spectrum raise some very serious questions that we, as a profession, need to begin answering. There is a sense — perhaps justified, perhaps not — that there are already more open jobs than qualified applicants in law librarianship. This, combined with a large number of retirements predicted over the next 10 years or so, could leave our profession seriously wanting for qualified people. The effects could be devastating. We could find our users abandoning the law library for other less expert sources of information, and the hard-won expertise and services of our profession could be threatened, along with our credibility.

It seems clear to me that we need to be working hard to bring new people into the profession. This means a lot of different things. Mid-career librarians, especially in technical services, need to be recruited into law librarianship. Lawyers looking for a career change need to know about librarianship as an option, as do law students. Law school students need to be exposed to law librarianship as a career option.

There are a number of ways to do this. AALL needs to form a formal student chapter system. The American Library Association has student chapters, with plenty of student members at most law schools, as does the Special Library Association. AALL should, too. Student chapters would expose library students to the many job options in law librarianship and would let them begin making professional contacts. It would also allow employers with entry-level positions to find potential applicants.

We need to systematize and promote formal law librarianship education. There are a number of good law librarianship programs in the country, but we need more. What I have in mind are programs that not only provide library school courses on legal materials and law librarianship but also have a formal relationship with law libraries and law schools to give students real-life experience and expanded educational options. Such programs would allow students to earn J.D.s or M.L.S.s or both, so that they can pursue the careers of their choice.

Any university campus with both a law school and a library school is an automatic candidate for such a program. Of the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, 25 have at least one university with a library school and a law school on the same campus. Each and every one of those universities ought to have a law librarianship program of some kind. Nine of the remaining 27 states have both a law school and a law school in the state, meaning that a law librarianship program is still a possibility.

We need to become more visible as a profession. We need to let people know that law librarianship is a worthy profession, and that there are jobs available. I am convinced that there are many potential law librarians out there who simply don’t know about the possibilities that our profession offers. They’ll never know about law librarianship unless we make the effort to tell them. It’s up to us.

I hope you enjoy this issue of AALL Spectrum. As you read it, I hope you think about some of the challenges our profession is facing and what we need to do to resolve them. As always, I’m eager to hear what you think.