Judith A. Morgan--Innovator, Selfless Leader, and Mentor

Lee F Peoples, Oklahoma City University
JUDITH A. MORGAN—INNOVATOR, SELFLESS LEADER, AND MENTOR

Lee F. Peoples*

Judith “Judy” Morgan came to OCU at a time when the law library needed high quality and sustained leadership. The law school had just emerged from a funding and accreditation crisis. The physical facility, library staff, and collection were in need of improvement. She brought the law library back from the brink and transformed it into the vibrant institution that it is today. Judy has seen the good times, the bad times, and everything in between. During her twenty-five years at the law library, she worked with no less than seven different law school deans and successfully guided the law library through three ABA accreditation visits.

Judy served as law library director during a time of tremendous change in legal information. When she arrived at OCU in 1983 as an assistant director, computerized legal research was in its infancy, and the paper card catalog and West’s print reporters and digest system reigned supreme. But in just a few years, the dominant paradigm shifted toward electronic legal research.

Under Judy’s steady hand, the law library embraced technology and used it to transform the way that students and faculty accessed legal information. Judy oversaw the installation of the first Lexis and Westlaw terminals in the law library. The transition from a print card catalog to the electronic system occurred in the mid-1990s. The law library was an early subscriber to databases, including Legaltrac, Wilson’s Index of Legal Periodicals, CALI (Computer Assisted Legal Instruction), and HeinOnline. The library steadily increased its electronic subscriptions and today subscribes to over fifty databases.

Judy’s leadership in implementing technology also extended to the

* Associate Professor of Law Library Science, Oklahoma City University School of Law.
law school. Under her direction, the law library started the law school’s audio-visual department and supported the use of technology in the classroom. She oversaw the construction of the law school’s first computer lab in 1990 located in the law library. Later that same year, she led a drive to collect grocery store receipts to purchase additional computers for the lab. In a few short years, the law library was managing dozens of PCs as the computer lab increased in size. The law library also created the law school’s first webpage and distributed campus Internet access credentials and e-mail addresses to law students.

What started out as a series of projects carefully managed by the law library has become the department of Law Technology Services.

When Judy arrived, the law library had approximately 110,000 volumes and was lagging behind its peer and benchmark schools. Hard copy title and volume count was traditionally the “coin of the realm” for the purposes of the annual ABA survey. Under her leadership, the volume count tripled and now stands at approximately 322,000. Judy was a staunch advocate for increasing the law library’s book budget. During her tenure, it increased many times over. Her goal was not only to increase the breadth of the library’s holdings, but to also improve the quality of the collection. Judy personally reviewed each and every new book and law review issue as it came into the law library. This allowed her to spot new issues and trends in the law, and she used this information when selecting new titles for the collection. As the law school developed centers and specialized certificate programs in specific areas of law, the law library supported these endeavors by building up specialized collections in these subject areas. She founded the law library’s Native American collection to support the law school’s Native American Legal Resource Center, which opened in 1989.

As the collection grew, Judy devised innovative ways to arrange it and to make the most effective use of the historic Gold Star Building. When the law school classrooms and administrative offices were relocated to the Sarkeys building in 1994, Judy oversaw the remodeling of the Gold Star Building. She continually strove to make the best use of the space. Since the 1994 remodeling, study rooms have been added, additional faculty offices constructed, and the collection has been rearranged and shifted countless times.

As Judy departs, academic law libraries are on the precipice of another major change. The ABA is no longer collecting title or volume counts in the annual survey. During the summer of 2009, the law library
removed and recycled a large number of duplicate volumes from its collection to make room for new faculty offices and for the growth of the treatise collection. This move would have been unimaginable a few decades earlier, but is now commonplace. The ABA has shifted its focus from measuring titles, volumes, and other “inputs” to measuring services and other “outcomes.” Judy’s focus on developing a cadre of reference librarians who teach and an impressive array of student and faculty services have positioned the law library to measure up well under the new ABA regime.

The tremendous growth in the size and quality of the collection and the creative use of technology during Judy’s tenure are obvious examples of her leadership abilities. But she made substantial contributions to the institution in areas that are not as easy to quantify. Judy was a selfless leader and mentor to the librarians and staff who worked with her.

