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Library Support for Faculty Research

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This article, aimed at faculty rather than librarians, explains the genesis, purpose, and present methods by which the University of Michigan Law Library provides research service and document delivery to the law school faculty, and describes the benefits to the entire law school community. I hope to inspire other law schools to develop similar programs.

"What do you want the library to be?" That was my question to Dean Terrance Sandalow, who in 1984 appointed me director of the Michigan Law Library.

"I want you to make the library central to the intellectual life of the law school."

Although I understood his answer and instinctively supported the concept, I was not sure how the reality of a "library central to the intellectual life of the law school" would be different from the existing situation. The library already had a great and comprehensive collection, a budget to support continuing acquisition at the same high level, a document-delivery system for faculty, a separate faculty library, and what appeared to be a sufficient staff of specialized reference librarians, catalogers, and other professionals. Only twenty years later can I define the concept more specifically and describe the steps that enabled us to achieve what both regular and visiting faculty regularly report to be the best library service they have experienced anywhere, with the exception of those who have clerked at the U.S. Supreme Court.[1]

As I pondered what to do, back in 1984, I knew only that our great strengths were the collection and a team of top-notch librarians, including several reference librarians who had law as well as library/information degrees. I suppose I was unconsciously influenced by my own love of doing research and

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I claim credit only for the initial concept and original model, and for the description in this article. The real work of creating the service—establishing credibility and earning the trust of the faculty, developing processes and procedures, revising the original model, hiring and training new librarians, and finding ways to meet increasing demand—was done primarily by Barbara Vaccaro Garavaglia, head reference librarian. Barbara Snow, head circulation librarian, did the same for the copying and delivery functions. The present team of reference librarians consists of Kincaid Brown (American selection, U.S. documents, Web master), Aimee Mangan (faculty services), Jennifer Selby (international selection, reference desk), and Beatrice Tice (foreign/comparative law, publications, and instruction).

1. It's hard to compete with an institution that has only nine primary patrons.

teaching advanced legal research. But the inspirational spark came when I noticed that my faculty colleagues never talked about their research assistants. They talked about their best students, their former students, and the incoming students. Even though they were able to hire RAs with funding from the William W. Cook Research Endowment, it was not apparent that they used them extensively.

Why not? I haven't done a survey, but my instinct is that it would be difficult for a member of the faculty, particularly one in pursuit of tenure, to find the time to hire, train, and supervise one or more RA's. But, I thought, librarians are really good at that. We hire, train, and supervise dozens of students who do such things as shelve, file loose-leafs, work our desks, label books, and so on.

In a flash, I knew what to do: add a research component to the library's existing document-delivery service. The dual-degreed reference librarians could hire, train, and supervise a team of law students who could help with the research. Document-delivery requests that were more complex than they first appeared could be shifted to the research service.

Now, after two decades of working with varying structures and people, the library provides an annual average of 100 documents to each faculty member and a yearly total of about 500 faculty research projects. We have done this without adding staff, although we had to make extensive changes in our other work, including eliminating some functions and drastically changing how we did others.

Sixteen Benefits of a Faculty Research Support Program

A program designed to provide support for faculty research has many potential benefits. It can

- increase faculty productivity by finding and delivering research material.
- remove frustrations that encourage faculty to procrastinate. (E.g., a book is charged out, the copy machine isn't functioning, the student didn't show up for work, I have no idea which database to search.)
- enable faculty to focus on analysis and writing, by providing basic research on specific projects.
- maximize the return on the law school's investment in the collection.
- maximize the return on investment in librarians, faculty, and student workers.
- train students, systematically, in legal research methods.
- provide student workers with knowledge of the research, as well as the teaching, in which faculty engage.
- relieve faculty of the time-consuming tasks of hiring, training, and supervising research assistants.
- help to train those research assistants that faculty do hire.

- enhance faculty support for the library, reflected in financial support and understanding of the library's operation.
- increase librarian-faculty interaction on a substantive and intellectual level.
- increase visibility of librarians and respect for their knowledge and skills.
- enhance responsibility of librarians and give them more intellectually challenging work.
- increase librarians' knowledge of faculty research, which helps them make better judgments about building the collection. In turn, collection development responsibilities enhance librarians' ability to do research.
- create over time a core of alumni with special ties to the library.
- and—occasionally—turn a prospective lawyer into a prospective law librarian.

Ten Steps to Establish a Faculty Research Support Service

I don't claim that Michigan identified and then took these ten steps. I've identified them retrospectively. The actual doing was muddled and complex, back and forth. These are clear only in retrospect.

