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Teaching Research to Faculty: Accommodating Cultural and Learning-Style Differences*

Jane Thompson**

Ms. Thompson explores the challenge of teaching law school faculty how to research effectively, especially in light of a unique "faculty culture" and differences in individual learning styles.

Introduction

Teaching faculty how to research effectively—and to utilize fully the resources of an academic law library—is a unique challenge for librarians. Faculty bring to the "training table" a different set of cultural values and norms compared with those of librarians and students. Also, faculty have unique needs for information and individual learning styles that must be addressed before teaching can be successful.

An article on *how* to teach faculty, though, begs the question: *Why* should we teach faculty? After all, aren't they subject specialists—many considered "experts" in their fields—who are undoubtedly acquainted with the nuances of sophisticated research? Is targeting faculty for instruction an efficient use of limited librarian resources?

This question has been addressed convincingly in a recent essay on faculty outreach.¹ The author posits four reasons why librarians should explore new ways to work with (including teaching) faculty. First, we *need* to instruct faculty because the skills necessary to perform basic research—let alone advanced research—are changing rapidly. Gone are the days when faculty could consult a law library's card catalog and a few classic print sources and feel confident that they had covered the field.²

Second, as information seekers, faculty are a large consumer group that presents unique opportunities for effective instruction. They have a career-long and constant need for information.³ We can respond to them specially because,

* Jane Thompson, 1996.

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1. Anne G. Lipow, *Outreach to Faculty: Why and How*, in *WORKING WITH FACULTY IN THE NEW ELECTRONIC LIBRARY* 7 (Linda Shirato ed., 1992).

2. *Id.* at 8. Lipow observes that the "visual cues" faculty used to receive in manual research are lacking in an electronic research environment. Faculty cannot quickly grasp, for example, "the organization, the size, or the content" of a database, and they may not easily determine that a relevant database exists.

3. *Id.*

unlike the situation with most students and public patrons, we know a great deal about who our faculty are and what they do (i.e., their research specialties, courses taught, and committee assignments), and we know where to reach them (office or home) at any given time.⁴

Third, faculty play a powerful role in the institution as a whole. The reputation of the law school depends on the quality and quantity of faculty publications. Also, our interactions with faculty can affect our ability to reach other constituencies in the school, especially students. In the words of the essay, “[t]o the extent that faculty are misinformed or uninformed about the library, their students will be misinformed or uninformed.”⁵ And if faculty convey enthusiasm and support for the law library, the library stands a better chance of acquiring the resources it needs.

Fourth, exploring new ways to work directly with faculty secures our continuing viability. The electronic information explosion necessitates that librarians change the way they perform their instructional roles. Faculty should be the focus of new techniques and attitudes because they are a key constituency in the law school.⁶ In this new era, librarians initiate contact with faculty and engage in continual follow-up. We try to avoid giving faculty the message that we can only help them in a reference-desk, short-answer context.⁷

Elements of Successful Teaching

If we agree that faculty need research instruction, how can librarians teach them effectively? They can start by learning and incorporating some of the standard elements of successful teaching.⁸

A good teacher, for example, knows (and keeps up with) the subject matter and can convey it clearly and confidently.⁹ This means that a librarian must understand the subject well enough to communicate with a minimum of jargon.¹⁰ Although it is hard to avoid some degree of jargon these days, particularly when teaching online research, we need to remember that what are household words to us—e.g., *search engine*, *Boolean searching*, *hypertext*—may be confusing and off-putting to faculty if used too liberally.

4. *Id.* at 10.

5. *Id.*

6. *Id.*

7. *Id.* at 10–11.

8. Sonia Bodi, *Teaching Effectiveness and Bibliographic Instruction: The Relevance of Learning Styles*, 51 C. & RES. LIBR. 113, 114 (1990). Ms. Bodi draws from the classic work by Highet in describing the essentials of effective teaching. GILBERT HIGHET, *THE ART OF TEACHING* (1950).

9. Bodi, *supra* note 8, at 114.

10. See *Critique of the Faculty Development and Library Instruction Movements: A Panel Discussion* (remarks of John Barber), in *LIBRARY INSTRUCTION AND FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY* 68, 72–73 (Nyal Z. Williams & Jack T. Tsukamoto eds., 1980).

A good teacher conveys enthusiasm for the teaching process and for the subject matter.¹¹ How can a faculty learner maintain interest if the librarian lacks the energy or enthusiasm to bring the subject matter to life?

A good teacher likes (i.e., respects) and understands the student.¹² It is easy to take this point for granted, but it is critical to working with faculty. The need to respect and understand faculty has both collective and individual dimensions. The librarian must grasp the nature of "faculty culture" generally and how it differs from the organizational culture of librarians.¹³ The librarian must also be able to recognize and respond appropriately to individual learning styles.

