



Law Library Lights

Snapshots from the Shutdown

Compiled by Andrea Muto

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From the Editors: The recent shutdowns in DC, MD, and VA threw libraries into a dramatic period of adjustment as we sought to rapidly implement new processes by which to continue to serve our patrons. This meant a steep learning curve for many of us and an unprecedented series of changes in how our libraries operate from day-to-day. In response, Andrea Muto reached out to current and past LLSDC Board Members and SIS/Committee Chairs to see how they have been managing these shifts and what advice they have for others.

Emily Florio

**Senior Research Manager, Hogan Lovells
LLSDC Past President**

In addition to video chats with friends and family, I've been trying to find silver linings amongst all this uncertainty,

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apprehension, and discomfort. A highlight for me so far is that I've welcomed a new cat named Minnie (officially Professor Minerva McGonagall) into my home and she has already brought me laughs and happiness during this otherwise bizarre time. I encourage you to also look for small victories or silver linings.



Professor Minerva McConagall's, a.k.a. Minnie, typing skills aren't quite up to par, but her interpersonal skills are on point.

Keith Gabel
Library Consultant, HBR Consulting Editor
LLSDC General Legal Publications Union List

Covid19 has put a real damper on inter-library loans. I cannot access my own collection, let alone ask anyone for a copy of anything that isn't available electronically. Office closures hit DC just as we were prepping for a new edition of the General Legal Publications Union List. As the editor of the GLP, I find myself pondering new and convincing ways to encourage continued support of the idea of ILL, both in hard copy and digitally, let alone for this particular publication. Still, I'm comforted by the idea that we will be back in our libraries soon, sorting out how law libraries will be forever changed by this outbreak.

As for how our profession has changed since the offices have closed, one thing strikes me in particular. It is the power behind the statement of "That book/periodical is available in hard copy only. Can I get you something else?" I've heard very few complaints from attorneys in response to it, which demonstrates just how far expectations have changed from just a few months ago.

Strange days, indeed.

Megan Moltrup
Baker McKenzie, Research Librarian
PLL-SIS President

Working from home has actually been much busier work-wise than when I was in the office. If I didn't have my co-worker I'm not sure how I'd get through it.

Jokes aside, some days are a struggle, but I think accepting that it's part of our new "normal" helps. Feel your feelings, don't dismiss them! Then do something for you! I've been baking, working my way through my large library book pile (that was what I stocked up on while everyone else was grabbing their toilet paper), and I just built a Lego skyline of Hogwarts!

Technology has helped not only work wise, but personally, as well. We've been having game nights

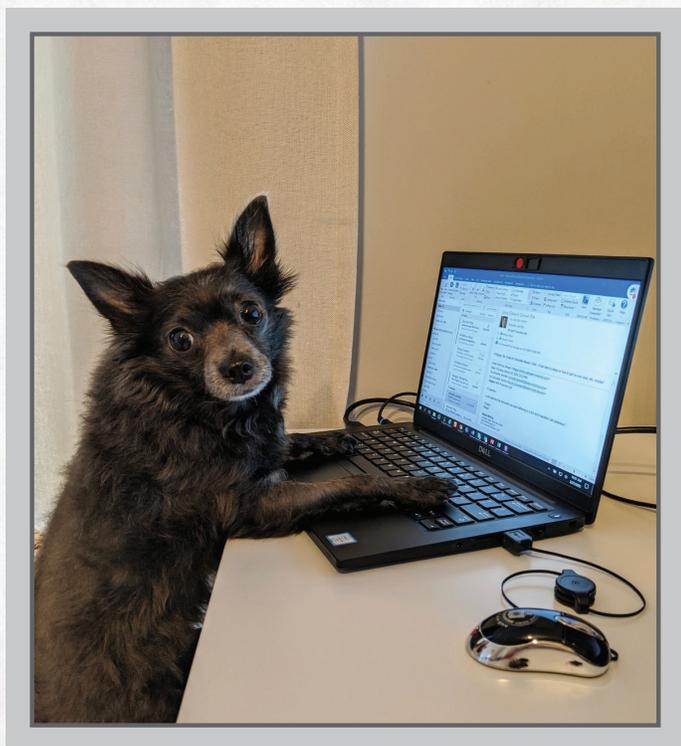
and video chats with friends across the country. We haven't prioritized these hang out sessions in the past, and I'm really hoping it continues post-quarantine. Looking for a great game to play with friends and family online? Codenames!!!