1. Define the mission of the library to include, as a primary purpose, support of faculty research and teaching. Consider this excerpt from the University of Michigan's "Mission of the Law Library":

> **The Law Library's purpose is to build collections and provide services to support the teaching and research needs of Law School faculty and students.** Therefore, the Law Library's collections, services, and policies are primarily designed to benefit the Law School's faculty and students, and others officially connected with the Law School . . . ."

2. Interview faculty to find out whether and how they use research assistants, what research help they need but can't get, what topics they are currently working on, what courses they are teaching, and what they see as possible future topics for their teaching and research. This step can often be done quickly, because it is difficult for faculty to imagine what they have never experienced. Even if interviews are time-consuming, they are helpful in tailoring services.

3. Examine library operations to identify ways to shift resources away from secondary purposes to the primary purpose. At Michigan we took the following steps.

a. For reference librarians, eliminate specializations in reference work but retain them for collection development. Allocate supervisory responsibilities to individuals (reference desk, Lexis and Westlaw coordination, Web site, publications and research guides, teaching) but be flexible in assigning these to different people over time.

b. For support staff, use a level of staffing appropriate to the activity. Undergraduatess can photocopy; office staff can make deliveries to faculty offices; law students can retrieve materials from all libraries and Web sites; and experienced law students can assist in research.

c. Accomplish secondary activities (service to nonlaw student patrons, lawyers, nonlaw faculty) in ways that require less time from highly skilled librarians *and* better meet the needs of secondary patrons. E.g., put research guides on the Web instead of providing personalized help; make patrons as self-sufficient as possible (through arrangement of collection, guides, good signage).

d. Substitute electronic delivery for copying and physical delivery. For example:

- Use SmartCILP to deliver tables of contents instead of copying and delivering, or routing journals.[2]
- Use SmartCILP to notify faculty of new articles on subjects of interest to them; encourage use of links to Lexis and Westlaw.
- Use automatic notification services from Lexis and Westlaw.

4. Eliminate activities that do not support any of the elements of the library's mission. E.g., work time should not be used to perform clerical tasks for professional associations.

5. Define the services you want to provide for faculty.

a. Document delivery: Will the default be the original, or a photocopy? What turnaround time will you promise? Are there limits on what you will provide, or will you provide anything no matter where you have to get it?

b. Research service: What will the limitations be in terms of time, nature of research, or other limits? What will be the turnaround time? Will there be a cover memo? What delivery method, print or e-format?

6. Write job descriptions for full-time and student staff.

a. Develop processes to hire, train, and supervise students.

b. Review job descriptions of librarians and full-time support staff to be sure they reflect the new goals of providing research support.

7. Be sure each person understands the changes, the reasons for the changes, and how the changes will affect daily work.

8. Develop processes for handling requests.

- taking in requests, clarifying them
- assigning work to appropriate level of staff (students or librarians)
- tracking requests

2. SmartCILP is a personalized periodical awareness tool for legal researchers, provided for a fee by the University of Washington's Gallagher Law Library. See <http://lib.law.washington.edu/cilp/scilp.html> (last visited June 24, 2003).

- offering options (such as interlibrary loan)
- notifying requestors of progress if request can't be met immediately
- standardizing content of cover memos describing project and what was done
- copying
- delivering results (physical or virtual)
- keeping statistics (number of items, projects, and time spent)
- developing standards for when to say no and ways of offering positive alternatives (For example, if a member of the faculty has a project that will obviously take 80 to 100 hours, and wants it done in two months, we suggest spreading the project out over a longer time, so that we can do it; or we suggest hiring a research assistant whom we will help train.)

9. Inform faculty of services.

a. Provide information with personal visits, printed material, and e-mail. Repeat as needed.

b. Direct casual conversation toward research.

c. When someone uses the service, do personalized followup: Did we supply what you needed? Can we do more? Suggest additional research that might be appropriate.

d. Audit classes to gain a better understanding of courses; show your interest in the classroom aspect of faculty lives.

10. Polish the service, and be sure that faculty see it shine.

a. Create a brochure.[3]

b. When faculty candidates visit, ask for time to explain library services. Whether or not the candidate joins the faculty, you will have promoted libraries in general.

c. Train all staff in How to Give Great Service. We require all staff—regular and student—to take a two-hour session; it is given annually and includes role-playing in how to handle an angry, disappointed patron. It's fun, we provide a great free lunch, and we pay the students to attend.

d. When you get compliments, share them with the staff (honoring patron anonymity, of course).