Faculty Culture and Learning Style

What is "culture" in the context of "faculty culture"? Organizational culture includes "group behavioral regularities, group norms, espoused values, embedded skills, habits of thinking, and shared meaning."¹⁴ Participants in a shared culture bestow praise or scorn upon those who act in accordance with—or in opposition to—cultural norms.¹⁵

Faculty culture in particular consists of "perform[ing] many similar tasks, shar[ing] common values and beliefs, and identify[ing] with one another *as colleagues*."¹⁶ A salient feature of faculty culture is the premium placed on pure knowledge.¹⁷ To put it simply, law "faculty are valued for what they know rather than what they can help other people learn."¹⁸ On their scale of knowledge, theoreticians are at the top and practitioners (such as librarians) are relegated to lower ranks.¹⁹ Most faculty are oriented toward their disciplines exclusively, and they "defer to each other based on specialization."²⁰

Another characteristic of faculty culture is a high degree of professional

11. Bodi, *supra* note 8, at 114.

12. *Id.*

13. See generally, Larry Hardesty, *Faculty Culture and Bibliographic Instruction: An Exploratory Analysis*, 44 LIBR. TRENDS 339 (1995). Although Hardesty is concerned with how faculty culture affects support for *student* bibliographic instruction, it is this author's observation that the culture has an analogous impact on support for *faculty* bibliographic instruction.

14. *Id.* at 344 (citing EDGAR H. SCHEIN, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP 8–9 (2d ed. 1992)).

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.* at 345 (emphasis added) (quoting WILLIAM G. TIERNEY & ROBERT A. RHOADS, FACULTY SOCIALIZATION AS CULTURAL PROCESS: A MIRROR OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT 11 (1994)). It should be noted that some nuances of faculty culture may differ across academic disciplines. See, e.g., Jerry G. Gaff & Robert C. Wilson, *Faculty Cultures and Interdisciplinary Studies*, 42 J. HIGHER EDUC. 186 (1971).

17. Hardesty, *supra* note 13, at 348–49.

18. *Id.* at 350 (citing THE GROUP FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION, FACULTY DEVELOPMENT IN A TIME OF RETRENCHMENT 14 (1974)).

19. *Id.* at 349.

20. *Id.*

autonomy.²¹ This can encourage isolation and a prima-donna attitude, which may work against collaboration with, or training by, librarians. A more recent hallmark of faculty culture is a perceived lack of time. New professors in particular are stressed by trying to keep up with knowledge in their fields and their many academic demands.²² Research instruction may be viewed as expendable or as a "luxury" they cannot afford. Finally, because of time pressures and the cultural value placed on "skepticism and critical analysis," faculty often resist proposals for change²³ (including changes in research strategies or techniques).

By contrast, instructional librarians generally subscribe to a "managerial culture,"²⁴ which speaks the language of "goals and objectives" and which values applied knowledge.²⁵ Librarians are less assertive intellectually and produce less theoretical scholarship. They are also socialized to their profession differently from faculty.²⁶ They take an interdisciplinary approach to their work²⁷ and learn to network with other librarians. Unlike faculty, librarians usually operate within hierarchical reporting structures. And, despite similar time pressures, they generally remain idealistic.²⁸ Because of these differences, very few faculty view librarians as academic equals or colleagues²⁹ (although they may see them as professionals³⁰), and very few librarians view themselves as peers of faculty. This status imbalance places librarians at a disadvantage when working with faculty, particularly if librarians try to approach scholarly research and research instruction as a shared enterprise.

In addition to understanding and appreciating "cultural" differences, librarians cannot connect with faculty in a teaching environment without recognizing and adjusting to learning styles. The subject of individual learning style is beyond the scope of this article. Briefly, however, learning style refers to

21. *Id.* at 351-52.

22. *Id.* at 352.

23. *Id.* at 353-54.

24. *Id.* at 351. Just as there are differences in faculty cultures across academic disciplines, there are cultural differences among types of librarians. With respect to bibliographic instruction, for example, the culture of academic librarians values user instruction and independence ("lifelong learning"), and the culture of special librarians values timely information delivery over bibliographic instruction. *See generally*, Roma M. Harris, *Bibliographic Instruction: The Views of Academic, Special, and Public Librarians*, 53 C. & RES. LIBR. 249 (1992). Academic law librarians embrace aspects of both of these cultures.

25. Hardesty, *supra* note 13, at 356.

26. *Id.* at 357.

27. *Id.* at 349.

28. *Id.* at 363.

