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### Reaching and Teaching Millennials: Designing the Future of Student Services

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# Reaching and Teaching Millennials: Designing the Future of Student Services

**Abstract:** Today's students have come to expect library services that are quite different from their predecessors and law librarians must evolve to meet their needs. As law libraries in the United States face the realities of declining enrolment and decreasing budgets, it is imperative that we find new and creative ways to build positive relationships with our students while also preparing them for the realities of practicing law in an environment driven by rapid technological change. Three law librarians from the United States, Brian Detweiler, Kimberly Mattioli, and Mike Martinez, Jr., discuss their successes and failures in reaching out to their student populations, creating and evaluating various student-centred instructional programmes, and in establishing a strategic plan to meet the needs of millennial law students.

**Keywords:** student services; law students; academic law libraries; US law libraries

## INTRODUCTION

The use of the term 'millennials' to describe the generation born some time after 1982 first appeared in a book entitled *Generations* by historians William Strauss and

Neil Howe.<sup>1</sup> Ever since, it seems, they have been the target of ridicule. From millennials who are installing nap pods at their places of work<sup>2</sup> (lazy), to young people who believe that they should not be expected to attain financial independence until the age of 25<sup>3</sup> (entitled), to the

30-year-old man who refused to move out of his parents' home while also suing Best Buy after they fired him for refusing to work on Saturdays<sup>4</sup> (lazy and entitled), news stories about millennials and their undesirable attributes are everywhere.

While these stories are widespread in the popular press, anyone who knows a millennial will know that these pieces demonstrate the exception rather than the rule. And while millennials are hardly the first generation to face criticism from their elders,<sup>5</sup> they have been maligned in the media and lampooned in popular culture to such an extent<sup>6</sup> that a majority of them view their own generation negatively and do not even self-identify as millennials.<sup>7</sup>

The generation has been coming of age for over a decade now and millennials make up the majority of the workforce.<sup>8</sup> While there are indeed differences between their work styles and those of their older colleagues, it would be irresponsible to give a blanket label to an entire generation of people, some of whom are approaching forty and some of whom are just entering university.

Putting the negative stereotypes aside, it is evident that members of the younger generation do in fact have some unique characteristics that set them apart from Generation X and the Baby Boomers.<sup>9</sup> Millennials are raised to be confident and may feel free to speak their minds in a way that can be perceived as rude to older generations.<sup>10</sup> They are less likely to adhere to "old fashioned" ways of doing things, not necessarily out of laziness or entitlement, but rather because they understand that technology makes it possible to complete tasks in ways that were impossible in the not so distant past.<sup>11</sup> Millennials are also more likely to change jobs or even careers if it means that they can work for a company that aligns with their values. In a survey of millennial lawyers conducted by Thomson Reuters in 2015, 86% of respondents said they would be less likely to leave a law firm if paid parental leave was offered equally to both men and women. Thirty-eight percent said they would relocate to another country for work if it meant obtaining more favorable parental leave benefits.<sup>12</sup> Work-life balance is something that is incredibly important to millennials.

Of greater concern to academic law librarians is of course what millennials are like before they enter the workforce—how are things changing at law schools and how can law librarians shape their services to a new generation of users? Researchers have been very interested in the learning habits of millennials, and the traits these researchers have identified can be useful for librarians who are eager to introduce new student-focused services into their law schools. Some of the traits that set millennials apart from previous generations include the following: they are digital natives, or at least started using technology when they were very young; they prefer experiential, interactive, and collaborative learning; they are multitaskers; they desire choice and flexibility; they expect instant gratification; they are practical; and they are nomadic communicators.<sup>13</sup>

This article explores the ways that academic law librarians can provide millennial students with services that appeal to them and incorporate their learning styles. Some of these services aim to improve the law student experience by providing stress-relief activities during exams. Others attempt to align the library with student values by hosting charity drives or helping clinical students conduct pro bono work. Finally, services that are purely instructional in nature have to be tailored to groups of students who perceive themselves as technologically advanced. Working to provide relevant services to the current generation of law students will help to ensure that law libraries remain an appreciated component of law schools, even during a time of great financial uncertainty. This article looks at law libraries at three different schools in the United States and discusses some of the services these libraries have implemented in an attempt to keep law students engaged and satisfied.

