NOCALL News

Northern California Association of Law Libraries
A chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tony Pelczynski

I'm a born quitter. In college, I did not hesitate to drop a class if I caught even the slightest hint that it might prove boring (or excessively challenging). As a teenager, my forearms aflame from dredging chicken parts through vats of infernal marinade, I once quit a job at El Pollo Asado after a single inaugural shift (I was ultimately too sheepish to pick up the paycheck covering my three hours of work). And I'm sure I have walked away from a relationship or two in a manner that the kids of today would call "ghosting."

I also abhor event planning: there is little I hate more than excessive choice, and I find differentiating between largely similar venues, menus, tablecloths, etc. to be agonizing and spiritually deadening. I recall precisely one screaming, gesticulating, no-speaking-for-several-days, one-of-us-is-sleeping-on-the-couch-tonight fight with my wife, and it occurred while putting together a party celebrating our wedding. As I write this column, she is currently planning something for her sixtieth birthday next year, and I am steering well clear of the entire process.

So, when, as NOCALL Vice President/President-Elect, it eventually dawned on me that I was tasked with spearheading the planning of 2023's NOCALL Spring Institute, my first inclination was to resign. My wife talked me down, however, and I carried on. At some point during Spring Institute preparation, I also stumbled across an online image of a t-shirt bearing the simple slogan "You Can Always Quit." This idea subsequently lodged itself in my brain, and as my Spring Institute-induced anxiety levels spiked, the phrase became something of a personal mantra. I am not usually prone to absorbing or disseminating pithy bumper sticker wisdom, but I found its simple truth to be liberating.

I am not an especially religious person. At the same time, I am solidly middle-aged, and not markedly healthy – I assume the Grim Reaper's icy embrace is probably nearer to me than I would prefer. These twinned facts frequently compel me to ponder how my remaining years on earth might best be spent. If a person believes that nothing awaits them on the other side of life, apart from a vacuous eternal void, then that person should probably not spend their short time on earth doing things they find unpleasant. Now, this outlook may not be entirely realistic: not everyone can, say, simply walk away from a job they hate. But the knowledge that quitting is a possibility (if only theoretically), an option tucked away in my back pocket, has brought me a great deal of comfort when confronted with the gaping maw of eternal nonexistence. When my ashes are eventually blown away by the nuclear winds of whatever dystopian Skynet-inspired apocalyptic hellscape OpenAI has in store for us, it will matter not one iota that I left my teenaged El Pollo Asado supervisor in a lurch back in 1986. Remember: you can always quit!

Happy Holidays, everyone!

IN THIS ISSUE

Professional Reading in Review

Refugio Acker-Ramirez and Kristin Brandt,
U.C. Davis Law Library

"How Well Does ChatGPT Handle Reference Inquiries? An Analysis Based on Question Types and Question Complexities," by Katie Lai, *College & Research Libraries,* (November 2023), vol. 85, no. 6, pp. 974-995.

This study assessed ChatGPT's ability to answer actual reference questions received by the Marvin Duchow Music Library at McGill University in Canada. The authors developed an assessment rubric to evaluate ChatGPT's performance based on question type and difficulty. ChatGPT performed best in response to the simplest and most straightforward questions and the worst for the most complex questions that required subject expertise and advanced research skills. Interestingly, ChatGPT was useful in questions that required language competency in French. It was also able to draft reply letters in French to questions that were asked in English. Overall, the authors found ChatGPT unsuitable for answering reference questions. ChatGPT lacked the core knowledge for scholarly research, lacked the ability to detect nuances, and provided inaccurate information.

"A Beginner's Guide to Library Association Service," by Catherine Sassen, *College & Undergraduate Libraries,* (2023), vol. 30, nos. 1-2, pp. 44-52 (2023).

Librarians join professional organizations for many reasons: to contribute to their profession, learn new perspectives, develop professionally, advocate, and network, to name a few. But how do new librarians decide what organizations to join and what their commitment level should be? In this article, the author covers the benefits of library association service, how to find service opportunities, and how to succeed in service roles. Importantly, the author also addresses how to say no to service opportunities that do not fit with the librarian's interests or professional goals. This article is a useful read for those newer to the profession or anyone who would like to get more involved in professional service.

"Adapting Legal Research for a First-Generation Audience," by Thomas Sneed, *Legal Reference Services Quarterly,* (November 2023), pp. 1-15.