<http://codenames.plus/>

Victoria L. Capatosto
Research and Instruction Librarian, Howard
University School of Law Library
LLSDC Corresponding Secretary

I have always been a huge advocate of telework and remote work options, so I'm looking at the remote work aspect of this crisis as an opportunity to test-run my imagined ideal working situation. My home environment isn't perfect for two people to be teleworking at the same time. My fiancé took over the living space of our 1-bedroom apartment and I've been using our bedroom as my office. To make it into a better workspace I brought my office chair and second monitor home, re-purposed my vanity into a desk, and pulled out an old folding table for extra space. I'm being super patient with myself because some days are more productive than others, which is pretty much the same as before, except now I'm hyper-aware of myself since my human connections are severely limited.

Some of things I'm doing to stay focused and alert are opening the window — even if it's cold outside — for at least part of the day to get some fresh air, and taking walks around the apartment for a break from the desk. My partner and I are doing a water-drinking challenge by keeping track of how many glasses of water we drink a day on a



Megan's co-worker – making sure she knows they're all in this together.

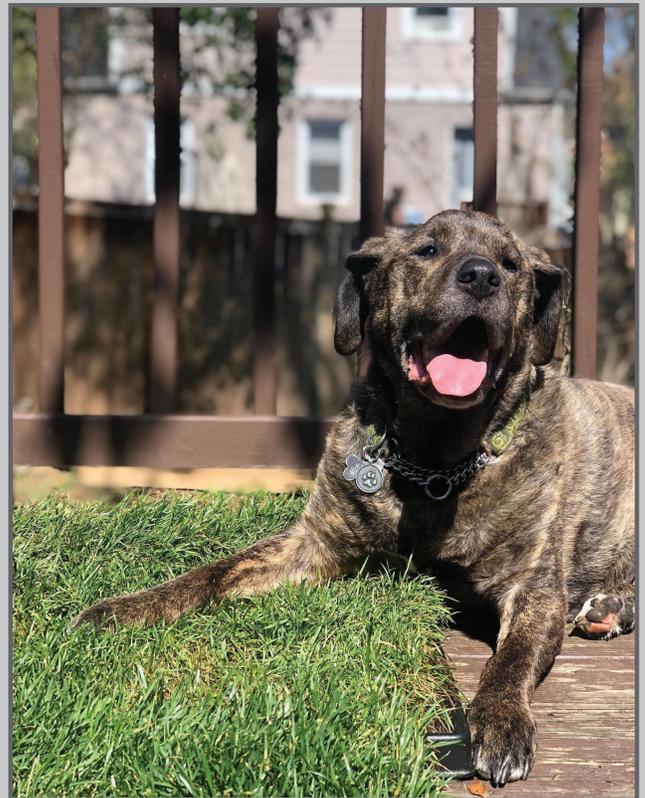
handwritten chart; the goal is 1 gallon a day, and just like anything else some days are easier than others — but we feel accomplished when we reach this goal. I'm sure many others are experiencing this as well: I find myself working longer hours. In order to maintain my mental health I'm scheduling exercise into my day to make sure it gets done because I need to give my mind breaks.

I'm extremely lucky to be safe at home with my partner and appreciate the effort we're both making to be respectful of our new office mates (cats included); we're finding that our strong foundation of open and honest communication is key. The main part of in-person work that I miss is helping the students that stop by my office. I hope that my students and HUSL colleagues are all staying safe. Access to technology is vital for telework and for keeping in touch with long distance family and friends. My circle is actually being better about keeping in touch now than ever before, even though most of us have been long-distance for many years. There is a lot we are all learning from this crisis. I'm taking every bright spot I can find and holding on tight.

