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High School Law and Access to Justice LA Law Library Program Description/Components

Program introduction:

LA Law Library is the second largest public law library in the United States (the first being the law collection of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.). It serves primarily the self-represented individuals throughout Los Angeles County who are interacting with the courts or legal system on their own behalf. The library's collection consists of more than 35 miles of shelving and one million volumes, plus access to over 25 different legal databases. It is also heavily used by solo, corporate and large law firm practices, as well as academic researchers and government agencies. Professional reference librarians staff a public access reference desk during all hours the library is open. Their primary role is to assess legal issues and provide meaningful access to applicable library tools and resources to help address a particular legal matter.

For local high school students, the goal of the library's Workplace Tour and Access to Justice Community Conversation programs is to provide a platform where "the law goes live." Here, the high school civics, government, and U.S. history classes are enhanced through interactive engagement with actual legal materials and documents and the legal process. This provide an opportunity to learn about the multitude of career opportunities open to future lawyers and legal industry professionals and to think critically about equal access to the judicial system for all, including those who cannot afford the fees of an attorney.

LA Law Library provides three programming options for high schools, described below. All programming, except the workplace tour, can take place either at the library or on-site at a participating school.

1. **The Workplace Tours Program**
The Access to Justice Program
2. **Law Curriculum Support Program**

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1. The Workplace Tours Program

Program Elements:

➤ After students and teachers are escorted up from parking (which we provide), we greet students, and introduce the tour guides and program leaders. Ryan Metheny, a former practicing attorney and now a law librarian has been the primary tour guide and leader, plus our very energetic Global Law librarian, Neel Agrawal, assists with parts of the tour.

➤ Introduce library – its history, size, purpose and why it’s relevant to the students. We tour the reading room, which is the part of the library that contains all of our reference and more heavily used material. We introduce students to the reference desk and what reference librarians do; we show students where to find California statutes and case law; explain the use of practice materials like treatises and practice guides; plus we introduce federal statutes and cases, and show where to find laws of other states in the library. We encourage questions throughout this part of the tour, which we find keeps students engaged and lets us tailor things a bit to what the students find interesting or want to understand.

➤ Training center round table: student introductions & examinations of resource (show and tell). This part of the tour takes place in our new training center, which is an interactive classroom space. The students pair up and each are given a print resource to explore briefly, after which we go around the room, and the students introduce themselves and talk about their resource (why it’s useful, who might use it and when, etc.) We always look to draw upon interesting and teen-relevant titles from our collection. Students have been known to hang back and explore a title more in-depth as the rest of the group prepares to move on to the next portion of the program.

➤ Following the tour, the students take part in a voting simulation exercise designed to explore the evolution of voting rights in the United States and the impact it may have had on key presidential elections. In particular, this online simulation exposes how certain groups were “locked out of the ballot box” through substantial periods of American history. Students “cast a vote” by visiting our voting simulation website, and are asked to select certain profile characteristics (gender, age, race, etc.) according to their own circumstances or by entering fictional information. Students are then assigned a federal presidential election, given short profiles of the presidential candidates from the randomly selected year and asked to vote. Students are then told whether their



vote was accepted or not based on the voting rights that were in effect as of the date of that election. Inevitably, students are surprised to learn who was and was not allowed to vote. Discussion centered around five follow-up questions is lively!

➤ Return to training center, student PCs: demonstrate use of online resources. Here, we set up each student (or students pair up, depending on the size of the group) with student PCs in our training center, and then they follow along as we demonstrate the use of some online legal resources relevant to teens. One of our favorite resources is freely available outside of the library through our website. Students are shown how to access the full text of the complete Nolo press library and shown sample titles that address issues which teens could find relevant.

➤ Workplace panel. This is a panel of 5-8 legal professionals who discuss their career path and answer student questions. Panel members include current and former lawyers, paralegals, legal secretaries, translators, law librarians, other library staff and judges from our board of trustees. The “workplace panel” is designed to empower students by having them speak with members of the library staff, and others, about their career options, the many different paths that can lead to a career in the law, and the many different types of careers available within the legal field. Each of the panel members are assigned to a small group of students. Panelists tell the students about their career path, i.e., what each was like in high school, what he/she studied in college, what made the panelist want to pursue a career in law, and all those other things that led the panelist to where he/she is today. After 10 minutes or so, panelists will switch to a new group of students, so each group can get the perspectives of a few different panel members.

