2-1-1978

Legal Research in a Slide Carousel

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For the law student, the librarian new to the legal field, and even the practitioner, attempting to discover the method to the madness of legal research is a tedious and often painful experience. The law library—as a laboratory where the student, librarian and practitioner perform the mechanics of legal research—has a responsibility to educate its users in the functions of legal materials or at least offer the means by which they can educate themselves. Regardless of the controversies in law schools as to who should teach legal research and how it should be taught, law libraries whether they be academic, firm or court libraries, have patrons who *need to know*.

It is not feasible for every patron to be given a personal multihour tutorial by a reference librarian. The professionals do not have the time for such individualized mini-courses. Some patrons are more comfortable learning on their own and at their own pace. How then to meet this *need to know* in an effective, efficient and versatile manner?

The Law Library at the State University of New York at Buffalo began to meet this challenge in the summer of 1975. A series of slide-type programs were planned on individual aspects of legal research. By August 1977 a completed series of ten were available. An annotated list follows:

1. *Legal Reference Materials* covers legal dictionaries and encyclopedias, sources for citation verification and legal research texts.
2. *Legal Periodicals and Indexes* covers various kinds of legal periodicals and how to use the indexes.
3. *Court Reports* includes the various official and unofficial court reports and elements of a court's reported decision and kinds of decisions rendered.
4. *Case Digests* describes what a digest is and how it can be used; covers the various digests and the West Key Numbering System.
5. *Federal Statutes* covers federal statutory materials including Statutes at Large, the

U.S. Code and C.C.H. Congressional Index.
6. *State Statutes* describes the legislative process at the state level using New York materials to explain bills, session laws and codes.
7. *Shepard's Citations* covers the various volumes of Shepard's, what Shepard's is used for and how to shepardize a case and statute.
8. *U.S. Administrative Law* includes the C.F.R. and Federal Register system, presidential documents and sources of information about federal agencies and their regulations and decisions.
9. *U.S. Legislative History* describes the federal legislative process and the sources for researching legislative intent.
10. *American Law Reports* describes the organization and use of A.L.R.

The programs which range from ten to sixteen minutes in length are composed of 35mm slides in a carousel slide tray and an audiocassette tape with silent pulses which automatically sync the narrative with the slides. They are designed for individual use on a Singer Caramate rear screen projector and tape player or for group presentation using a slide projector and cassette tape recorder with sync capabilities.

These programs are used on an individual basis and shown to groups in classroom situations. They have been used by freshman law students as well as upperclassmen (who have been known to remark, "Why weren't these around when I needed them?"). They are standard teaching tools in a paralegal course team taught by the author and two other librarians. A professor from a neighboring university has borrowed the programs to present to his class on higher education and the law. Lay persons studying for legal clerking exams have also used them. Thus, the usefulness of these programs has not been limited to the law student.

Each program was conceived and written by members of the reference staff or in consultation with them. The programs were tailored to the Buffalo Law Library by including locations of materials and supplementary inhouse publications. Final editing of the scripts was the re-

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sponsibility of the audiovisual librarian who then planned the coordinating visuals.

Slides were produced using high speed Ekta-chrome film, a 35mm single lens reflex camera and a copystand with photoflood lamps. The film was sent out for processing. A standard cassette tape recorder was used for taping the narration. The tape was then synchronized with the slides using an inaudible pulse mechanism available on the recorder.

Costs incurred in this undertaking were that of materials and time. The Library owned the necessary equipment except for a camera and a copystand which were borrowed from the Media Lab at the University's School of Information and Library Studies. These two items were later purchased for under four hundred dollars. The cost of film, processing and cassette tapes averaged twenty dollars a program—allowing, of course, for numerous retakes! Staff time varied per program depending on the expertise of the writers. From beginning to end production time averaged fifty to sixty hours per program.

Although no formal evaluation has been made of these slide-tape programs, informal and unsolicited feedback has been encouraging. Those using them as teaching tools find them versatile in that they can serve either an introductory or summary purpose. The slides can also be used alone with live narration for more personal presentations. Those using them on an individual basis can view them as often as they wish. The program can be stopped to take notes or to study a visual for a longer period of time.

Growing user response has indicated that these media packages are a viable and effective teaching/learning alternative. The staff of the Library feel that they have been a worthwhile venture. Librarians from other institutions who have viewed the programs have also responded favorably.

For those libraries which may have the incentive to begin such a venture themselves, some words of caution are in order:

• A media specialist either on the staff or available for consultation is an obvious asset. In a recent survey of slide-tape production in academic libraries it was noted that

"[i]t may take only a few minutes to learn the basics of manipulating the equipment but not everyone can take good photographs, develop suitable soundtracks, and write effective scripts. All these competencies are needed to produce effective slide-tape presentations."[1]

• Two excellent articles by Mack Ryan on the production of slide-tape programs are highly recommended for "how-to's" on all aspects of planning and production.[2]

• Don't choose media for media's sake. Nothing is more destructive than misusing a particular medium. A "mediocre slide-tape presentation may be less effective than a lecture accompanied by a few carefully chosen overhead transparencies."[3]

• Media is not designed to replace human interaction or interpersonal communication. It is designed to augment them.

• An administration and staff which support such a project by effectively promoting the use of the programs are a must.

One of the recommendations emanating from the previously mentioned survey was that due to "considerable duplication of effort among . . . libraries . . . institutions [ought to] cooperate to develop exemplary programs that can be widely used."[4]

This point is well taken. The Buffalo Law Library is presently investigating the feasibility of revising the ten slide-tape programs to make them more viable for other libraries. It is hoped that these universal programs will be ready for distribution in the spring of 1978. This then would eliminate duplicative effort. However, there is much to be said for the program tailored to the particular library. This article began with the premise that each library has patrons who *need to know* and they need to know the how and where of the library they habitually use.

With these two choices available, either the universal program or the tailored inhouse production, it is hoped that law libraries will begin to meet their patrons' needs in alternative ways.

[1] Hardesty, *Use of Slide-tape Presentations in Academic Libraries: A State-of-the-Art Survey*, 3 J. ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP 139 (1977).

[2] Ryan, *Preparing a Slide-tape Program: A Step-by-Step Approach, Part I, Audiovisual Instruction*, at 36-39 (September 1975); *Preparing a Slide-tape Program: A Step-by-Step Approach, Part II, Audiovisual Instruction*, at 36-39 (November 1975).

[3] Hardesty, at p. 140.

[4] *Id.*