Kristina Alayan
Director, Howard University School
of Law Library
LLSDC President

Working from home full-time is not for me! I appreciate the convenience and flexibility as an occasional option, but there are so many things I miss about going into the office -- from seeing staff and students to having a clear division between my

home and work life. And yet, there are silver linings to this turbulent time. Some of the solutions we identified to help maintain library services through this period are working so well we plan to keep them. On a more personal note: am I the only person who inexplicably hoarded "fancy" candles for a "fancy" future day? I've stopped waiting and now I burn them during each of my Zoom meetings. Positive reinforcement at work! I also have an older dog who is on borrowed time. The fact that I can give Sophie extra snuggles, treats, and time to lay in the sun throughout the day (like she deserves) has been a real gift to us both. ■



Ms. Sophie, a reminder that being outside, giving and receiving love, and enjoying the small things in life can remain life goals despite this craziness.

President's Column

Look for the Helpers

Kristina J. Alayan

Director, Law Library, and Assistant Professor of Law, Howard University School of Law, kristina.alayan@law.howard.edu



I haven't met all of the current LLSDC members, and yet I know that each of you has been impacted by COVID-19. Some members may be overwhelmed by increases in demand and new, unexpected responsibilities. Others may be worrying that they (or their staff) are ill-equipped to pivot seamlessly into a remote environment: Does everyone have the necessary equipment? Internet access? Training? In the famous Fred Rogers' quote, children were encouraged in times of fear and uncertainty to "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."¹

Bearing witness to the helpers in our communities can give us hope when we feel helpless. It's second nature to reflect on our first responders and medical professionals at the front lines of every emergency.² And yet, I have no doubt there have been countless examples taking place within our membership. Animal shelters are empty because the demand for fostering and adoptions are so high.³ A state with surplus ventilators shipped them to a sister state overwhelmed with hot spots.⁴ Families and friends are reconnecting virtually.⁵ Musicians are sharing their talent with local and global audiences.⁶ Librarians are doing what we do best: sharing solutions, data, and resources with each other and our users in real-time.

I'm sorry that we won't be able to enjoy the LLSDC Town Hall and Closing Ceremony together. I was especially disappointed that we had to cancel the Sandy Peterson Memorial Lecture since we were able to secure New York Times bestseller, Ijeoma Oluo, as our speaker.⁷ (If you're as big a fan of hers as I am, don't despair. We're determined to bring her back at a mutually agreeable time once it's safe to do so!) In the interim, the Board is working hard to identify the type of virtual programming we



President's Column

can offer that will add the most value to all of you. By the time this issue of Lights is circulated, we will have reviewed and summarized your responses and developed a strategy to meet your needs as best we can. I look forward to seeing the new and creative ways we can continue to connect.

If your work is anything like mine, you may have discovered that some work from home solutions are worth maintaining after we return. The LLSDC Board will be keeping these types of solutions in mind as well. For instance, will we learn that attendance for programming is better when it's offered virtually?

In law schools across the country, graduating students were especially disappointed they couldn't celebrate with each other and their families in person. Law library staff have worked hard to build on existing programs, services, and relationships to support our communities. Many of us quickly developed guides to help our communities transition. At Howard, we expanded our guide to not only include basic information and legal resources, but also resources to help cope with stress and a collection of evolving social justice issues related to COVID-19.⁸

As I've said before, the strength of LLSDC is in its membership. We are fortunate to have one of the most engaged and robust cross sections in the academic, government, and private law library sectors of any AALL chapter. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas as we navigate this situation together. I have no doubt that we will benefit from each other's experience, perspective, successes, and challenges. No matter what happens in the coming weeks and months, we are stronger and better together. ■

