Teach-In Reflections: Past, Present and Future

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TEACH-IN REFLECTIONS:
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

BY GAIL A. PARTIN

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The 1995 National Legal Research Teach-In is barely behind us and excitement is building already as preparations begin for the fourth annual Teach-In in 1996. With the details of the third still swimming in my head, and plans for the fourth already starting to coalesce, it seems the ideal time to contemplate the future of the program.

In so doing, I ask myself the following questions: Are the original goals established in 1993 still relevant in 1996? Are we continuing to gain momentum? Does this event we call the National Legal Research Teach-In really reach a national audience? Does the Teach-In appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of legal research instructors? Does it provide them with the tools they need to train others? I hope that a review of the past three years will not only answer my questions, but also provide inspiration and fresh ideas for the future.

The Teach-In Mission

The initial idea for a teach-in sprang from several "Bridge the Gap" programs conducted by members of the Research Instruction Caucus (RIC) of the American Association of Law Libraries in 1991 and 1992. Designed to bolster the sagging research skills of students and new lawyers, these programs highlighted the need for increased cooperation among the academic, private, and government sectors of the legal profession in the training of legal researchers. At the same time, it was apparent that law librarians were in a unique position to effectively and economically meet the research instruction needs of the legal community. The Teach-In event was created to celebrate legal research instruction and to demonstrate the importance of involving more law librarians in teaching these skills. As Ellen Callinan, RIC chair and a prime mover in the creation of the Teach-In, so eloquently stated on the eve of the First Annual Teach-In in 1993: "The synchronization of our training activities illuminates the role we have assumed so quietly and effectively in recent years. By sharing the excellent resources individual librarians have designed, we empower all law librarians with the tools for implementing quality training programs. This cooperative, simultaneous effort to satisfy a genuine need within the legal community could position our profession as a proactive resource rather than a reactive expense."1

There seems no doubt that the goals established in 1993 will still be relevant in 1996 and years beyond. The level of dialogue about legal research programs has surged as the legal community reflects upon and reorganizes its priorities in light of the recommendations of the MacCrate Report.2 Legal research skills were an integral part of the "Statement of Fundamental Lawyering Skills and Professional Values" included in the report.3 It is uncertain whether the gap in the research skills of new lawyers has begun to narrow. Even if it has, it will take many years and much cooperation to design and implement suitable programs to close it completely. The unique role that librarians can play in providing essential skills instruction remains especially critical.

The Teach-In goal of helping librarians bridge the credibility gap continues into 1996 as well. "The need for an established program that holds a niche open for [librarians] as teachers of legal research is as great now as it was three years ago."4 When more and more librarians around the country become visible as highly competent and capable instructors, it will be easier for others to assume that role in their own institutions.

1 The National Legal Research Teach-In is held annually during National Library Week. Activities for the 1995 Teach-In were conducted April 9-15.
4 Id. at 135.
5 Telephone interview with Ellen M. Callinan, Chair, Research Instruction Caucus (May 30, 1995).
When asked recently about the Teach-In’s mission for the future, Ellen Callinan predicted an increased demand for instruction in the area of technology. As technological developments outpace the individual’s ability to keep up, there will be a skyrocketing need for librarians to share with each other their expertise in new electronic applications. If this can be accomplished—through the Research Teach-In and other avenues—then librarians, in turn, will be especially well situated to conduct lawyer/student training and staff development sessions to bring their constituents up to warp speed.

Momentum Builds: Teach-Ins I & II

During the planning for the first Teach-In, scheduled for April 18-24, 1993, the organizers were hoping to compile two subject-oriented training kits and make them available to RIC members. They took a giant leap of faith by advertising the event as an “annual,” despite their apprehensions about its reception within the law librarian community. In the end, their dedication and hard work paid off. They provided not two but four separate training kits: Introduction to Legal Research, Administrative Research, Looseleaf Research, and Legislative Research. With the generous support of West Publishing Company, they distributed 315 training kits throughout the country. These figures were especially gratifying given the limit of one kit per institution imposed by event organizers. Introduction to Legal Research was the most popular (126 requests), while the remaining three topics were about equal: Looseleaf (67), Legislative (67), and Administrative (55). Posters and bookmarks were created especially for use with Teach-In events through the artistic and financial generosity of LEXIS/NEXIS. The First Annual Teach-In exceeded all expectations and created momentum for expanding those expectations in the years to come.

After 1994, the Teach-In could legitimately be called an annual event. The Second Annual Teach-In, April 17-23, 1994, was a resounding success, breaking all of the previous year’s records. Advertising posters, bookmarks, and five different training kits were offered to Teach-In participants throughout the country. A total of 406 kits were distributed: Environmental Law (109), Labor & Employment Law (87), International Law (83), Tax Law (70), and Intellectual Property (57). This overwhelming response proved what was long suspected—there exists an unfilled demand for high-quality legal research training materials.

More and More: Teach-In III

Given the success of its predecessors, the pressure was on for the Third Annual Teach-In in 1995. Was momentum waning after two years? Was there material available for new instruction kits? Up to this point, the RIC Clearinghouse had been a handy resource for training materials, but it seemed that all of the most interesting topics had been used. Something new and exciting was needed to keep the spark alive. Consideration was given to suggestions made during previous Teach-Ins and to contributions already received but as yet unused. Four topics were finally selected: Human Rights, Legal Resources on the Internet, Securities Regulation, and Training Materials for Networked Systems: CD-ROM, Email, Internet, etc. New designs were created for the posters and bookmarks. Again, all previous records were shattered as 486 training kits were sent out. “This year, we felt a special need to respond to newly emerging challenges in teaching legal research skills, especially those dealing with electronic modalities. Our success was due in large part to being able to offer topics on the cutting edge, fulfilling a need at the right time and for the right price.”