## STUDENT OUTREACH: REACHING MILLENNIALS

Among our primary goals as librarians should be making our students feel welcome in the library and ensuring they have the space and resources they need to be successful. And while millennials are the largest generational users of public libraries in the U.S.,<sup>14</sup> many of our students came to depend less on librarians for research assistance during their undergraduate years than their predecessors.<sup>15</sup> This makes early and effective outreach at the graduate level more important than ever.

### Library Events

Hosting social events helps our students feel more at home in the law library and allows them to interact with librarians and staff on a more personal level. The University at Buffalo Law Library's annual welcome party takes place during orientation week and allows us to introduce our space and ourselves in a relaxed and positive environment. We also hold well-attended movie nights in partnership with various student groups and an annual Super Bowl party, all of which provide additional opportunities for our students to relax and socialize in the library during the semester. In addition, this semester we are also planning a Library Game Night with video games and board games, and a Family Day where we show a children's movie, offer crafts and games, and hold a mini-Library Olympics with scavenger hunts and sack races.

### Student Organizations and Journals

Direct outreach to student organizations in the law school can be an effective and efficient way of reaching large numbers of students. Engaging in issues that matter to the groups through charity drives, library movie nights, and other programs increases library visibility in the eyes

of the students and the larger community and helps engender positive feelings that can become the basis for collaborating on future educational workshops or social programming.

American law schools' student-edited journals also provide an ideal partner for librarian outreach and expertise. Our first interaction with journal members is typically when our reference librarians provide research training to new journal members in the fall, but librarians at our institutions also provide ongoing support throughout the year.

As new journal members, second-year students are typically tasked with locating and verifying the numerous and sometimes obscure citations of submitting authors. This duty often leads frustrated students to the reference desk where an experienced librarian can usually help them find the cited sources in a matter of minutes or at least guide them through the library's inter-library loan service as a last resort. Additionally, some journals at the University at Buffalo set aside one or more Saturdays during the semester to work through their citations together. Attending these 'Cite-Ins' and bringing along a few extra copies of the Bluebook<sup>16</sup> and a box of donuts has always been appreciated by our students and is an enjoyable way to support our journals and get to know the students better.

Finally, in addition to research training and cite checking assistance, librarians can provide each journal's editorial staff with access to services that are not typically available to students. Plagiarism checking software can help editors evaluate the novelty of authors' submissions, and a library-administered perma.cc account<sup>17</sup> allows the journals to preserve online links cited in their articles, so that readers do not encounter dead links in the future when URLs change or pages are taken down.

## Feedback

Conducting regular student surveys and focus groups is imperative to ensure we are meeting our users' expectations, particularly as they may evolve over time.<sup>18</sup> Holding at least one focus group per semester is an excellent way to get regular, in-depth feedback about library space and services.<sup>19</sup> For the cost of a few catered lunches, student volunteers spend an hour sharing their opinions on all aspects of the library and offering suggestions for potential improvements and new offerings, several of which have been implemented at Buffalo, including offering standing desks, improving our study carrels and providing laptop chargers for students to borrow.

Meanwhile, online surveys allow the participation of a much wider audience, but are generally best suited to specific topics.<sup>20</sup> Raffle gift cards or other prizes for survey respondents may help increase participation. Lastly, the University at Buffalo provides an old-fashioned suggestion box for those who do not want to participate in surveys or focus groups. This suggestion box receives very little use, however. In the two years since we posted a small corkboard with our responses to submitted

comments, we have not received another substantive comment sufficient to post a new response.

## Communication

Unsurprisingly, millennials are the leading cohort for social media usage when compared to their older counterparts,<sup>21</sup> which makes outreach via social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blogs an important means of reaching out to our young and connected user base.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps more surprisingly, in the authors' experiences, print posters and announcements remain an effective means of communicating library events and services with our students, particularly when placed in the line of sight of a captive audience, such as in toilet stalls or lifts.

## Field Trips

As was mentioned earlier in this article, millennials put a premium on work-life balance<sup>23</sup>. They are more aware of mental health problems and appreciate the importance of avoiding burnout. Law librarians are well positioned to provide students with much needed stress-relief activities that can help them temporarily take their minds off their studies. One way to help students is to encourage them to step outside the confines of the law school and explore their surroundings.