Notes

¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LGHtc_D328

²<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/04/10/opinion/trouble-with-calling-health-care-workers-heroes/>

³<https://www.wired.com/story/coronavirus-pet-adoption-boom/>

⁴<https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2020/04/oregon-sends-140-ventilators-to-new-york-gov-kate-brown-we-are-all-in-this-together.html>

⁵<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/20/well/virus-virtual-happy-hour.html>

⁶<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/03/17/coronavirus-music-livestream-concerts/>; <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/9335531/coronavirus-quarantine-music-events-online-streams>

⁷<http://www.ijeomaoluo.com/>

⁸<http://library.law.howard.edu/continuity/>



From the Editor

The Well-Being & Mental Health Issue

Anne M. Guha

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As I write this column it's been almost two months to the day since I began working from home. The last week that my library was operating more-or-less normally was in mid-March. It was the week we hosted LLSDC's two-day Legal Research Institutes (which barely squeaked in before libraries across the country began closing and events were cancelled *en masse*.) It was also the week of the original deadline for contributions to this issue. Mere days after that deadline, everything for *Lights* was put on hold so that our editors, columnists, and contributors could focus on the daunting transition that was now before us as our work and lives were upended and our library services and operations transitioned first partially — and, swiftly thereafter, completely — online.

The theme for this month's issue — which was chosen back in January — was "Well-Being and Mental Health," and perhaps more prescient than we could have realized. For this issue of *Lights*



Submission Information

If you would like to write for *Law Library Lights*, contact Anne M. Guha at amg300@georgetown.edu. For information regarding submission deadlines and issue themes, visit the LLSDC website at www.llsdc.org.



From the Editor, Continued

we asked our membership for features on well-being, mental-health, and stress management in the workplace, particularly those focused on librarians and library staff (though a focus on patrons was also welcomed). We ask that our readers note that much of this issue was planned and/or written in the months and weeks before these dramatic shifts in our lives and workplaces had taken place. That said, we have also endeavored to include some pieces which have been written in the intervening weeks, and which address the current situation directly. I am tremendously grateful to every person who worked on this issue, who made contributions large or small, people who found the time and energy amidst all the transition and confusion to pick this thread back up and make this issue happen. I am particularly grateful to our new Assistant Editor, Rachel Jorgensen, for all her help on this and for the grace with which she has executed her first, *Lights* editorial experience.

In this issue — the first of this volume¹ — we are delighted to welcome back Jeff Gerhard, who will continue his work on Tech Talk; in this issue, he discusses how libraries can approach managing the stressors caused by technology errors and how we can work to mitigate this frustration for our users. We are also excited to announce a new author for our book reviews, Jennifer Krombach, who here has reviewed “Thriving Under Stress: Harnessing Demands in the Workplace” by Thomas W. Britt and Steve M. Jex. Our Member Spotlight brings you the results from our poll question, “What is your favorite way to destress?” (circulated back in February!). Finally, chapter President Kristina Alayan provides you with some updates from LLSDC in her President’s Column.

In our features for this issue, we have gathered some insights and advice from past and current LLSDC Board Members and SIS/Committee Chairs in our feature “Snapshots from the Shutdown.” Next, in “Mind-Body Wellness at Work,” Hannah Miller discusses how a wellness program at Georgetown’s medical school inspired our law school’s very successful “Lawyers in Balance” program, which itself inspired our “Staff in Balance” program, geared towards enhancing mind-body wellness among our staff.

By now, you may have already seen some announcements for our upcoming summer issue, the final issue of our volume, with the theme – also chosen back in January — of “Technology and Change.” For this issue, we invite your thoughts on the constantly evolving technology in law libraries, as well the ways in which technology in the practice of law, provision of legal services, or legal education has impacted law libraries. We encourage you to consider this topic broadly, and particularly welcome any features that might reflect on this theme in light of these unusual times. ■

Notes

¹Even before the shutdown, this issue was already quite unusual in another respect — it is the Spring issue, and yet the first of its volume. After a gap in our usual editorial chain proved challenging to fill, I was asked to reprise my role as editor of *Lights* to help bring you the remaining Spring and Summer issues.



