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Law Librarians' Pet Peeves

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Law Librarians' Pet Peeves

By Fritz Snyder and Pat Chapman

The 1998 WestPac Annual Conference was held in Missoula, Montana. We had a band (whom we wanted to call the "Moody Bluebooks") for the opening reception, and a member of the band wanted to compose a song for librarians using our pet peeves. We put a call for peeves on the law-lib list and 155 entries came pouring in. Many said: "Thanks for letting me vent." We love our jobs, but among ourselves we let the peeves come out. By category, then:

Messes

Library users who leave a huge mess behind—piles of books, half-full coffee cups, food garbage, used tissues.

Technology

People who say:

"Electronic resources certainly have reduced the need for staff, haven't they!"

"What's so hard about a computer search?—You just press some keys!"

"What do you need more space for; it'll all be on CD-ROM in five years anyway!"

From law students: "Why do I have to research in books? Isn't everything on the computer?"

Technology users who can't follow simple, plainly posted, instructions.

Disappearing files on LEXIS and databases on WESTLAW.

Too many different formats, format changes, or modes of access.

Cookies.

Networked CD-ROMs which take WAY more effort to keep running than they should.

The term "Wexis." It's just too, too cute. Also, it sounds like Elmer Fudd. "I hate that damn word."

Publishers

Reps who say:

"We're not selling anything. I just want to ask you about the legal research electronic services you're using. Do you have five minutes?"

"What types of law does your firm practice?"

"Try this new publication risk free for 30 days and if you are not satisfied, you can return at no cost" (except you have to pay the postage and you have to pack and wrap the damn thing).

"Please provide the front and back of the canceled check for the following invoices ... and a listing of individual invoices from statements that were paid in full one-to-three years ago."

Waiting on hold to speak to a customer representative (while the recorded message keeps saying in a despicably cheerful voice, "We are here to serve you").

Having to retain an old volume after receiving only a partial replacement.

Explaining publisher inflation—to the publisher's rep.

Telemarketers who:

Try to sell you subscriptions/sets you already have.

Want to chat about practice areas and suggest titles.

Call despite the fact that the publisher already has a field rep in the area.

Are pushy.

Vendors who will not take "no" for an answer.

Automated phone routing hell and then: "Get your account number and call us back."

Vendors padding contents of new supplements with text that appears in another source or the main text.

Growing publishing monopolies (whatever happened to the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice?).

Fewer field reps for vendors and the wholesale firing of experienced mid-level and senior level company personnel to pump up profits so shareholders stay happy.

New series names of existing titles, packaged differently, to sell more products which aren't really new at all.

Telemarketers who, while reading from a script, want to sell something to the "liberry" or speak to the "liberrian."

How about the volume numbers for *Am. Jur. 2d* being printed on the spine in the exact same spot that we put call number labels.

Non-stop publisher inflation.

West Group.

Aspen.

CCH.

Law-Lib Discussion List

Law librarians whine too much.

Auto-responders: If you're going to be out of the office, make sure to postpone your listservs or unsubscribe from the list.

Otherwise, everyone else on the list gets messages such as: "Jack is out of the office. If there is an emergency, call Jill."

When someone mindlessly posts a rather routine ILL request to the list of something that is clearly available locally and within the requestor's state. This almost always

causes a duplication of effort because there are so many nice librarians out there who are willing to fill almost anything—even though someone else may have already done it.

Folks who ask for help, receive an answer privately, and publish thank you's to the list generally—without telling the whole list what the answer is.

Law Firms

"Gee, you're smart. You could be a lawyer!"

New fall associates to a librarian: "Let me explain this so even you can understand."

"Get copies of all the cases cited in this reply brief. I haven't read it yet, but I'm sure I need them all."

"This research should only take a few minutes...."



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A note is left on your chair or desk overnight that describes a reference project but it does not identify the requestor.

"*The Bluebook of Citation?*—Gee, I never thought I would have to use THAT again after I got out of law school."

The attorney who requests research at 5 p.m. and is at your desk bright and early the next morning looking for the results.

Working through your lunch hour on a rush project only to find that the attorney who the project is for has gone for the afternoon.

"It's 5:30. What are YOU doing here?"

"Chasing down the daily law firm newspaper to the third stall in the men's room (and I'm a woman)."

Internal firm newsletter listing people who worked on a project and lauding the research that attorney or paralegal XYZ did to win the case or get a new client when you did the research.

Management unwilling to spend money for part-time library assistance in the summer but willing to hire secretaries for each summer clerk.

Finding an untouched pile of materials on an attorney's desk one week after the after-hours mad rush to find them because they were needed instantly.

The attorney who never checks out her books, arguing that she doesn't have time to do so.

An attorney who said he needed a "recent" case concerning a certain issue and a certain client. You look—and discover the case was decided in 1968. Or: "I think I remember reading that SOMEWHERE a few months ago."

The attorney who wants you to buy every single title she wants, but your budget can't handle it. Then: "I'll make that up in two hours of billable time!" Right—but that money won't go into your budget.

"I need section 23.001 of 24 U.S.C." A long search which goes nowhere. "Oops, I meant section 2301." No apology, no nothin'.

Sending his secretary into the library with an incomplete citation, needed immediately—and the attorney nowhere to be found.

The attorney requesting a search on a person and then it's your turn to play "20 Questions": What's his full name? what's his field? any other names? etc. Then, after the search, from the attorney: "Maybe you'd like his CV."

"Find some information on the XYZ Company." What the attorney already knows but didn't tell you: XYZ Company was headquartered in Chicago, they made parking meters, and they went out of business five years ago.

Lawyers who tell me how to do my job: "you can look"

The attorney who is in such a terrible rush they need something faxed. When told the cost by the state law library, snail mail is just fine.

