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Creative Assessment: Connecting Legal Research Training and Instruction to Results (Review of AALL Program)

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Program Reviews—Monday sessions

F6—Creative Assessment: Connecting Legal Research Training and Instruction to Results

Kimberly Mattioli, Indiana University Maurer School of Law

As academic law librarians, we should all be concerned with identifying whether our students are meeting AALL's Principles and Standards for Legal Research Competency. I was excited to attend this session on Creative Assessment so that I could learn new ways in which librarians can evaluate their students to see if they are adequately trained in these core competencies. The panelists were Pamela Rogers Melton, Associate Director for Administration at the University of South Carolina, Gail Partin, Interim Director at the Dickinson School of Law Library, and Barbara Gabor, Senior Research and Reference Specialist at WilmerHale.

Gabor started the panel by telling us about some of the steps her firm has taken to ensure that summer and first-year associates are getting the research help they need. This includes a mentoring program, as well as technology support. Gabor then proceeded to give a gift to academic law librarians everywhere by providing us with actual quotes from partners in her firm about their associates' legal research skills. I would recommend using Gabor's slides to show students what partners are saying about new attorneys. My favorites were: "I don't want answers from Google—nor does my client. If it was easy and simple the client would not have hired us," and "I want them to track what they did and where they looked." These are things librarians have been telling their students for ages, but perhaps it will have a greater impact when it's coming from a partner at a large law firm.

At this point in the session, the presenters asked the participants to respond to two questions: 1) Do you have a creative or effective method of assessment to share? and 2) Which skills are the most difficult to assess? The presenters plan to compile the responses and distribute them via AALL. I thought this was a great way to ensure that even those who were unable to attend will still be able to benefit from this session.

Melton discussed some of the assessment techniques she uses in her Advanced Legal Research class at the University of South Carolina. These include ungraded in-class assignments, larger graded assignments after completion of units and a research memo. She also utilizes an online program that allows her to ask different types of questions and provide immediate feedback to students. Finally, she utilizes short research problems where students are required to write a memo within two hours.

Partin also utilizes research memos in her class at Dickinson Law. In addition, she uses a detailed self-assessment, where students indicate whether they feel competent in certain areas of legal research. They use a clicker system and look at the results during class. While the assessment methods covered in this session may or may not be new to us as instructors and reference librarians, it was interesting to learn how other Advanced Legal Research and/or Legal Research and Writing classes are conducted. For example, one audience member said that at his school, students are given a multiple choice test that they must pass before they are allowed to move on to the research component of the exam. It was eye-opening to see just how many ways there are to assess whether our students are gaining the skills they need to be attorneys. It was also great to hear from a firm librarian for perspective from outside of academia. I would recommend that everyone review the handout from the presentation and keep an eye out for the audience responses that will be compiled and distributed.

Tuesday Sessions, July 21
(G, H, I & J programs)

G4—Library Privacy Laws and Drafting a Privacy Policy

I-Wei Wang, UC Berkeley School of Law

Libraries' role in protecting, advocating for and promoting privacy in the digital world: the topic is in the air these days. Glenn Greenwald talked about it at the American Library Association conference in June (<http://alaac15.ala.org/node/28721>; <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/no-place-to-hide/>; see also <http://www.ted.com/talks/>

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