Mind-Body Wellness at Work

Hannah Miller-Kim

Special Collections Librarian, Williams Law Library, vvv, htm@georgetown.edu

Here at Georgetown Law Library staff have the opportunity to participate in the Staff-in-Balance program. The Staff-in-Balance is a mind-body wellness program, which grew out of the Lawyers-in-Balance program that started at the Law Center over 10 years ago, in 2008. This program aims to bring a variety of mind-body techniques to participants. Each week a new mind-body wellness technique is taught and practiced in the 1-hour session.

The origins of the Lawyers-in-Balance program stems from a mind-body wellness program created by the Georgetown University Medical School for medical students. Staff and Faculty at the Law Center trained in the Medical School's program and thus Lawyers-in-Balance was born. Every semester, and occasionally over the summer, facilitators offer wellness classes to students and staff.

The techniques taught center around mindfulness and include mindful eating,

meditation, visualization, walking meditations, and journaling, to name a few. The techniques that are part of the program's 8-week curriculum are designed to bring awareness to everyday activities, such as eating and walking with mindful attentiveness. Mindfulness calls us to be present in the moment with what is, instead of rushing through something, such as the act of eating. To

"The Staff-in-Balance is a mind-body wellness program, which grew out of the Lawyers-in-Balance program that started at the Law Center over 10 years ago."



mindfully eat and appreciate our food not only slows down that act of eating -- hence better digestion – but also acknowledges the healthy role food has in our lives, leading to our appreciation of the food we consume. This is just one example of mindful eating practice.

I have attended the Staff in Balance program both as a participant and a facilitator. I am always surprised by how different each program is for me. Teaching these techniques and seeing the positive impact they have in others' lives keeps me motivated to be a facilitator.

For more information on the Lawyers-in-Balance program you can visit the webpage at <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/your-life-career/health-fitness/center-for-wellness-promotion/mind/lawyers-in-balance/>. ■

“Mindfulness calls us to be present in the moment with what is, instead of rushing through something . . .”

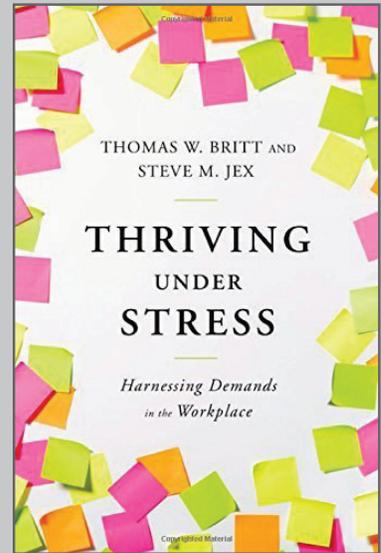


Book Review

Thomas W. Britt and Steve M. Jex, *Thriving Under Stress: Harnessing Demands in the Workplace* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

Jennifer Kim Krombach

Reference Librarian, Georgetown University Law Center,
jk2187@georgetown.edu



I sometimes take liberty with Benjamin Franklin's famous quote by adding that, in this world, nothing is certain except stress, death and taxes. Stress — it's the sometimes invisible but often inevitable force that circles our adult lives by virtue of a revolving door of commitments and demands: family, children, health, money, schools, housing, and the list goes on. As evident from its title, *Thriving Under Stress: Harnessing Demands in the Workplace* is particularly on point with this issue's theme and tackles stress management from one particular source, the workplace.

Our physical workplace might look a little different right now, but, for the most part, we've taken the law library environment home, and neither space is a stranger to stress. What the authors describe as "hindrance stressors" — stressors in the workplace that are often outside the immediate control of an employee (pg. 55) — are pervasive in libraries: insufficient resources (most recently relating to the COVID-19 restraints we are all experiencing), tight budgets, inconsiderate coworkers and/or bosses, conflicting expectations from faculty, attorneys, managers, unrealistic deadlines, and unclear guidelines.