The author shares their experience as a first-generation law student and discusses the importance of supporting first-generation students in higher education. The article highlights various programs and initiatives aimed at helping first-generation students succeed, including a course redesign program at Washburn University to incorporate inclusive pedagogy for first-generation students. Small changes were made to the course including adding inclusive language to the syllabus, scheduling individual meetings with students, allowing creative formats for assignments, and incorporating diversity and inclusion into assignment examples. The author illustrates the importance of critical self-reflection and taking small, manageable steps when redesigning a course, and this article might provide helpful insights for others looking to improve engagement with first-generation law students.

"The Importance of an Onboarding Process for Librarian Success," by Sonali Sugrim, *Journal of New Librarianship,* (2023), vol. 8, no. 2, pp 69-73.

The onboarding process for new librarians is critical for their long-term success, but many libraries do not have effective onboarding programs. The author shares that an onboarding program should clearly communicate job expectations, provide documentation of policies and procedures, designate a mentor, and commit to regular check-ins. Clear communication from leadership sets the tone and prevents new librarians from feeling abandoned, and thorough documentation ensures institutional knowledge is retained when personnel change. An onboarding process with these elements fosters a healthy work environment where new librarians can thrive. The author calls for library leadership to make onboarding a priority to ensure librarian retention and success.

Legal Tech Recap

Kristie Chamorro, UC Berkeley Law Library

You guessed it – generative AI (GenAI) continues to dominate legal tech news, including the drama of OpenAI firing and then rehiring Sam Altman to GPT-4 passing the legal ethics exam.

I'm sticking with the usual format of highlighting new tools and updates that have been released over the past few months. As always, please let me know if there is a specific topic or tool that you would like to see covered here.

Clearbrief

Clearbrief rolled out several new AI-powered features over the last few months, including: Hyperlinked Timeline for creating case chronologies with hyperlinks to source documents; Ask Your Docs, where users can query their document sets for specific information; and Verified Fact Section, a tool for incorporating information from e-discovery documents directly into a Word document.

Bob Ambrogi reported on these updates, including a video demonstration, and Law.com covered the developments.

LexisNexis

In late October, LexisNexis made legal tech headlines with the launch of its GenAI legal research product, Lexis+AI to US law firm customers. The release was widely covered, including posts on LawSites, Dewey B Strategic, ALM/Law.com, and Above the Law.

In November, LexisNexis expanded its Lexis+ AI suite with two new features, Lexis Snapshot and Lexis Create, to enhance legal workflow efficiency. Lexis Snapshot, available to CourtLink subscribers, uses GenAI to summarize federal district court complaints, detailing the nature of suit, parties, harms, and remedies. Lexis Create is an add-on for Word that integrates Lexis content into the drafting process. A recent Geek in Review podcast episode, An Inside Look at LexisNexis' AI Sprint, takes a deep dive into LexisNexis' AI products.

Pre/Dicta

Pre/Dicta has developed legal analytics that it says can predict a federal judge's ruling on a motion to dismiss with 85% accuracy. Its creator, Dan Rabinowitz, won the "Innovator of the Year" award at ALM's 2023 Legal Week conference. Jean O'Grady recently reported on the expansion of its capabilities, including prediction for additional motion types, a new dashboard, litigation timeline predictions, and other new features.

ShareFile for Legal

ShareFile for Legal was recently featured on Ambrogi's How It Works video series. The video showcases ShareFile's capabilities in expediting client onboarding, organizing secure client documents, improving collaboration with integrated task management, and increasing operational efficiency through automated workflows and secure document collaboration.

Thomson Reuters

Thomson Reuters made headlines with the November 15 announcement of a suite of GenAI tools that are integrated into Westlaw Precision, following its acquisition of Casetext. The new products include a GenAI assistant, a development platform for GenAI skills, and AI-enhanced functionalities for Practical Law.

Thomson Reuters is offering these AI Assisted Research tools to US Precision customers (but not to academic customers yet). Ambrogi covered the release, including a beta version of GenAI in Practical Law set for release next year. O'Grady attended and covered the November press event, stating that we are "standing on the doorstep of change."

Trellis

Trellis continues to expand its platform with the recent addition of South Carolina, New Hampshire, Iowa, and Kansas state trial courts.