6 Id.


8 Telephone interview with Karen B. Brunner, Cochair, National Legal Research Teach-In Committee (June 6, 1995). Karen was actively involved with the New Jersey Law Librarians Association’s first “Bridge the Gap” program, one of the catalysts that led to the creation of a national Teach-In. Her commitment and dedication to the Teach-In program have proven to be invaluable to its successful implementation during the past three years.
We suspected that the two technology-specific topics would command the greatest interest, but we were still amazed to find that they accounted for 79 percent of the total number of kits distributed. Final totals were: Legal Resources on the Internet (279), Training Materials for Networked Systems (106), Securities (51), and Human Rights (41). This appears to be a clear mandate to offer even more technology-oriented topics in upcoming years. Another key element in the success of individual training events has been the bookmarks and posters designed specifically for the Teach-In. The number of bookmarks requested has steadily increased each year, reaching a record high in 1995 of 18,000. Poster requests have remained fairly constant at around 200 per year. Judy Floyd-Evans, in charge of Law Librarian Relations at LEXIS/NEXIS, commented that the popularity of the bookmarks may be due in part to their “Just Ask” theme, which succinctly “captures the essence of the benefit that a law librarian can provide.”

**Reaching All Audiences?**

The Teach-In Committee has remained steadfast in its efforts to reach all constituent groups in all locations that might be interested in the activities—and especially the teaching materials—of the Teach-In. A detailed breakdown of training kit recipients shows that in 1994, kits were sent to 39 different states, including the District of Columbia. By 1995, materials were distributed in 47 states. In general, the distribution of requests followed population lines. States with larger populations requested more training kits, while sparsely populated areas requested fewer.

Training kits, posters, and bookmarks were requested most often by academic and private law librarians, with the number of requests about evenly split between the two. These two groups accounted for 85 percent of the requests in 1994 and 78 percent in 1995. Interestingly, the number of requests from government librarians, including state and federal courts, agencies, and legislative bodies, tripled from 1994 to 1995. Among the government libraries represented were the Executive Office of the President, the Library of Congress, United States attorneys, the Internal Revenue Service, the Commerce Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, state law libraries, state supreme courts, state attorneys general, state penitentiaries, and public defenders.

Others requesting kits included law professors, secondary schools, insurance companies, utility companies, automobile manufacturers, retail department stores, pharmaceutical companies, computer manufacturers, legal publishers, oil companies, library consultants, and private law library associations.

Shuffling through the distribution lists of past Teach-Ins, I see indications of a new market developing for Teach-In materials—the global legal community. In 1994, kits were sent to two foreign countries: Canada (3) and the Philippines (1). Just one year later, the number of kits sent to locations outside the United States had nearly tripled. Six countries received the 1995 kits: Australia (1), Canada (6), England (1), Ireland (1), Israel (1), and New Zealand (1).

It seems reasonable to assume that as electronic communications and information storage make the world more dependent on technology, our interests and needs will intersect more often with librarians in other parts of the world. Professional relationships will be forged through these common bonds and expertise will be shared. These themes, already inherent in the “national” Teach-In, can be easily adapted to the global community for our mutual benefit.

There can be no doubt that the Teach-In has reached a widely diverse audience. Regardless of what the future holds, the single most important goal of the Teach-In will be to remain relevant and appealing to all individuals interested in legal research instruction.
Planning for Number Four!

As you read this, planning is already under way for the Fourth Annual Teach-In, April 14-21, 1996. Over the years, the committee has consistently relied upon the donations of a few faithful librarians when compiling the training kits, which constitute the core of teach-in offerings. Without excellent instructional materials, the Teach-In is a hollow shell. As we strive to enter new and uncharted territories, the Teach-In must become more and more dependent upon the fresh ideas and approaches that are being developed right now within the legal community. Your contributions are the lifeblood of this program.

If you have any ideas, suggestions, donations, or experiences that relate to legal research instruction or the Teach-In concept, please share them with the Teach-In coordinators for 1996. Your input is critical to the development of an effective, relevant, and beneficial program for 1996.

Send your comments to:
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Reduced Prices for 1995 Teach-In Kits

West Publishing Corporation has generously donated its surplus supply of 1995 Teach-In kits to the clearinghouse maintained by the Research Instruction Caucus. RIC wants to share this largesse with those interested in teaching legal research. Accordingly, the prices for 1995 training kits have been reduced by half. When the existing inventory is depleted, kits will still be available upon request at the full price. So request your kit now while supplies last!

As of this writing, the available kits (with the reduced price indicated) are:

- Human Rights—$95001 ($6.65)
- Legal Resources on the Internet—$95002 ($10.70)
- Securities Regulation—$95003 ($7.65)
- Training Materials for Networked Systems: CD-ROM, Internet, Email, etc.—$95003 ($8.65)

Orders should include the title of each kit desired, Clearinghouse order numbers, and a check payable to AALL (include $3.00 postage and handling for each kit ordered). Send to:

RIC Clearinghouse
American Association of Law Libraries
53 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 940
Chicago, IL 60604

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