



Spring 2012

Message from the President

Greetings, WPLLA members!

Our year is winding down, and I cannot believe that my time as your president is already drawing to a close! We've had a great year, and I've been proud to be associated with such a fine group of people. I do thank you for the opportunity to serve this past year. I would also like to thank those that served with me on the board: Joel Fishman, Karen Shephard, Kate Frey, Amy Lovell, Stosh Jonjak, Newkirk Barnes, and Mary Stacy. I could not have asked for a better, more cooperative and inspiring group to work with!

We've had many interesting programs, thanks to Karen Shephard (your incoming president) and the programming committee: Louise Beswick, Kristen Baginski, Cindy Cicco, Pat Roncevich, and Mary Stacy. We've had a wide variety of programs on project management, forensics, Marcellus oil and gas, useful technology and gadgets for the library, a history of lawyers, and will be hearing from our county librarians on the day-to-day life in a county library soon. I have enjoyed each and every program, and hope that you have too.

And also a big thank-you to our very diligent webmaster, Linda Tashbook. She has gone over and above to keep our website current and relevant for us!

I hope to see many of you at the Annual Spring Banquet, which this year will be held at the Renaissance Hotel, in May. At that time, we will welcome the new board members, and Karen Shephard will become your new president.

Melanie Johnston, Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott, LLC

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Upcoming Wplla Events and Announcements

-- Travel Grant for AALL Conference, deadline is April 23, 2012. Boston AALL, July 21 - 24

Sharpen those pencils, imbibe in some caffeine, and tell the world (or, I guess, the WPLLA scholarship committee) about your law librarianship career goals and you just may be selected to receive a \$500 grant to help you attend the 2012 AALL Conference in Boston!

-- County librarians meeting, Friday, April 20th

Meet local county law librarians on Friday, April 20th, from 11:45 to 1:30 at the Allegheny County Law Library (City-County Building, room 921, 414 Grant Street, Pittsburgh, PA). Beaver County Law Library's Bette Dengel will speak about her position in her speech, entitled "Life in a Small County Law Library."

-- Annual Spring Banquet, May 16th

What's better than feasting on Char-Broiled Chicken, Roasted Fingerling Potatoes, and New York Cheese Cake at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh (107 Sixth Street)? Why, doing so with all your fellow WPLLA members of course! Put a big, red circle on your calendar for the evening of Wednesday, May 16th--it'll be a hoot!

Newsletter Committee Members

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Learning about Forensic Science and the Law

By Sallie Smith

Imagine investigating the collection of DNA from spent shotgun shells, the evaluation of individual shoe wear patterns, the temperature analysis of a 9 mm firearm, or the correspondence of the “Happy Face Killer.” These are just a sampling of the research projects by students in Duquesne University’s Forensic Science and Law Program, a 5-year curriculum that begins with freshman entry and ends with a Master of Science degree (<http://www.duq.edu/forensic-science/>.)

WPLLA members learned about this academic forensic program at a recent March 21st lunch meeting, “Uncovering the Truth: Forensic Science & Law.” Featured speaker was the program’s director, Dr. Frederick W. Fochtman. With more than 35 years of experience as a forensic professional and having served ten years as the Director and Chief Toxicologist of the Pittsburgh Medical Examiner’s Office Forensic Laboratory, Dr. Fochtman is well-qualified to speak on both forensic science in general and Duquesne’s Forensic Science and Law program in particular.

I admit I was drawn to the program thinking I’d hear an insider’s account of crime scene investigation. However, Dr. Fochtman was wise to temper our television-fueled imaginations with a real-world description of the field of forensic science and the training required for the profession. First and foremost, students must possess an aptitude for mathematics and the sciences. They are highly trained to apply scientific principles and techniques to the analysis of evidence. At the same time, they must understand the legal framework in which the science is utilized and their role as critical adjuncts to the truth-seeking process of our systems of justice.

