

## THE USE OF TRIVIA AS A TOOL TO ENHANCE THE TEACHING OF LEGAL RESEARCH

BY MARK W. PODVIA

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Despite what we librarians may think, the vast majority of our students do not regard legal research as the most exciting subject. While most—unfortunately not all—students realize the importance of good legal research skills, class assignments are often viewed with emotions that range from sheer boredom to outright apathy.

In an effort to increase student interest in legal research exercises, those of us who teach legal research at The Dickinson School of Law of the Pennsylvania State University have tried incorporating law-related trivia questions into our assignments. These trivia questions have ranged from law school or other legal history to questions regarding the portrayal of lawyers in books and films and on television.

Students are neither required nor expected to attempt to do the trivia questions, however the vast majority of our students do make an effort to complete them. Students who complete the trivia questions receive rewards ranging from extra credit—normally one point for getting all the questions correct—to prizes such as mugs, books, candy, or gift certificates. The prizes are sometimes awarded at a special ceremony in the library where winners are selected from among those who correctly answered all the questions. These ceremonies are always well-attended, even by those who are not in the running for a prize.

The student reaction to the trivia questions has been very positive. In an evaluation of 60 students conducted during the spring of 2003, 54 respondents indicated that they had completed at least one set of trivia questions during the 2002–2003 academic year. Two students indicated that they had answered some questions, while four had not answered any.

Of the 54 students who completed at least one set of questions, 52 indicated that they had enjoyed doing them, one did not enjoy doing them, and one left the question blank. Forty-two of those respondents said that the questions enhanced their learning experience, while 11 said that the questions did not enhance their learning experience and one left the question blank.

Of the six students who did not complete at least one set of questions, all listed a lack of time as their reason. One also noted that she did not enjoy trivia questions.

Among the comments from those who had completed at least one set of trivia questions were the following:

- The bonus questions were like dessert after the meal. They put a smile on my face.
- I'm not sure how much "relevant" learning I did as a result of the trivia questions, but they were fun!
- The questions are fun and entertaining.
- They were really fun and I learned a lot of interesting trivia.
- They added variety to the monotony of everyday work!
- They made the research assignments somewhat fun.
- Good break from law school. Helps make research more interesting.
- Fun facts.
- Good break and fun to learn new and interesting facts.
- I spent more time trying to answer the bonus and just-for-fun questions than the actual assignment.
- Doing the bonus questions brought some much needed fun (and stress relief) to homework and law school in general. Our classes often take themselves too seriously and these questions reminded me that there is life outside of law school.
- They're great for a diversion, and it's nice from time to time to try finding information that doesn't have to be cited in *Bluebook* format.
- A bit of amusement in an otherwise dull library.
- Make them even tougher!
- The nonpracticing lawyer questions were particularly interesting—you don't just have to practice law with a JD.

- It's great to see that lawyers are involved in a variety of professions showing one that a law degree can help one achieve many different dreams.
- I looked for answers and at times it became a challenge to find them.

In addition, the following responses were received from those who said that the questions enhanced their learning experience:

- The bonus questions get me thinking about the assignment. Once I'm online looking up the answers to the bonus questions, I might as well do the rest of the assignment. It's kind of like a dare, a challenge to get the right answers. Plus you can never know too much random trivia and it turns a dry topic into something you actually want to do.
- The just-for-fun questions helped to practice isolating key words for computer database searches in a way that was less onerous than standard legal queries.
- Made the assignments worthwhile and it even helped my Internet research strategies.

Those who had not completed at least one set of trivia questions provided the following comments:

- I enjoy the just-for-fun questions, but rarely have time to do more than a few of them.
- I never know more than a few. I stink at trivia!
- The trivia questions were interesting but I just didn't have the time to do them.
- Too much work in all my classes. If it isn't required, I don't do it.
- I hate looking stuff up.

Here are some of the trivia questions that we have used. You might want to see how many you can correctly answer. The answers can be found at the end.

### Lawyers on the Big Screen

The following questions are based on various films that highlight the legal profession. Guess the name of the film in which these Hollywood "attorneys" starred.

1. 1973: John Houseman as a Harvard law professor.
2. 1962: Gregory Peck as a Southern lawyer.
3. 1992: Tom Cruise as a U.S. Navy lawyer.
4. 1993: Tom Hanks as lawyer Andrew Beckett.
5. 1957: Henry Fonda as a jury member.
6. 1962: Gregory Peck as a lawyer threatened by an ex-con.
7. 1990: Harrison Ford as a prosecuting attorney.
8. 1959: James Stewart as a defense attorney.
9. 1997: Keanu Reeves as a lawyer.
10. 2000: Albert Finney as attorney Ed Masry.
11. 1959: Paul Newman played a Philadelphia lawyer.
12. 1998: Anthony Hopkins portrayed John Quincy Adams.

### Television Lawyers

Many television shows have been built around lawyers. See if you can identify the law-related television shows featuring these actors and actresses.