Organizing a field trip is a simple way to show stressed out law students that the library cares about their mental wellbeing. At the Indiana University Maurer School of Law, the law library organized and hosted a session on rare legal materials at the Lilly Library, the campus's rare books and manuscripts library. While not every librarian is going to have access to a world-class rare books library, the destination is less important than the gesture. Students appreciated the fact that the law library was hosting a fun event, and they particularly appreciated that the librarians and the law school Dean also attended. The session is now an annual event, and proves to be very popular, especially among first-year students.

## Fun and Games

Both the study and practice of law can be extremely demanding. Consequently, law students and lawyers in the U.S. and other jurisdictions report higher instances of mental health issues and substance abuse than the general population.<sup>24</sup> By instituting some simple and cost-effective offerings and activities, we may be able to relieve some of our students' anxiety, while also making them happier and more productive.<sup>25</sup>

To that end, many law libraries in the United States have come up with creative ways to help students relax, particularly during exam periods. Libraries set up stations with board games, decks of cards, jigsaw puzzles, coloring books, putting greens, and much more. The University at Buffalo School of Law has a box of law poetry magnets

and a magnetic board where students can make their own law-themed poems. Other schools have art shows where they display original student artwork in the library. The possibilities are endless and go a long way in making the library a welcoming place to students.

## Reaching Students Through Their Stomachs

One of the more popular initiatives offered at the University at Buffalo was our 'PB&J Bar,' where we set up an area in the library where students could make themselves a free peanut butter and jam sandwich at lunch-time.<sup>26</sup> The students loved it and it led to numerous positive interactions between students and librarians. We also used this space to publicize library events and solicit feedback on our services. In fact, our PB&J Bar became so popular that we had to discontinue it for financial reasons, but our Student Bar Association relocated it to the Student Lounge and has continued offering it ever since. A similar initiative, offered by a library around exam time only, would undoubtedly prove more cost-effective, yet would still yield the positive interactions and chance for feedback from appreciative students.

## Study Space

Law library physical space and the look of study areas can be summarized in one word: amenities. Law libraries altered their appearance and transferred their focus to accommodate the needs of today's students. Furniture can be rearranged to create different spaces and section off areas for collaborative study. Libraries also provide newer services to students such as mobile phone and laptop chargers, headphones, earplugs, standing desks and therapy dogs. Libraries have become the hub of student life at law schools by developing a sense of community and providing spaces and services that meet our students' needs.

The ever-changing world of information (from physical materials to digital materials) creates the need for these collaborative spaces and dictates the types of services provided. These changes in information also set the stage for changes at law firm libraries. The Law Commons at St. Mary's served as the basis for a proposal to change the firm library at Norton Rose in San Antonio. The firm librarian realized that newer lawyers sought out areas and spaces to work collaboratively and ushered in changes to make her library satisfy this goal.

## STUDENT SUCCESS: TEACHING MILLENNIALS

While millennial students appreciate the hard work law librarians put into fun activities, it would be feeding into stereotypes to assume they do not care deeply about their educations and want instructional activities in the library as well. Legal education in the United States is a

three-year process, at the end of which students are expected to have been transformed into full-fledged lawyers. Librarians are expected to teach these students how to become proficient researchers by the time they graduate, often while being given very little time to work with them directly.

The law library's educational role stems directly from American Bar Association (ABA) Standard 301(b), which provides, "A law school shall establish learning outcomes that shall, at a minimum, include competency in...[l]egal analysis and reasoning, legal research, problem-solving, and written and oral communications in the legal context..."<sup>27</sup>

Because of our knowledge of information, we as information professionals are called upon to provide our expertise. The library is the natural place to provide this type of hands-on practical knowledge. The ABA also speaks to this expansive knowledge and instructional need from the library in Standard 605, in which the ABA provides that, "A law library shall provide the appropriate range and depth of reference, instructional, bibliographic, and other services to meet the needs of the law school's teaching, scholarship, research, and service program."<sup>28</sup>

Librarians have implemented many different types of instructional services, with the majority falling into two main categories: information literacy instruction and practical skills instruction. Information literacy instruction aims to help students research effectively and efficiently, either on a basic level or using more advanced or subject-specific skills. This type of instruction also attempts to ensure that students can evaluate legal research resources once they have the skills to find them. Practical skills instruction tends to focus more on the types of skills that students will need to utilize in practice. This type of instruction can include assisting students who are practicing in a clinical setting or setting up a consultation for a student before they start a new job. Both types of training are incredibly important for student success, but students tend to put an emphasis on practical skills instruction, presumably because they think it will be more useful when they start their jobs.

