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LibGuides, Blog Posts, and Articles, Oh My!

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Library-supported portfolio pieces for law school students and graduates

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"Publish, publish, publish!" is a piece of advice commonly offered to students by career services departments in law schools across the country. Student publications typically take the form of law review or bar journal articles or perhaps competition submissions; however, with the advent of accessible Web 2.0 technologies, publishing has evolved to encompass all sorts of content, styles, lengths, and audiences.

While many law schools have experimented ad hoc with these options, this past year Pace Law School librarians took the bull by the horns and began to expand the concept of the law student portfolio by aggressively exploring what the library can offer to students and recent graduates to assist them with developing portfolios in support of their job searches.

The Pace Law Library approach has been mostly electronic in nature and incorporates into Pace's advanced legal research courses portfolio pieces such as student-authored LibGuides, blog posts, and bar journal articles. Moreover, student notes that satisfy the school's Upper-Level Writing Requirement are being given greater exposure by posting them to the school's Digital Commons. The idea was to give students the opportunity to grow their professional portfolios and to increase student publications by taking advantage of existing law school resources and infrastructure. While the benefits of this shift are still being fully realized, tangible results can already be seen.

ePortfolios

Electronic portfolios highlighting student work for the benefit of prospective employers are not new, having been around since the mid-1990s. However, even though many universities offer ePortfolios, this service has not yet been widely embraced at the law school level. As a result, students are frequently left to their own devices to promote themselves and their scholarship. While savvier students may brave creating their own SSRN or Academia.edu accounts, these resources are not necessarily designed for student use. To fill this void, here are some ways Pace has been able to use existing resources to promote student scholarship.

Student LibGuides

The Pace Law Library was an enthusiastic adopter of Springshare's LibGuides platform for its online research guides, and the reference librarians have made extensive use of the software to create guides that support the curriculum. Traditionally, the work product for the three-credit Advanced Legal Research course was a written research guide or pathfinder, but this assignment began to seem somewhat irrelevant to the needs of the students. It was time for a change. Brainstorming sessions with the reference librarians and review of similar capstone assignments generated by students at law schools, including Georgia State University College of Law, Creighton Law School, and University of Washington School of Law, led to a change in the work product for the course. Online research guides would better meet the course's pedagogical goals and more fully engage law students of the Millennial generation. This change was implemented during the fall 2012 semester and has proven to be a success.

Once students finalize their topics at the beginning of the semester, they turn in a list of 20 relevant online sources with their URLs; this list is graded, and students get feedback during individual meetings with the instructor. Students immediately put the list of sources into service during the LibGuide instruction class and are able to begin building their guides with the sources they identified earlier. Learning how to locate, evaluate, and use online sources of legal and non-legal information is a skill that will stand students in good stead when they are practicing attorneys.

It quickly became apparent that devoting one class to LibGuides instruction was not enough for most students. Anxious students besieged the reference librarians for help with their

guides, and it was clear that the students needed written documentation to which they could refer on an ongoing basis. Once a set of LibGuides tips was created, the number of questions plummeted. Even more significant, the guides submitted second semester were far superior to those submitted first semester, and student evaluations praised the helpfulness of the tips.

The tips cover the basics of web design; sources of content, legal and law-related, free and fee-based, and techniques to assess its authenticity and reliability; choice of fonts and colors; use of graphics and free sources of graphics; and intuitive design techniques. The initial assumption was that no instruction in web design would be needed because students today are digital natives. However, while some students intuitively understand good web design, others do not, and it is necessary to review the basics. This skill is readily transferrable to social media, which most students will use to market themselves once they graduate from law school. And online research guides can become an important component of students' ePortfolios, demonstrating their value to potential employers.

In addition to valuing written documentation, students appreciated feedback, and several opportunities have been built into the process. Students are required to post preliminary and then more polished versions of their guides, both of which are graded. After the LibGuides Comments feature is enabled, students are required to review their fellow students' guides and to post comments about their contents, structure, ease of use, and appearance. Perhaps because the comments are graded, they have been remarkably thoughtful and insightful, and the students have profited from this feedback, often incorporating it into the final versions of their guides, which must be posted by the last day of the exam period.

Another opportunity for feedback comes during the in-class presentations that take place several days after the comments are posted. The presentations allow students to show their guides to the class and discuss the stylistic and substantive choices they made. The in-class presentations are graded, and most students deliver focused, cogent introductions to their topics. The presentations also serve as an opportunity for students to develop their public speaking skills.

The final requirement for the course is a brief paper (six to eight pages) in which students discuss preferred approaches for conducting research on their topics; it serves as an opportunity for the students to sum up and reflect on the semester's work.

To date, Pace has five student LibGuides that are publically available on topics ranging from the *Alien Tort Statute* to the *Truth in Lending Act* (**libraryguides.law.pace.edu/profile.php?uid=68191**). In addition, 15 guides are privately published on topics including Securities Arbitration, Dodd-Frank, and New York Landlord Tenant Law. When analyzing the statistics for these sites, 13 of the 20 guides had hits in the months after students completed the class. Particularly with the private guides (eight of 20), which are excluded from search engine results, these statistics seem to indicate that students are providing their guide URLs to prospective employers. This pattern is anecdotally supported by exit surveys conducted with students. While a formalized "discard" schedule for student guides has not been adopted, the library hopes to keep them active for at least three years after publication. This may require some work on the part of the librarians if the students opt not to update their guides themselves or must include a disclaimer indicating that the guides are not being updated.

Blog Posts and Bar Journal Articles

As part of Advanced Legal Research for Environmental Skills, students were provided with two opportunities to enhance their résumés: a blog post and a bar journal article. Students were first assigned to draft a short blog post (approximately 250 to 500 words) featuring an online environmental resource. Blog posts were chosen because they are now a frequent medium for law firms to publicize their work and services. Each post discussed the scope and value of the information provided, how best to navigate the resource, and/or a discussion of its important features or datasets. Six blog posts were generated from the class and posted to the external library blog Pace Environmental Notes, **paceeenvironmentalnotes.blogspot.com**, spotlighting such unique resources as the USDA's WebSoilSurvey and the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions. A review of the metrics for these posts shows that each was viewed between 29 and 77 times by readers over a six-month time frame after the class ended. These statistics suggest that the

students have included their blog posts on their résumés.

In lieu of a traditional research paper, students were asked to submit a final paper suitable for publication in a bar journal. A bar journal format was selected to expose students to this common type of professional publication. These informal articles, which were assigned as capstone assignments for Advanced Legal Research for Environmental Skills and New York Practice, were designed to provide practitioners with short pathfinders on discrete issues of New York and environmental law. Students initially struggled with the format—eight to 12 pages with footnotes—but later adapted after examples were provided. To date, one student paper has been published with two others pending publication (**digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawstudents/15**).

Digital Commons

In 2006, the Pace Law Library enthusiastically embraced the Bepress Digital Commons, a hosted electronic digital repository for scholarship that had been adopted earlier by the university. The law library organized a separate collection for Faculty Scholarship (**digitalcommons.pace.edu/law**). Shortly thereafter, in a massive project headed by Head of Reference Services Cynthia Pittson, the Pace Law Library uploaded all of the school's student-edited law reviews into separate collections on Bepress. To help highlight student scholarship, the Digital Commons Library at the law school has been expanded to include collections for Dissertations and Theses and Student Publications (more than 200 publications). The library is also engaged in the creation of a new Digital Commons Library that will include papers that fulfill the Upper-Level Writing Requirement. ∎

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