

Law Students Performing at a Class Near You

By Rhea Ballard-Thrower

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For several years I taught first-year legal bibliography, and most recently, I have taught advanced legal research. At the end of each academic year, course evaluations arrive and I carefully read each one. Overall, the comments are very positive. The students remark how much they have learned, although in the same breath they consistently state that the course requires—and I quote—“an insane amount of work.” I have to admit that my courses are quite demanding, but as other legal bibliography instructors can attest, there is so much information to teach and just too little time in a semester. Despite the fact that legal resources have not changed much over the years, I find I must alter a few things in the way I teach the course every semester. However, the biggest change to my course took place in 1995. That was a watershed year for me in that I decided to get the students in my section actively involved in teaching legal bibliography.

October 3, 1995, is a day that I will always remember exactly where I was, for that was the day when the decision in the O.J. Simpson trial was announced. So, what does O.J. Simpson have to do with legal bibliography? Well, I figured that if Mr. Cochran could organize a “dream team” for Mr. Simpson’s legal representation, then I could do the same thing for legal bibliography. In the spring semester of the following year, I organized the students into legal bibliography dream teams. Each team was required to present a legal bibliography topic to their classmates. The presentations were to be between 25 to 30 minutes long. I told the students they could be as imaginative as they wanted. I have to admit; I thought the students would do a typical show-and-tell of the resources with a PowerPoint presentation. To my surprise,

the students were way more creative. Given the opportunity to be the “instructor for the moment,” the students took their responsibility quite seriously. Each team had to meet with me at least three weeks before their presentation to the class. During that meeting we reviewed their project theme, discussed which legal resources would be presented, made sure the team members had a clear understanding of how to use the resources, and reviewed the resources handout that each team had to prepare for their particular topic. In the years to follow, I learned the hard way that in the conference meeting, I also needed to cover such issues as the use of profanity, appropriate dress, and the consumption of generally not-considered-edible foods. But, those were only minor glitches. On the day of the presentations, I started the class by introducing the team’s topic. Using the traditional Socratic method, I reviewed with the students the various legal resources for that day’s discussion. After answering any remaining questions, the dream team for that day was then allowed to perform. So, what did the students showcase? What follows are brief descriptions of some of my favorite presentations.

The Goodfellas and the Waste Management Business

A group of “Goodfellas” uses the *United States Code* and *United States Code Annotated**, as well as other federal statutory materials to determine whether they will violate federal law if they form and operate a “waste management business” (otherwise known as a gambling venture).

Survivors of the Titanic

As their cardboard cutout of the Titanic is sinking, passengers rock back and forth on the ill-fated voyage discussing how to use the *American Law Reports* to locate information on the topic “carriage of passengers.”

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Updating the Simple Life

For their latest adventure, team members Paris and Nicole are reference assistants at a law library. The two have difficulties updating case law. Fortunately, the law librarians are available to help the trust-fund beneficiaries understand not only how to use *Shepard's*[®] in print and online, but also how to use KeyCite[®].

Starr Trek

Captain's log stardate 2098.1.7.23—Federal Regulations Officer Kenneth Starr arrives on the ship to investigate possible regulatory violations. Officer Starr demonstrates how the *Code of Federal Regulations*, *Federal Register*, *List of CFR Sections Affected*, and other resources can be used for federal regulatory research.

Oprah's Favorite Things

Team audience members are shocked to learn that they are a part of Oprah's "My Favorite Things—Secondary Sources" television episode. Recipients react with hysterics as Oprah explains and then gives away to those in the audience copies of law reviews, legal newspapers, and her other favorite secondary sources.

The Blair Witch Digest

This presentation was unique in that a video was delivered to me at the beginning of the class. The following message was attached to the videotape: "On August 26, 10 law students entered the law library to film a documentary on digests, focusing on the topic of witchcraft. None of the students has been heard from since. This morning, this footage was found on top of a *Decennial Digest*." Keeping with that theme, the members of the team were not in class that day. On the video, frightened team members ran through the library at night (after closing) explaining how to use the digest system. For the final scene there was a scream as a volume of the *Decennial Digest* falls to the floor.

Pulp Fiction Robbery

In a re-enactment of the well-known movie scene, a couple of misguided team members named Pumpkin and Honey Bunny start to rob a coffee shop. Eventually, Pumpkin points a gun at Jules, Jules points a gun at Pumpkin, Honey Bunny points a gun at Jules, and Vincent points a gun at Honey Bunny. Jules resolves the conflict by explaining how to use the state codes, digests, and other state legal resources to locate information on the topic "robbery." After Pumpkin and Honey Bunny indicate that they now have a thorough grasp of state legal research, Jules decides to let them go.

So, there you have it. Who knew that first-year law students could be such creative teachers of legal bibliography when given the chance? My only regret is that I did not videotape the presentations. The presentations could have been used to teach others that legal bibliography can be presented in a fun, yet informative way.

Lights! Camera! Action!

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