## Information Literacy

Law librarians have attempted a variety of methods to teach law students the importance of information literacy. Many librarians in the United States teach upper-level Advanced Legal Research courses, and more still have a part in the first-year Legal Research and Writing (LRW) curriculum. Librarian involvement in LRW varies widely by school though, and it cannot necessarily be counted on as a way for students to get a full understanding of legal research methods and sources.

To make up for what can be an incredibly limited amount of class time with the students, many law librarians have implemented general research workshops or workshops geared toward student organizations or moot court teams. Unfortunately, the general research workshops are often sporadically attended. It is very difficult

to fit a workshop into the students' already packed schedules, and it is equally difficult to convince students that they need research instruction when they are busy trying to keep up with their classes. Offering lunch or light refreshments can help lure students to workshops but we have had only limited success with that tactic.

Literacy training does tend to pick up in the spring before students start their summer jobs. In the United States, law students need to find jobs or internships the summer after their first and second years. While the position a student has after the first year of studies is important, it is the job during the second summer that often determines whether a student will have full-time employment after graduation. As a result, students tend to become very serious about their research skills as their jobs approach. Many law libraries offer "prepare to practice" workshops that are geared toward very practical, skills-oriented training. Other libraries allow students to sign up for individualized consultations where the instruction is specifically tailored to their area of work. It is also very common for law librarians to take somewhat panicked phone calls from students who reach their summer jobs and discover they are not prepared to research a particular issue.

### Practical Skills Instruction

St. Mary's embraced the evolution of legal instruction by quickly adapting to the ever-changing landscape. Our Externship Program provides a model demonstrating this transformation, providing students the opportunity to:

[E]arn credit while working at a nonprofit, government agency or select in-house counsel. The program provides an opportunity for law students (2L or 3L) to earn academic credit for practical work experience and to help students better understand classroom work and the relationship between legal doctrine and practical legal skills.<sup>29</sup>

Beginning in 2011, Externship Program students received instructional training from the library in the traditional manner, attending live lectures. This training later evolved to become a hybrid, with videotaped lectures replacing some live lectures. The current adaptation will be delivered through the Canvas learning management system as an asynchronous class. The new technology allows the tracking of student access (using analytics) and provides a central location to manage learning objectives.

### Technology Competencies

Technology training has also become a popular topic in law libraries and one that is in high demand from students. Librarians in the United States come to the role of technology skills instruction directly from the standards of the ABA, which states that lawyers must keep abreast of

changes in technology and that law libraries must remain "informed on and implement, as appropriate, technological and other developments affecting the library's support for the law school's program of legal education."<sup>30</sup>

As a result of this ABA directive, libraries have begun offering technology training on sources such as Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and Adobe Acrobat. For instance, the University at Buffalo provides basic Microsoft Word training to all incoming students during orientation week, and provides ongoing support throughout the students' remaining three years through the use of instructional videos<sup>31</sup> and by providing individual assistance at the reference desk.

## MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE FOR MILLENNIAL SUPPORT

### Supporting Students in Changing Times

Legal publishers increase their subscription costs each year. Law Libraries enter into multiyear contracts to defray costs or at least try to manage these increases over time. Administratively, law libraries are being asked to do more with less, making the most of their budgets in challenging times.

Legal education enrollment adds to this budgetary dilemma, particularly for institutions that follow a tuition-driven model. When enrollment is either flat or declining as it has been in recent years,<sup>32</sup> budgets follow suit, forcing libraries to make difficult financial decisions about cutting subscriptions and services.

Libraries use both the increase in legal subscription costs and decrease in enrollment as a factor in collection development. Libraries adapt to these changes by evaluating their current collection and finding ways to cut underutilized resources, often by cutting print subscriptions as the current trend dictates a shift from print copies to digital.<sup>33</sup> All these decisions must be made while balancing the needs of millennial students.