Most advice on stress in the workplace cautions that we should avoid it whenever possible — that stress is destructive and unhealthy. Taking a different approach, authors Britt and Jex embrace another philosophy: "Stress is not the enemy in our lives. Paradoxically, it is the key to growth" (pg. 120).

Book Review, Continued

Britt, Professor of Psychology at Clemson University, and Jex, Professor of Psychology at Bowling Green State University, posit that positive outcomes can be born from stressful working conditions if employees approach the demands of the job in the right way (pg. 6).

To emphasize the relevance of the material to the employee's own life, each chapter has diagnostic activities and application exercises in which the reader is asked to consider how they are currently responding to work stressors, how they might identify the significant and importance of their work, and identify ways they can better recover from work demands.

Recognizing the important role that managers play in creating the conditions for approaching stress in adaptive way, each chapter also provides recommendations for what managers can do to reduce the negative effects of stress at work, enhance the positive effects, and create an environment where employees can thrive.

The book spans ten chapters, which are divided into three major sections. The first section focuses on understanding the effects of stress at work:

Chapter 1 —

Understanding the demands you are under, identifies the different types of stressors at work as well as the resources available to

the employee that might offset the effects of stressors or might help employees experience some beneficial effects.

Chapter 2 —

The psychological, physical, and behavioural (sic) costs of work demands, addresses the negative ways in which workplace stress affects psychological (anxiety and depression), physical (increased blood pressure and decreased immune system function), and behavioral (poor performance, high turnover) outcomes.

Chapter 3 —

The importance of interpreting work demands as challenges instead of threats, distinguishes between "challenge stressors" (such as high workload and weight of responsibility) over which an employee has some degree of control, and "hindrance stressors" (such as organizational politics or insufficient budget) which cannot be changed through the employee's own efforts.

In the second part of the book, the authors emphasize the conditions that contribute to employees' resilience in the face of difficult work conditions. Contrary to the logic of typical stress management interventions, Britt and Jex emphasize that employees can do more than just tolerate stress on the job – they can thrive under these conditions.



Book Review, Continued

“Contrary to the logic of typical stress management interventions, Britt and Jex emphasize that employees can do more than just tolerate stress on the job – they can thrive under these conditions.”

Chapter 4 —

What sets apart employees who respond well under stress? This chapter identifies strategies for approaching stress in a healthy manner, such as reinterpreting the implications of demands for performance, remaining mindful regarding the immediate performance situation, and recognizing that stressful conditions can provide an opportunity to grow and demonstrate resilience.

Chapter 5 —

Beyond Coping: thriving under work demands, highlights that the meaning that employees assign to their work (understanding the impact of his or her work on the organization and on other people) is one of the critical factors that distinguishes those who thrive versus those who do not.

Chapter 6 —

Positive effects of stress at work, discusses the newly emerging idea of ‘eustress’ (literally “good

stress”), which manifests as positive reactions (such as optimism) to work demands.

The third section of the book emphasizes that in addition to making use of certain strategies at work, employees must also adequately recover from demanding work experiences to have the energy to approach work demands with a healthy outlook. This issue is addressed in:

Chapter 7 —

Personal Energy as a critical resource for thriving at work.

Chapter 8 —

How detaching from work restores personal energy.

Chapter 9 —

The failure to thrive at work, addresses what happens when employees find themselves incapable of thriving at work. The authors find that individuals who find themselves in jobs with poor ‘person-job fit’ may be unhappy at work despite their best efforts to adapt and recover from stressful work conditions.

Chapter 10 —

Epilogue: your next steps forward, reviews key lessons of the book. Readers are encouraged to complete an interactive exercise that will illustrate how they are equipped to respond in positive ways to demands they encounter in their work environments.