29. *Id.* at 356-57. A recent study of "mature" university librarians concluded that, among other factors, a collegial attitude and "self-confidence in the librarian role" contributed significantly to faculty acceptance of librarians as colleagues. Jean A. Major, *Mature Librarians and the University Faculty: Factors Contributing to Librarians' Acceptance as Colleagues*, 54 C. & RES. LIBR. 463, 468-69 (1993).

30. *See, e.g.*, Robert T. Ivey, *Teaching Faculty Perceptions of Academic Librarians at Memphis State University*, 55 C. & RES. LIBR. 69, 79-80 (1994).

“the characteristic ways each individual collects, organizes, and transforms information into useful knowledge and action.”³¹ Learning style includes cognitive (perceiving and processing), affective (feeling and valuing), and physiological (environmental) behaviors.³² An important dimension of cognitive style is that learners display preferences for visual, auditory, or tactile/kinesthetic teaching methods.³³

One facet of learning style common to faculty is that they are “adult learners.” Adults are characterized by a “motivat[ion] to learn *as they develop needs and interests that learning will satisfy*.”³⁴ This is the “so what” factor; adults need to feel that the training is relevant to their work, and they will place any information that they learn into the framework of their experiences to date. Adults also have a “need to be self-directing.”³⁵ And among adult learners, individual differences become more pronounced with age and experience, so that a teacher must adjust for variations in “style, time, place, and pace of learning.”³⁶

Implications for Successful Teaching

What are some implications of these cultural and learning-style differences for effective teaching? As instructional librarians, we must recognize that faculty may prefer to turn to “colleagues” before they approach us for research advice.

31. Richard M. Henak, *Effective Teaching: Addressing Learning Styles*, TECH. TCHR., Nov. 1992, at 23, 24. Individuals in the same career tend to have similar learning styles. Jin M. Choi, *Learning Styles of Academic Librarians*, 50 C. & RES. LIBR. 691, 694 (1989) (citing David A. Kolb & Mark S. Plovnik, *The Experiential Theory of Career Development*, in ORGANIZATIONAL CAREERS: SOME NEW PERSPECTIVES 65–87 (John Van Maanen ed., 1978)).

32. THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING STYLES: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING, COURSE DESIGN, AND EDUCATION at xii, (Ronald R. Sims & Sebrania J. Sims eds., 1995) [hereinafter IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING STYLES]; Bodi, *supra* note 8, at 114–15.

33. Blue Wooldridge, *Increasing the Effectiveness of University/College Instruction: Integrating the Results of Learning Style Research into Course Design and Delivery*, in IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING STYLES, *supra* note 32, at 49, 53. Another component of cognitive learning style is personality type, which has received a great deal of attention recently. See, e.g., ALICE M. FAIRHURST & LISA L. FAIRHURST, *EFFECTIVE TEACHING, EFFECTIVE LEARNING: MAKING THE PERSONALITY CONNECTION IN YOUR CLASSROOM* (1995). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is one of the better-known personality instruments. For an example of how the MBTI has been used in a law student setting, see Vernellia R. Randall, *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, First Year Law Students and Performance*, 26 CUMB. L. REV. 63 (1995–96).

For discussion of other aspects of cognitive learning style, see ALFRED G. SMITH, *COGNITIVE STYLES IN LAW SCHOOLS* (1979) (covering law professors in ch. 11); Eileen B. Cohen, *Using Cognitive Learning Theories in Teaching Legal Research*, 1 PERSPECTIVES: TEACHING LEGAL RES. & WRITING 79 (1993).

34. Ronald R. Sims & Sebrania J. Sims, *Learning Enhancement in Higher Education*, in IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING STYLES, *supra* note 32, at 3 (emphasis added) (quoting FREDRIC H. MARGOLIS & CHIP R. BELL, *MANAGING THE LEARNING PROCESS: EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR THE ADULT CLASSROOM* 17 (1984)).

35. *Id.* at 4.

36. *Id.*

The advent of e-mail and e-mail discussion lists makes this easier for faculty, and we should support these independent efforts wherever possible. At the University of Colorado, for example, we encouraged a professor with comparative law interests to subscribe to INT-LAW, a foreign and international law discussion list for librarians and lawyers.³⁷ We also need to be proactive about faculty instruction. By conveying an interest in a professor's subject expertise, and by being alert to new print and online sources that could make the professor's research or teaching more thorough, convenient, or up-to-date, we open the doors to instructional possibilities.