### Strategic Planning

Libraries that choose to be student-focused allow students to dictate the services provided (within reason). In order to reach these millennial students, we need to blend their needs with the standards set by the ABA. ABA Standard 702 provides:

A law school's facilities shall include: a law library that is suitable and sufficient in size, location, and design in relation to the law school's programs and enrollment to accommodate the needs of the law school's students and faculty and the law library's services, collections, staff, operations, and equipment [and] shall include: suitable and sufficient space for its students and faculty for quiet study and research; suitable and sufficient space for

group study and other forms of collaborative work<sup>34</sup>

In 2017, St. Mary's University School of Law evaluated and revised its strategic plan<sup>35</sup> with the goal of balancing a student-centric approach with the standards provided by the ABA. First and foremost, we acknowledged the programs and activities supported by our library, demonstrating a student focus. We acknowledged that a significant number of our student population self-identify as digital natives. We acknowledged that any plan needed to include future planning and adaptation and change (part of the University Mission). Lastly, we acknowledged the need for innovation. While the ABA provided minimal

standards, we decided to expand on the language and define key parts with our students in mind.

## CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD

As we strive to meet the needs of today's students, a new generation, iGens or Generation Z, is on the horizon.<sup>36</sup> They will likely be at least as technologically savvy as their millennial counterparts, and it will be interesting to see how they differ in other ways. No matter how their attitudes and expectations evolve, it will be our responsibility to adapt to meet those changes so we can continue to reach and teach our students as effectively as possible.

## Footnotes

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- <sup>33</sup> Steven Bell, 'Digital vs Print: Taking a Position as an Academic Librarian' *Library Journal* (New York, 14 September 2017) <<https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=digital-vs-print-taking-position-academic-librarian-bell-tower>> accessed 12 September 2018.
- <sup>34</sup> American Bar Association, "ABA Standards" <[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal\\_education/resources/standards.html](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/standards.html)> accessed 31 August 2018.
- <sup>35</sup> St. Mary's Strategic Plan provided in the appendix.
- <sup>36</sup> Laura Pappano, 'The iGen Shift: Colleges Are Changing to Reach the Next Generation' *New York Times* (New York, 2 August 2018) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/02/education/learning/generationz-igen-students-colleges.html>> accessed 5 September 2018.



## APPENDIX STRATEGIC PLAN 2017–2020

### VISION

Sarita Kenedy East Law Library strives to be an innovative law library serving students, faculty and the legal community.

### MISSION STATEMENT

Sarita Kenedy East Law Library of St. Mary's University supports legal education and scholarship by providing outstanding service and information resources.

### WHAT WE DO

Connecting people to information: Access, Educate, Empower

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- I. Strive to create an environment that places the library at the center of law school life:
  - a. Provide a friendly service-oriented staff
  - b. Create space to meet the evolving needs of our patrons
  - c. Provide online presence reflective of our physical environment
  - d. Provide policies mindful of our patron needs.
- II. Provide relevant services to patrons reflecting excellent quality in scholarship and legal education:
  - a. Offer training on technology, tools, and resources
  - b. Provide pedagogical resources for teaching and knowledge
  - c. Communicate, advertise and market services and resources
  - d. Maintain relevance by identifying, anticipating and preparing for future library needs.
- III. Maintain and develop a quality collection across varied formats:
  - a. Create a dynamic collection informed by students, faculty, and library expertise
  - b. Develop a fiscally responsible collection
  - c. Provide materials and resources conscious of emerging technology and trends
  - d. Provide a collection which is appropriate and balanced
- IV. Provide a work environment that fosters development for library faculty and staff
  - a. Foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, and creativity
  - b. Provide resources and support for professional development and enrichment
  - c. Encourage a healthy work-life balance
  - d. Encourage library faculty and staff to work together and across the University to cross train and educate each other.

## Biographies

**Brian Detweiler** is the Student Services and Legal Technology Librarian at the University at Buffalo's Charles B. Sears Law Library, where he has worked since 2014. Prior to working at UB, Brian served as the Faculty Services Librarian at St. Mary's University School of Law, and practiced law with the Legal Aid Society of Rochester, New York. He earned his Juris Doctor from the University of Notre Dame Law School, his Masters in Library Science from the University at Buffalo, and his Bachelor of Science from the State University of New York College at Brockport.

**Kimberly Mattioli** is the Student Services Librarian at the Indiana University Maurer School of Law where she has worked since 2015. She earned her Juris Doctor from the University of Michigan Law School, her Masters in Library Science from the Indiana University School of Informatics and Computing, and her Bachelor of Arts from Michigan State University.

**Mike Martinez, Jr.** is the the Deputy Director of Administration and Professor at the Sarita Kenedy East Law Library at St. Mary's University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas, where he has worked since 2003. Mike earned his Juris Doctor from St. Mary's University School of Law, and his Masters in Library Science and Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas at Austin.