VerifAI

In a December LawSites post, Ambrogi showcased VerifAI, a Word add-in from SpotDraft that accelerates contract review using GenAI. The post features a video demo by SpotDraft's co-founder Rohith Salim.

vLex

In late October, vLex announced the release of Vincent AI, its "AI-powered virtual assistant." The new platform (initially released as a beta version) include tools for completing first-draft research memos, building arguments and summarizing documents. The release was covered in the ABA Journal and ALM/Law.com, as well by Ambrogi and O'Grady.

Wolters Kluwer

The Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory Future Ready Lawyer Survey Report, which includes insights from 700 legal professionals across the U.S. and Europe, indicates high expectations for rapid adoption of GenAI in the legal sector despite potential economic and ethics challenges. The report also identifies key trends impacting the legal industry, including compliance complexity, growing demand for specialized legal services and for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) expertise.

Things You Should Check Out

In her October 31 post, AI and the Future of Law Libraries: Opportunity or Armageddon, O'Grady discusses the evolution of law libraries and the impact of technology, particularly AI, on the profession. She also highlights a national discussion initiative led by the University of Arizona's Law Library on Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Law Libraries, aiming to provide guidance on integrating AI into law library operations.

In November, Vanderbilt Law School announced the creation of the Vanderbilt AI Legal Lab (VAILL). In a recent edition of The Geek in Review podcast, the hosts interview the VAILL's co-leaders, Cat Moon and Mark Williams, about the lab's mission and its focus on leveraging GenAI to improve access to legal services.

ERIN BROWN

Librarian, Technical Services, Office of Legislative Counsel

How did you choose law librarianship as a career?

I actually fell into it. I started as a legislative clerk in the law library for the Legislative Counsel Bureau after I graduated college, gradually moving up to a Library Technical Assistant. My supervisor, who became a mentor, advised me to go to "library school" and get my MLIS and since it was related to my current position, I was able to do so while working. The program was at San Jose State so I took hybrid classes. Odd back then but the norm now!

If you were not working as a law librarian, what would you most likely be doing?

I probably would have gone to law school and worked in advocacy in youth services or the ACLU doing civil liberties. I'm closing in on retirement from the state and am looking at expanding my horizons. I love what I do so if there's any way to incorporate law librarianship with my post-retirement life, that would be a plus. I think it would be handy in helping youth in crisis, or as a researcher for a non-profit.

What's the best advice you've ever received working as a librarian?

The best advice that I received was that patrons/requesters don't always know what they're looking for so part of my job will be not just finding their answers, but finding their questions! Developing good reference interviews is not just a skill I've honed at work but also in my daily life. I'm sure other librarians have noticed this skill at work in their regular lives as well.

What is your favorite legal book and why?

Not a legal book per se but a research book; *The California Blue Book 2000*, sesquicentennial edition. My mom, Cheryl Brown, was working at the California Secretary of the Senate's office and was the main contributor to the enormous book. She sought research help from my former supervisor, Linda Heatherly, so I was able to help Linda with research questions. That could have been when the bug for research – governmental and legal historical – first hit me. I love history, especially legal history and the book was beautifully done. A copy sits on my home office desk in memoriam of my mom.

What 5 books made the biggest impression on you? How did they do so?

Vietnam: A History by Stanley Karnow – This book changed my perspective and compassion regarding that war and how brutal it was on our country and Vietnam. It piqued my interest in foreign policy, and I changed my major emphasis from American politics to American and international politics in college.

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World – I listened to this book during Covid and a few months after my mom died. I am glad I did. Not only do you get actors mimicking the voices of the Dalai Lama and Bishop Tutu, but you get to laugh through your pain. It was inspiring and lovely, and even brought me to tears at times.

The Hounds of the Baskervilles – I read this as a child and fell in love with mysteries. I think it probably helped my instinct to dig until I find the truth but also my fascination in going on wild intellectual rides. Besides being scared out of my mind, I love following mysteries – murder mysteries, capers, treasure hunting, convoluted conspiracies, and spy stuff.

Plato's The Republic – The concept of Justice is a huge motivator in my life. It's why I mentioned wanting to work with youth in crisis or in civil liberties. My heart aches when I see injustice in the world, but it also plays an integral part in navigating my interpersonal relationships.

Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Jesus's Childhood Friend – This is probably my favorite book. The book is hilarious, smart, and a great concept. A slick, and sarcastic what-if for the missing years of Jesus Christ. It's not a book that takes itself seriously, but it's well written and a fun read.

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