Program Conclusion:

The program concludes with students reflecting on this field experience with evaluation questions aimed at helping us to gauge the most successful components of the workplace tour and to learn ways in which we might improve on the model. We value the feedback, seek information regarding levels of engagement and appreciate the opportunity, whenever possible, to learn from the teachers additional ways in which LA Law Library might further compliment the school’s curriculum.



2. The Access to Justice Program

Program Introduction:

The framers of our Constitution recognized the importance of the courts when they made the judiciary one of the three coequal branches of our government. The courts are where we go to have our rights protected, our injuries redressed and our disputes resolved. However, while the courts play an important role in our everyday lives, both funding cutbacks and the high cost of hiring an attorney has created both a backlog and lack of access to our legal system for our most vulnerable populations. How is this ‘justice gap’ addressed in Los Angeles and what can be done to bridge that gap between the need for civil legal assistance by low and moderate income people and the resources available to meet that need? This program can be produced either on campus or on site at the library. It can be a stand-alone program or accompany a Workplace Tour Program the library conducts on site at LA Law Library.

Program Elements:

Overview of the issues. In order to understand the magnitude of the need for affordable legal services in California, Ryan Metheny, program coordinator, will open an information session with a discussion focusing on California’s demographics and access to justice as a public policy issue and as a companion to social justice in general. The students will engage in a dialog comparing social justice and access to justice, how these two concepts overlap and interrelate, and how each may impact students’ personal experience, family members or friends. Ryan will then introduce the topic addressing additional sources for legal assistance, including the role of law libraries.

Introduction to Access Points for Legal Assistance in Los Angeles

An overview of legal aid in LA, including a referral list, will open the discussion on what legal aid does, how the nonprofits and government funded agencies differ from one another, how they are funded (from sliding scale to unbundled) and what each option provides, and, finally, what restrictions factor into the services available to self-represented individuals.

Hands-On Exercise

Students will be introduced to a type of legal proceeding called a class action lawsuit. Students will learn what a class action is and how it differs from



general litigation in that it can result in a beneficial outcome to members of society, in general vs. the individual.

Following the overview and discussion about the Cy Pres process, students will participate in a simulation where teams of ‘attorneys’ have party to or counsel on a class action case involving a potential Cy Pres award. The student ‘attorneys’ will receive a list of several Los Angeles nonprofit legal assistance organizations and conduct online research to learn more about the organization, its work, successes, and impact on the community.

Teams will research, make notes, deliberate among the team members to finalize on one selected entity, build a convincing case (advocate) for their ‘nomination’ and present their case before a panel of their peers. Students engage in team work, research skills, negotiating, composition, editing, public speaking and advocacy for a cause.

Program Conclusion

The library will attempt to coordinate a school visit and Q&A session with the winning legal aid organization.

In addition, when possible and schedules permitting, LA Law Library will facilitate a full panel of legal aid leaders from the representative organizations addressed in the lesson plan. Representatives from agencies located within the Los Angeles will share information about their services, insights about their work as well as personal career experiences.

Students will learn, first hand, about the best resources in legal aid available to low and moderate income individuals and families in Los Angeles, understand the strengths of each, and become empowered as ambassadors sharing valuable A2J (access to justice) resources within their own communities.



3. Law Curriculum Support Program

Program Introduction:

Many staff members at the library have significant experience in the legal industry, including current and former practicing attorneys. For schools that offer classes in law or legal topics, LA Law Library shares this expertise with students in support of school curricula and programs. Library representatives can provide guest lectures and facilitate in-class experience of the legal system such as mock mediations or arbitrations, or serve as coaches or mentors for existing programs like Teen Court and mock trial.

Program Components:

➤**Guest lecture on criminal law.** Attorney staff member explains the finer points of the criminal justice system, including the legal elements of common crimes, the concepts of act and intent, and the constitutional protections afforded to the accused.

➤**Mediation activity and civil procedure explanation.** Students are instructed on the basics of civil procedure using a well-known civil case as an example (e.g., the Facebook, Dodgers, or Erin Brockovitch cases). Students are then assigned to represent a party in the lawsuit and conduct a mock mediation, with the goal of reaching a settlement between the parties. Each side presents its case, and is given a secret “goal” in the settlement negotiations unknown to the other side.

➤**Support Teen Court or mock trial programs.** Attorney staff members can serve as coaches, mentors or judges in existing school programs like Teen Court or mock trial, applying their legal experience to help students resolve disputes and develop oral argument and presentation skills.

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