Duquesne’s program began in 2000 when the Cyril H. Wecht Institute of Forensic Science and Law was founded through a collaboration of the schools of law, nursing, and natural and environmental sciences. The goal was to offer a multidisciplinary program that investigates the application of modern science to the pursuit of truth and justice in criminal, civil, and family legal proceedings. Today, the University offers certificate and Masters programs in Forensic Science and Law, as well as a forensic track in the School of Nursing.

The master's curriculum provides students with an eclectic mix of courses such as: Introduction to Biostatistics, Torts, Quality Assurance & Lab Administration Management, Ethics for Science, Firearms & Toolmarks, Constitutional Criminal Proceedings, and Latent Fingerprint Analysis. This variety of coursework allows students to readily move into various areas of the profession. Some graduates secure positions in government and the military, others work for laboratory equipment manufacturers and suppliers, and still others pursue postgraduate work in law or medicine.

The certificate program offers an alternative approach to forensic science. Through online and live courses, professionals from a wide variety of disciplines are introduced to the basics of forensic science and can even participate in a mock crime scene investigation under the tutelage of seasoned homicide detectives and forensic scientists. Additionally, the Institute sponsors an annual conference, Forensic Friday seminars and CLE courses for professionals to learn what is possible and what errors can occur in the forensic investigation process.

Dr. Fochtman noted that many technological advances have occurred over the course of his career. The ABO blood typing once used for convictions has been improved by highly accurate DNA typing. Robotics systems are used in laboratories to improve precision, decrease errors and reduce analysis processing costs. In suspicious deaths, a single drop of blood might be sampled and preserved for possible future DNA analysis. And improved analytical techniques afford forensic toxicologists a high level of substance identification not possible 10 years ago.

While you may not interact with the criminal justice system in your day job, you just might want to investigate Duquesne's forensics programs as background for that crime novel you've always wanted to write!



Post Graduation Employment Statistics at Law Schools **By Michael Fleckenstein**

The legal community has been, and continues to be, in a state of flux. The Great Recession wreaked untold havoc on the economy, sparing few, and instituting in its wake a wave of changes that still reverberate today. Law firms and the universities that educate society's future legal force were no exception. These changes range from smaller class sizes in the law schools to smaller summer associate classes in many law firms. With fewer opportunities for full

time employment and more applicants for the position that are available, it seems only natural that many feel that there's someone they should be able to blame for their predicament, which is what a group of former law students decided to do when they filed lawsuits against numerous law schools for, what they perceived to be, their misrepresentation of employment statistics.

Last year, several graduates of New York Law School filed suit against their alma mater alleging that the post graduate employment statistics used in marketing materials are misleading. The statistics, they claim, seem to indicate that well over ninety percent of graduates obtain full time positions in the legal community. However, the claim further states that these statistics are skewed, as they include individuals who obtain jobs in fields that do not require a law degree and have widely varying salaries. For example, someone could be employed at a Starbucks and still be added to the tally of graduates who obtained full-time employment. Lastly, the plaintiffs allege, the statistics are obviously false due to the fact that New York Law School is routinely ranked near the bottom of the annual rankings published by *U.S. News and World Reports*.

New York Supreme Court Judge Melvin Schweitzer dismissed the case stating that at no point did NYLS claim that the statistics represented the picture painted by the plaintiffs of a ninety-two percent employment rate that consisted solely of graduates who obtained full-time, permanent positions at law firms. Additionally, using the plaintiffs' own logic against them, Judge Schweitzer pointed out that it should appear obvious to sophisticated graduate students prior to enrollment at such a lowly ranked school that the claims of a ninety-two percent employment rate are wholly false or at least inflated to some degree. The plaintiffs plan on appealing the decision.

In the wings, though, are more lawsuits aimed at other law schools for similar issues. Attorneys hope to file twenty more class action suits against select schools by Memorial Day with an additional twenty-five more schools by Labor Day. The goal is to arrive at some form of global settlement.

Several side effects of such litigation are the attention it has drawn from members of Congress and the pressure upon the ABA to demand much more specific information from law schools regarding post graduate employment. With student loan debt reaching one trillion dollars, law schools might be only the first to feel the need to change.