Judy understood that in order to provide new and innovative services to the law students and faculty, she had to attract and retain high quality librarians and staff members. When she arrived at OCU, the library only had three professionals and four staff members. During her tenure, she expanded the number of professional and staff positions as the needs of the law students and faculty warranted. She had a hand in hiring at least fourteen reference librarians who held the J.D. degree, seven non-J.D. librarians, and nearly forty staff members.

Judy excelled at attracting and retaining top notch library professionals and staff members to work in the law library. She strove to hire reference and public service librarians who also had their Juris Doctor degrees and to get those librarians into the classroom. She was willing to take a chance on law librarians early in their careers and nurture them into productive members of the profession. Judy hired a number of reference librarians over the years, including your author, who had their law degrees but were still in the process of obtaining their library science degrees.

Judy was never one to boast about her own accomplishments, but always selflessly nurtured and promoted the careers of those who worked for her. This made her an ideal mentor for librarians just starting out in their careers. She encouraged her librarians to be active in the profession and would often nominate OCU law librarians to fill leadership roles in regional and national professional organizations. She urged librarians to spend time writing articles and teach classes in the law school. Some law library directors are more restrictive when librarians ask to spend
time on professional development because those activities take librarians away from their day-to-day tasks. But Judy generously indulged her librarians, leaving it up to them to find the right balance between their day-to-day obligations and their professional aspirations. She realized that not only did these activities improve the professional skills and reputations of her librarians, but also reflected well on the law school.

Judy was always very proud when one of her librarians got elected to an executive board position, won a professional award, presented at a conference, or published a paper. She would quickly dash off a flattering e-mail to the faculty and staff praising the librarian for the accomplishment. Judy worked hard to keep her librarians happy, and several have remained at OCU for their entire careers. Those who moved on have served as academic law library directors, law firm library directors, and reference and public service librarians at top-tier law schools.

Academic law library directors are unique in law schools because they have dual appointments as administrators and faculty members. Judy excelled at both roles and moved effortlessly between them. She was a tenured Professor of Law Library Science and held in high esteem as a colleague of the law faculty. She religiously attended faculty colloquia, meetings, workshops, retreats, and other events. Her presence at these events kept the law library involved in the intellectual life of the law school, but also gave her critical information about the research interests of the faculty that she used in developing the law library’s collection.

Judy proposed an advanced legal research class to the curriculum committee and team taught the class with other librarians for many years. The class eventually grew into two separate classes, one focused on United States law and another focused on Foreign, Comparative, and International law. I had the pleasure of team teaching these classes with her for many semesters. She took a keen interest in Native American issues and treaty research and always taught those subjects in Advanced Legal Research. In 2005, she published *A Bibliographic Essay on Prestatehood Legal Research for the State of Oklahoma* which was included in the book *Presetatehood Legal Materials: A Fifty-State Research Guide*. The publication is regarded as the gold standard work in the field and received the American Association of Law Libraries Joseph L. Andrews Bibliographic Award in 2007.

Judy was a highly capable administrator. As law library director, she
was “the boss” of the law librarians, library staff members, and student workers. But her style was more collegial than dictatorial. She frequently made the rounds to the offices of librarians and staff members to see how everyone’s day was going. Her door was always open, and she welcomed new ideas as opportunities to improve the library’s collection and services. I always enjoyed discussing new approaches and ideas with her. Often she would have already considered the idea herself or at least knew of another law library somewhere who had tried it. She was supportive of new initiatives, but was realistic and frank about budget limitations, unintended consequences, and other pitfalls the presenter may not have thought of. She was adept at making decisions that were in line with current trends and best practices but that also took into account the law school’s unique history and mission.

She meticulously managed the law library budget by hand in a hardbound ledger. Law school and university financial administrators praised her ability to quickly account for each cent in the budget and for her careful spending projections that always kept the law library in the black. She was careful with the purse strings, but could always find some extra funds to support a law librarian’s trip to a conference.

These qualities made Judy a successful law library director and an outstanding mentor to me and the many other law librarians she worked with over the years. We will miss her greatly and wish her the best in retirement.