We need to remember that many faculty may perceive technology differently from librarians.³⁸ Faculty may be more concerned with policy issues, such as the impact of technology on research and teaching,³⁹ and less concerned with learning specific applications of technology. They may also view information technologies less specifically than we do.⁴⁰ They may not care to distinguish, for example, between online catalogs, databases, listservs, and CD-ROMs if all of these information sources are accessible from the same computer in their offices. For this reason, it may be hard for faculty to master protocol variations among different types of technologies and to understand the type of information they retrieve from each resource. Finally, as end-user searching becomes the norm, librarians should recognize that faculty may decide not to "play by our rules"⁴¹ or to value search results in the same terms we do.

Faculty instruction must always be time-sensitive. Formal training should be offered at times convenient to them, rather than to us. Most important, librarians need to gear any formal or informal faculty instruction to an individual context as often as possible. We must ask, What does this professor need to know right now, and at what level does she need to know it? How will what I am teaching relate to her personal experiences? Sometimes a professor is motivated to learn how to search the World Wide Web simply to find a college-age daughter's e-mail address. This can be the "hook" for later searching in a legal subject area.

Librarians need to take advantage of "teachable moments" when they arise, but to avoid offering a "lesson" during the hour before a professor teaches class or when a professor simply wants quick information delivery. I have found that

37. As a direct result of reading and responding to INT-LAW postings, the professor has experienced a huge increase in respect for the research abilities of librarians. In fact, the more that faculty are able to interact with academic law librarians in listservs, the closer librarians will come to being accepted as colleagues.

38. See generally, Nancy Dennis & Nancy Dodd Harrington, *Librarian and Faculty Member Differences in Using Information Technologies*, REFERENCE SERVICES REV., Fall 1990, at 47.

39. *Id.* at 50.

40. *Id.* at 49.

41. *Id.*

e-mail communication presents wonderful opportunities for instruction. I can be responsive to a particular question and include research suggestions that can be read and absorbed at the professor's desired pace.

In addition to these considerations, we need to ask, In what setting will particular faculty learn most effectively—their offices, the library, the faculty library, a large classroom? How do they prefer to learn: Are they watchers and thinkers, or doers and feelers, and how can we accommodate these preferences? What aspects of their personalities differ from mine? Am I an introvert, and is a particular professor an extrovert? If I choose to conduct training in his office, will he naturally be attracted to a ringing phone or to activity in the hallway or sidewalk outside his window (and will I be annoyed or rattled by this response)? Finally, how can we provide a variety of learning contexts—individual, small group, large group; visual, auditory, tactile—to ensure that we are reaching everyone on the faculty?

One way to keep track of these important variables is through a database of faculty profiles. The profiles that I have created for the faculty at the University of Colorado include such information as descriptions of their computer hardware and software; research interests and current projects; sabbatical proposals and time frames; recent publications; current internal and external committee service; preferred method of communication with the library (phone, e-mail, memo); library materials routed regularly to them; etc. A final category called "notes" includes profiles for online database searches, listserv subscriptions, or simply comments about their personal preferences and training received.

Once a year, I ask to meet individually with faculty for approximately thirty minutes to review and revise these profiles. Appointments may be arranged via e-mail, phone, or printed form. Faculty are generally relaxed and attentive during these appointments, because they have planned to set aside the time; they are in their own environment with the resources they regularly use; and they know that to get relevant service from the library it benefits them to inform me of their current needs and interests. During these sessions I take the opportunity to query them about use of our online catalog, gateway databases, WESTLAW, LEXIS, WWW, etc. I prepare for these conferences by identifying listservs, specialized databases, print sources, or software applications that might be useful to their research and teaching. If time permits, I teach them how to use some of the online sources, always suggesting that they sit at the keyboard if that feels comfortable to them. For those who learn best by studying documentation, I leave them with handouts. These annual appointments have led to further training sessions in particular areas of interest.

An important caveat to any faculty instruction is "Know thyself." The librarian-teacher must be aware of her strengths and weaknesses and adjust accordingly. This became quite clear to me recently when I was teaching a faculty member how to use e-mail and browse the World Wide Web for

information. The professor, a rising scholar but a technological neophyte, wanted to learn how to subscribe to a law discussion list so that he could communicate with like-minded colleagues. In my zeal to introduce him to the wonders of technology, I took the opportunity to teach him how to locate the list of “law lists” on the WWW; how to bookmark the site in Netscape to be able to find other lists later; how to interpret the subscription instructions for the listserv; and, finally, how to compose and send the e-mail message to subscribe. I sensed that I had overstepped the boundaries of effective teaching—and left myself prey to “cultural warfare”—when I began to explain how listprocessing software works and why we needed to suppress his e-mail signature block before sending the message. He stopped me in midsentence and, with a look of genuine astonishment and horror, said, “Do you have any idea how many neurons in your brain are occupied with this kind of information?” I had to laugh.

Vive la difference!