1. Eddie Albert played a New York lawyer who moved to the country to become a farmer in this 1960s show.
2. Tracey Needham played attorney Meg Austin during the first season of this current show.
3. Assistant District Attorney Sylvia Costas, played by Sharon Lawrence, was killed in a courthouse shooting incident on this television show.
4. William Talman, as District Attorney Hamilton Burger, rarely won a case in this drama.
5. Actress Ellen Foley portrayed Public Defender Billie Young in this courtroom series.
6. Susan Dey played Assistant District Attorney Grace Van Owen in this drama.
7. Simon Baker plays a hot-shot lawyer sentenced to community service for drug use in this television drama.
8. Actor Tom Cavanagh operated his law practice out of a bowling alley in this television show.
9. Amy Brenneman starred as Judge Amy Madison Gray in this popular television show.
10. Jill Hennessy played Assistant District Attorney Claire Kincaid in this drama.
11. James Garner was Chief Justice Thomas Brankin in this short-lived series.
12. Julian McMahon played a truly wicked lawyer in this current series.

### Lawyers and Law Students Who Gained Fame by Not Practicing Law

One of the great advantages of a law degree is its versatility, and it should not be surprising that many law students and lawyers have become famous by doing work that falls outside of the traditional practice of law. See how many of these nonpractitioners you can identify.

1. This former lawyer paid a famous visit to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1864. He is best remembered for his statement that “War is Hell.”
2. This former lawyer was elected mayor of Cincinnati in 1977, but is better known as the host of a sometimes controversial talk show.
3. This famous college gridiron coach earned his law degree from Cornell in 1894. While he coached at Cornell, Iowa State, Georgia, Stanford, and Pitt, he is best remembered as the coach of the Carlisle Indian School.
4. This Yale Law School graduate and Boston lawyer authored a Victorian mystery series that featured amateur sleuth Julian Kestrel.
5. In 1505 this German law student decided to become a monk after nearly being killed in a severe thunderstorm. He later gained considerable fame as a theologian.
6. This New York City lawyer became the star announcer of *Monday Night Football* in 1970, a position he left after the 1983 season.
7. In 1814 this 35-year-old Georgetown lawyer wrote a poem that was later set to the English tune “To Anacreon in Heaven.”
8. This lawyer portrayed the angel Gorgan on the *Star Trek* episode “And the Children Shall Lead.” Fans have rated the show as one of the worst *Star Trek* episodes ever.
9. A 1978 graduate, this author published a famous account of his first year at Harvard Law School.
10. This 1969 graduate of the Brooklyn Law School once served as a correspondent on *Good Morning America* and now hosts his own syndicated show.
11. This Hofstra University pre-law dropout was featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*’s swimsuit issue in 1982.
12. This former Mississippi lawyer has seen six of his 14 best-selling books made into films.

### United States Supreme Court Trivia

Established pursuant to Article III of the Constitution, the United States Supreme Court is certainly not trivial, but it does have a rich and colorful history. See how much Supreme Trivia you know about our nation’s highest Court.

1. What president appointed the most Supreme Court Justices?
2. What words appear above the main (western) entrance of the Supreme Court building?
3. How many Justices originally served on the Court?
4. In what year was the first female Justice, Sandra Day O’Connor, appointed to the Supreme Court?
5. In what building did the United States Supreme Court first meet?
6. When was the current Supreme Court building completed?
7. Who was the first Chief Justice?
8. What color robes did the Supreme Court Justices originally wear?
9. Who was the only person to serve as both President of the United States and Chief Justice?
10. As you face the Supreme Court bench, who sits to the immediate left of the Chief Justice?
11. On what date did the Supreme Court first meet?
12. Which Supreme Court Justice died in North Carolina while trying to escape his creditors?

### Answers

#### Lawyers on the Big Screen

1. *The Paper Chase*
2. *To Kill a Mockingbird*
3. *A Few Good Men*
4. *Philadelphia*
5. *12 Angry Men*
6. *Cape Fear*
7. *Presumed Innocent*
8. *Anatomy of a Murder*
9. *The Devil’s Advocate*
10. *Erin Brockovich*
11. *The Young Philadelphians*
12. *Amistad*

**Television Lawyers**

1. *Green Acres*
2. *JAG*
3. *NYPD Blue*
4. *Perry Mason*
5. *Night Court*
6. *L.A. Law*
7. *The Guardian*
8. *Ed*
9. *Judging Amy*
10. *Law & Order*
11. *First Monday*
12. *Charmed*

**Lawyers and Law Students Who Gained Fame by Not Practicing Law**

1. General William Tecumseh Sherman
2. Jerry Springer
3. Glenn S. “Pop” Warner
4. Katherine “Kate” Ross
5. Martin Luther
6. Howard Cosell
7. Francis Scott Key
8. Melvin Belli
9. Scott Turow
10. Geraldo Rivera
11. Carol Ann Alt
12. John Grisham

**United States Supreme Court Trivia**

1. President George Washington. He appointed 11 Justices.
2. “Equal Justice Under Law”
3. Six—a Chief Justice and five Associate Justices
4. 1981
5. Merchants Exchange Building, New York City
6. 1935
7. John Jay. He took the oath of office in 1789 and served until 1795.
8. The Justices originally wore scarlet-faced robes. By 1800 the Justices had switched to the simple black robes that they wear today.
9. William Howard Taft. He served from 1921 to 1930.
10. The senior Associate Justice
11. February 2, 1790
12. Associate Justice James Wilson

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**July 10-14, 2004:** 97th Annual Meeting of the American Association of Law Libraries in Boston, Massachusetts. See <[www.aallnet.org/events](http://www.aallnet.org/events)>.

**July 21-24, 2004:** 11th Biennial Conference of the Legal Writing Institute in Seattle, Washington. See <[www.lwionline.org/activities/conferences.asp](http://www.lwionline.org/activities/conferences.asp)>.