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No Such Thing as a Free Lunch? Come Visit SUNY Buffalo Law School's PB&J Bar!

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No Such Thing as a Free Lunch? Come Visit SUNY Buffalo Law School's PB&J Bar!

Brian Detweiler, SUNY Buffalo Law School

The Charles B. Sears Law Library instituted a self-serve peanut butter and jelly bar last fall and it has been incredibly popular with our students!¹ We open the bar for lunch every weekday when classes are in session and during final exams in an office behind the Reference Desk. Our bar's "happy hour" lasts from 11:15 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. to allow everyone time to make a sandwich during class breaks. (We hesitate to leave it open all day because of sanitary concerns, particularly with open jelly jars that are supposed to be refrigerated.) Since many undergraduate and graduate students from the University utilize our library as a study space, we place a prominent "Law Students Only" sign at the beginning of the line, which seems to have worked so far. We also have a sign alerting those with food allergies to the presence of peanuts and tree nuts (Nutella).



photo: B. Detweiler

The Peanut Butter & Jelly Bar is open for business

We try to provide as much variety as possible by serving white and wheat bread, crunchy and smooth

¹ The idea for our PB&J Bar came from a similar initiative created by Sister Grace Walle at St. Mary's Law School, where I worked from 2012 to 2014.

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PB&J Bar

peanut butter, strawberry and grape jelly, Marshmallow Fluff and Nutella. We started out offering potato chips last semester, but switched over to pretzels because they create less mess. It only takes a few minutes to set up every day, and while cleanup takes a bit longer—around 10 or 15 minutes to sweep up crumbs and wash utensils—the butcher paper on the counter and plastic carpet runner help contain the mess. We generally have at least 30 law students come through every day from Monday through Thursday. And even on Fridays, when there are almost no law school classes, we typically have at least a dozen students show up who are here studying. Most students take their sandwiches to go, but we also have a table and chairs so they can eat their lunches and socialize or catch up on classwork.

In addition to generating positive feelings towards the library, the bar also provides us with a captive audience to whom we can advertise events and whom we can informally survey about library services while they wait to make their sandwiches. We also recently added a small blackboard from Ikea to post handwritten announcements and hold small flyers. Including our weekly supply run to a local chain wholesaler to restock, we probably spend about an hour and a half to two hours on PB&J-related work every week the bar is open. This academic year, we spent about \$3,300 on food, plates, napkins etc. However, the gratitude of our students, the increased opportunities for interaction and the significant savings for them have all made the expenditure of money and effort well worth it! 🍪