Law Schools

Rude and condescending professors.

Professors who refuse to check out the materials they take out of the library, refuse to permit library staff into their offices to retrieve library materials, and then throw snot-slinging fits when something they want is not on the shelf and not checked out.

Administrators who say, as if they had just invented the concept: "Why don't you get together with other libraries and decide how you might be able to cooperate so we don't all have to spend all this money on law libraries."

Institutional policies that operate to the long-term disadvantage of an organization (e.g., budget rules that preclude saving some money out of each annual budget for several years to pay for a foreseeable large future expenditure, like replacing study chairs).

"I pay \$xxx in tuition. I want a new stapler now."

Patrons who want you to bend the rules.

Patrons who won't or don't or can't use the card catalog.

Faculty who want things immediately: "Put this on reserve immediately."

Parents who come in to do their kid's homework—without the kid. "How's the kid going to learn from the research project?"

Non-law school faculty and teachers who do not take advantage of instructional tours but simply give a large class an assignment requiring use of the law library.

Or faculty and teachers who do arrange instructional tours but do not themselves attend—maybe a good way for them to get out of town early for a holiday.

Deans who insist you become a Federal Depository Library because all those wonderful free items will boost your title count.

Miscellaneous

The continuing habit exhibited by newspaper columnists who fail to cite to either legislative bill numbers, when writing about federal/state legislation, or the names of parties involved in court cases.

Those Washington bureaucrats who send letters out to people involved in legal problems with the government who don't cite to the codified versions of the laws they mention.

"I just know there must be some legislative history that talks about this. Find it for me."

Omnibus bills.

Asking for a book by color.

The *pro se* patron who asks to see *The Book of Common Law*.

The telephone reference requestor who wants you to read her a chapter in a state code (or an entire section of the *CFR* or a Supreme Court opinion) over the phone.

"Tell me who has checked out this book. It's not on the shelf and I need it right now." Half the time, this person has it checked out to himself or else has passed it on to someone else and he can't remember who.

Folks who ask a question and then while you're answering walk away. Or, while looking something up for them, say "never mind" and leave or ask the person standing next to them.

"Thank you for your time." But it's the *information* that you gave them that was important.

Library directors who collect piles of crap in their office, don't know what to do with it, and let it ooze out their door into the area outside their office.

Folks who have things routed to them but never seem to get them back to Tech Services staff.

People who do not answer their phone mail.

People who say they have a REALLY simple, stupid, easy question—then, you find that it's some very complicated question that you have NO CHANCE of being able to answer off the top of your head.

Court clerks' offices that provide no assistance to *pro se* litigants except telling them to go to the law library, fill out the forms, and bring them back.

"No, I'm not asking for legal advice; I just need to know whether this statute applies in this situation."

Patrons who insist their question will "only take a minute." Right.

"What do you mean it's unpublished! All cases are published."

Post-it tags and notes. They pull the ink off and rip the page.

Removing chunks of pages from a looseleaf service and maybe returning them later.

Complaining that they can't play computer games on dedicated WESTLAW and LEXIS PCs.

"Why do you need all these books—everything's on the Internet now, right?"

People who read the e-mail I'm writing when I ask them to wait just a moment for me to help them.

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Calendar

Upcoming AALL Professional Development Programs

January 12, 1999 "Functional Space Planning/Evaluation for Law Firm and Corporate Law Libraries," Atlanta, Georgia. This full-day program will assist the law firm and corporate law librarian in meeting the design challenge. Whether a library is getting additional space, less space, or totally new space, the librarian needs to prepare for the design process. The accent will be on up-front analysis of needs and how to present your findings to management, facilities, the architect/space planner, and any others who may be involved. While design elements will be discussed, the main emphasis is on project preparation and assisting the librarian in balancing the functional needs against aesthetic/architectural desires during the process. The specific needs of each attendee—those not covered in case studies or class outline—will be sought and answered either in class or in a pre-scheduled individual consultation. For more information contact Lara Koban, AALL Educational Program Coordinator; phone: 312/939-4764, e-mail: lkoban@aall.org, or see <http://www.aallnet.org/events>.

April 15, 1999 AALL Annual Satellite Teleconference on Customer Service. Speakers are Darlene Weingand and Pat Wagner. For more information contact Lara Koban, AALL Educational Program Coordinator; phone: 312/939-4764, e-mail: lkoban@aall.org, or see <http://www.aallnet.org/events>. This event is a partnership between AALL and West Group.

May 13, 1999 "Copyright in the Electronic Age," Washington, D.C. Sponsored by AALL and taught by Lolly Gasaway. For more information contact Lara Koban, AALL Educational Program Coordinator; phone: 312/939-4764, e-mail: lkoban@aall.org, or see <http://www.aallnet.org/events>.

AALL Professional Development Programs Available for Scheduling:

These professional development opportunities are brought to you by the American Association of Law Libraries. AALL will offer educational programs to AALL members and others interested in law librarianship and legal information at venues around

the country. AALL will coordinate all scheduling, equipment, food, registration, and publicity, and provide on-site support. If you are interested in scheduling one of these programs, please fill out and submit a scheduling form. If you need more information, please contact AALL Educational Program Coordinator Lara Koban at lkoban@aall.org or 312/939-4764.

"Basic Legal Research," Marsha C. Thomas

"Copyright in the Age of Technology," Laura N. Gasaway

"Help! I'm Surrounded by the Law, and I Still Can't Understand Copyright!," Kenneth D. Crews

"Training the Internet Trainer," Wanda J. McDavid

If you need more information please contact Lara Koban at lkoban@aall.org or 312/939-4764. Once we hear from you, we will give you a call to discuss the details.