The Michigan Program

The library's program is a joint effort of the reference and circulation departments. Reference librarians and law student RAs retrieve documents

3. I'll be happy to send a copy of our brochure on request, or you can see it on our Web site at <http://www.law.umich.edu/library/facserv/facresearchfaq.htm>. It has all the details of the program and short descriptions of other library services. Every library's program will have unique elements; I certainly do not claim that our model represents the only or the best method and can serve as a template.

and perform research. Circulation staff do copying and make deliveries. In circulation, regular staff make deliveries twice a day, at noon and at four o'clock. Staff have keys to faculty offices and make deliveries straight to the seat of the chair at the desk. (We would not want students to enter faculty offices.) Our default is to deliver a copy of a short document (case, statute, law review article) rather than the entire volume, so the volume can quickly be available again to other patrons.

Michigan's reference librarians have two fundamental jobs: collection development, and helping people identify and use legal research material. Faculty research support is a special outgrowth of the latter role. At present we have four librarians with dual degrees, and one who has a law degree but no library/information degree. Only the four dual-degreed librarians have collection development responsibilities. The fifth librarian is the faculty research librarian; she hires, trains, and supervises the students who do the document retrieval/delivery and help with the research. She works a shift at the reference desk and attends collection development meetings. She spends the rest of her time doing research.

The four dual-degreed librarians are fungible at the reference desk: each provides reference and research assistance for all parts of the collection. But for collection development—which includes selecting new material, weeding the existing collection, writing collection development policies, and selecting appropriate formats—three of them do specialize: foreign (non-U.S. jurisdictions) and comparative law; international law and documents of intergovernmental organizations; and American law, including government documents. The fifth person, the department head, oversees collection development, works at the reference desk, and is part of the library's management team for library-wide planning as well as managing the department. She also supervises the ongoing faculty bibliography, which covers the entire history of the law school and is moving to the law school Web site.

Each of the three dual-degreed librarians who have collection development responsibility also has yet another role. These roles can rotate among the librarians, at least theoretically, as can the collection development roles. Depending on the education, skills, interests, and experience of the incumbents, the library tries to provide great opportunity. The additional roles include:

- supervising the reference desk (hiring, training, and supervising students, and scheduling both students and librarians to cover the desk from 9 a.m. to midnight)
- being the library's Web master
- coordinating relations with Lexis and Westlaw and our CALR room
- overseeing the library's publications and research guides
- having primary responsibility for bibliographic instruction: specialized presentations to classes and seminars, for members of student journal staffs, and for students' successful transition to the working world. (At Michigan, the Legal Practice Program provides first-year

instruction in legal research, writing, and advocacy; courses in Advanced Legal Research and Researching Transnational Law are taught by librarians but are aside from their jobs in the library.)

Michigan has found that having a single faculty services librarian works better than our first model, which was to use all the reference librarians. The assumptions of the first model were that it took advantage of expertise developed in collection development work, and it spread the benefits of interesting research and faculty contact among the reference staff. These assumptions proved false: not everyone liked doing the research work, and the expertise could be acquired without being connected to collection development. In addition there were inefficiencies in spreading the work around rather than centralizing it with one person. When the faculty research librarian is overwhelmed, of course the other librarians help out. Research that requires special language skills or subject specialization can also be directed to just the right librarian.

Centralizing the research service, and the document-retrieval and -delivery service, also enables the librarian to use students efficiently. And it reins in the librarians' bête noire: the faculty member who so much wants something done quickly that she asks not one person, but two or three, for exactly the same thing, and the librarians meet at the shelf grabbing at once for the same book. When all requests go to one person, that can't happen, and we work more efficiently.

The reference librarians use a group interview to hire students. We find that, together with the student, we can easily identify the best job for each student: reference desk assistant, document retrieval, or research assistant.

All the reference librarian jobs are challenging, because each component requires a different set of skills and a different mindset. Some work is with the public, some is solitary. Some tasks require working with teams, but others require independent initiative. This organizational structure and these job descriptions challenge the traditional line drawn between selection and reference. The jobs were designed to provide true lifelong careers, and to be an alternative to the more standard progression from, for example, reference librarian to department head to associate director, then director. They reflect Michigan's commitment to creating jobs that talented, energetic librarians can find satisfying over a long period, because the profession can't provide everyone with a chance to become a director or even an associate director. Librarians ought to have an alternative path to recognition and a good salary.

Our faculty research support program has made it easier for faculty to teach and do research, and to take advantage of Michigan's comprehensive collection. It helps to attract both regular and visiting faculty. And it has enriched and diversified the work of the reference librarians, providing challenging careers with a substantive legal content not before possible.