

Marshall News

DECEMBER 18, 2007

UT Tarlton Law Library Hosts Teaching the Teachers: Effective Instruction in Legal Research Seminar

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Meet the Library Staff	2
TALL Directors	3
Effective Instruction	3
Season's Greetings	4
Staff Contact Information	4

During October 18-20, 2007, TMSL librarians attended "Teaching the Teachers: Effective Instructions in Legal Research" hosted by the Tarlton Law Library's Jamail Center for Legal Research at the University of Texas at Austin. The three-day conference offered legal research librarians and legal information vendors the opportunity to examine and re-tool their approaches to teaching.

On Friday night, conference attendees were invited to a reception where they could register for classes, receive giveaways from vendors, dine on various finger goods and mingle with others. Roy M. Mersky, the Director for Research at the Tarlton Library, extended a "Texas-style" welcome to all in attendance. He also emphasized the purpose of the conferences as the opportunity to discover ways of integrating technology into the classroom, bolstering communications skills to be used in court and the classroom, and teaching with and without context.

Classes began early on Saturday morning. Richard J. Conviser, Stanley Johanson and David S. Sokolow shared "Thoughts on Being an Effective Teacher." Johanson, renowned for his Texas Bar Review lectures, made a great impression on attendees stressing that every course needs a game plan. His game plans, he revealed, are usually based on the skills needed to successfully complete bar examinations. After presenting the many skills of the professor to capture the focus of students, enable information retention all, spark independent learning all while injecting humor, Sokolow cautioned teachers to remember that "perfectionism robs you of the ability for excellence." At the mid-morning concurrent sessions. Participants had the choice of either attending "Teaching in and Within

a Context" or "Developing a Teaching Philosophy."

The fast-pace of learning and teaching continued throughout the day as Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice, Wallace B. Jefferson, spoke during lunch on the skills needed by new attorneys. Following lunch, Stephen M. Barkan and Virginia Wise discussed "The Changing Nature of Legal Research and Legal Thought."

Judge Nancy F. Atlas, Joseph D. Jamail, Jr. Harry M. Reasoner, and Stephen D. Susman served on the last panel of the day where they shared their thoughts on how legal instructors can base legal research tactics on those skills necessary for success "From the Courtroom to the Classroom." UT System Chancellor Mark Yudof, acted as moderator. Saturday's activities concluded the evening with a reception and banquet. UT-Austin Law School Dean Larry Sagar

spoke first. Sir David Williams, Emeritus Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, followed, having traveled from England, specifically for this event.

Sunday morning panelists and participants convened to discuss
(Continued on page 3)



All the HBCU Law Library Directors attend

Grace Mills, DeCarlous Spearman, Deborah Jefferies, Rhea Ballard, Ruth Hill
Florida, TMSL, NC Central, Howard, Southern

Texas Association of Law Library (TALL) Directors Meeting

Directors of the nine Texas Law School meet at SMU in November to discuss the state of their law libraries. A major decision was made to form a new association, the American Academic Law Librarian's Society (AALLS) to promote academic law librarianship and to represent the interests of academic law libraries.



Susan Phillips, Robert Hu, David Cowan, Roy Mersky, Gail Daily, Spenser Simons, Arturo Torres, Brandon Quarles, DeCarlous Spearman from Texas Wesleyan, St. Mary's, South Texas, UT, SMU, UH, Texas Tech, Baylor, & TMSL, respectively.

(continued from page 1)

“Technology in the Classroom.” Steve H. Nickles, Wake Forest University, began with the statistic that the majority of students prefer technology in the classroom. Other panelists included David Epstein, Joel William Friedman and Stephen Burnett. Nicks suggested the types of technology to be incorporated include: email, instant messaging, and course management systems (i.e. Blackboard, etc.). The most important question answered by the panel was how to use technology to make the classroom experience more valuable. According to the panelists, technology must be harnessed to meet the needs of different kinds of learners. This harnessing requires the hiring of more technical staff as well as the development of technological expertise by librarians. Most importantly, faculty must be convinced to use the technology that is there. The panelists recommended utilizing TWEN (Thomson/West Educational Network), a course management system like Blackboard, teleconferences and 2nd Life, a simulation software.

Diana R. Donahoe, James S. Heller and Richard Leiter led the “Teaching Legal Research” presentation. Leiter pointed out that instructors should give context to their lessons. For example, a legal research class for first year law students should

focus on what is used in the first year – case reporters and statutes and codes, as opposed to C.F.R.s or loose-leaves. Leiter went on to assert that even though technology has become a fact of life, students must understand print to use electronic legal resources.

Following lunch, participants were treated to closing remarks by Bryan Garner, author of “The Winning Brief” and editor of “Black’s Law Dictionary.” Garner emphasized the precision with which attorneys must operate. This precision can only begin with thorough and deliberate legal research plan. Garner said, “Research is best when the broader purpose is understood.” Therefore, professors and instructors must help students realize how legal research is the foundation to any brief they will ever make or argument they will ever write.

At the conference’s end, Mersky expressed satisfaction at how well-received the event was. He also thanked all of his staff, the vendors and attendees for their contributions. Another phenomenal fact not lost on Mersky was the attendance by all of the library directors from each of the historically black law schools throughout the country, many of whom trained under Mersky’s tutelage. (See photo, page 1). All participants departed with a clearer sense of effective legal instruction.



Season's Greetings from the TMSL

Marshall News is a publication of the Texas Southern University, Thurgood Marshall School of Law Library. A copy of the newsletter may be retrieved from the Law Library web page at: www.tsulaw.edu. Please send all comments to: Taciana Williams, Thurgood Marshall School of Law Library, 3100 Cleburne, Houston, Texas 77004. tawilliams@tmslaw.tsu.edu

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