Book Review, Continued

Those struggling with workplace stress will find that this book takes a refreshing approach by applying empirical research and psychology to the topic. The key takeaway for those in libraries is that despite the existence of stressors in the workplace outside our control, we can embrace stress, to some extent, for its ability to facilitate personal growth, professional development, and higher levels of performance.

Most of us can remember a time when we were working under difficult conditions, whether those conditions were long hours, tight deadlines, or insufficient resources. Britt and Jex emphasize that:

“The authors encourage employees to focus on the meaning and significance of their work and view themselves as active constructors of their work environment, capable of proactively addressing many of the demands they encounter, instead of being passive recipients of work stressors.”

“Although these types of conditions have the potential to produce negative responses such as frustration and anxiety, most of us also have experiences where we got the job done despite the demands that were present. In addition, we would probably admit that on certain occasions being pushed to do a job under difficult conditions led us to develop new skills and increased confidence in performing our jobs. In these cases, the stressors we experienced at work actually served to increase our skills and performance.” (pg. 120)

The authors encourage employees to focus on the meaning and significance of their work and view themselves as active constructors of their work environment, capable of proactively addressing many of the demands they encounter, instead of being passive recipients of work stressors.

Law library environments vary drastically, but *Thriving Under Stress* provides insights, strategies, and assessment materials that will be relevant to all employees, whatever their current space, and wherever they may be positioned across the spectrum of their organizational hierarchy, and shared with the students, faculty, or attorneys they serve. ■



Member Spotlight

Have you recently changed positions? Received a promotion? Participated in any professional events, conferences, or symposiums? Retired? Published? Been elected to serve in a professional organization? Anything else? Let LLSDC know by submitting your news and announcements to our editorial team. Photos are always welcome!

Jeff Gerhard

In January, Jeff Gerhard (*Law Library Lights* Tech Talk columnist) was promoted to Head of Digital Initiatives at the Georgetown University Law Center's Williams Law Library.

Jennifer Krombach

Jennifer Krombach joined the Williams Law Library at the Georgetown University Law Center as a Reference Librarian in December. Ms. Krombach earned her B.A. from the University of Virginia, her J.D. from the Dickinson School of Law, and her M.S.L.I.S from Catholic University. Ms. Krombach practiced family law in northern Virginia prior to becoming a law librarian.

Laura Moorer

Laura Moorer, former law librarian at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, is now the librarian for the Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Courts. Ms. Moorer was the librarian for the Public Defender Service for 12 years and replaced Letty Limbach at the Court of Appeals upon her retirement.

Sara Burriesci

Sara Burriesci has joined the Library Research Services division at the Williams Law Library, Georgetown University Law Center, as the inaugural Empirical Research Services Librarian. She has previously held the position of Reference and Electronic Services Librarian at the Williams Law Library from 2004 to 2011 and has worked as a reference librarian at the University of Maryland Law Library. Ms. Burriesci earned her B.A. from William & Mary, her J.D. from the University of South Carolina, and her M.L.I.S. from the University of Washington.



Member Spotlight, Continued

Daniel Donahue

Daniel Donahue joined the Williams Law Library at the Georgetown University Law Center as a Reference Librarian in December. Before coming to Williams Law Library, Mr. Donahue was a reference librarian at the O'Quinn Law Library at the University of Houston Law Center. Mr. Donahue earned his B.A. from the University of Virginia, an M.A. from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, his J.D. from George Mason University School of Law, and his M.S.L.I.S. from Catholic University.

Leah Prescott and Jeremy McCabe

Leah Prescott, Associate Director for Digital Initiatives and Special Collections, and Jeremy McCabe, Research Services Librarian, of the Williams Law Library at the Georgetown University Law Center, are co-recipients of the 2020 AALL Public Access to Government Information Award, for their invaluable work in creating the [Foreign Intelligence Law Collection](#). This collection provides access to opinions, primary documents, secondary resources, and other materials issued by or relating to FISA, FISC/FISCR, and Article III courts, as well as materials within the topic of foreign intelligence law.



LLSDC Scholarships and Grants

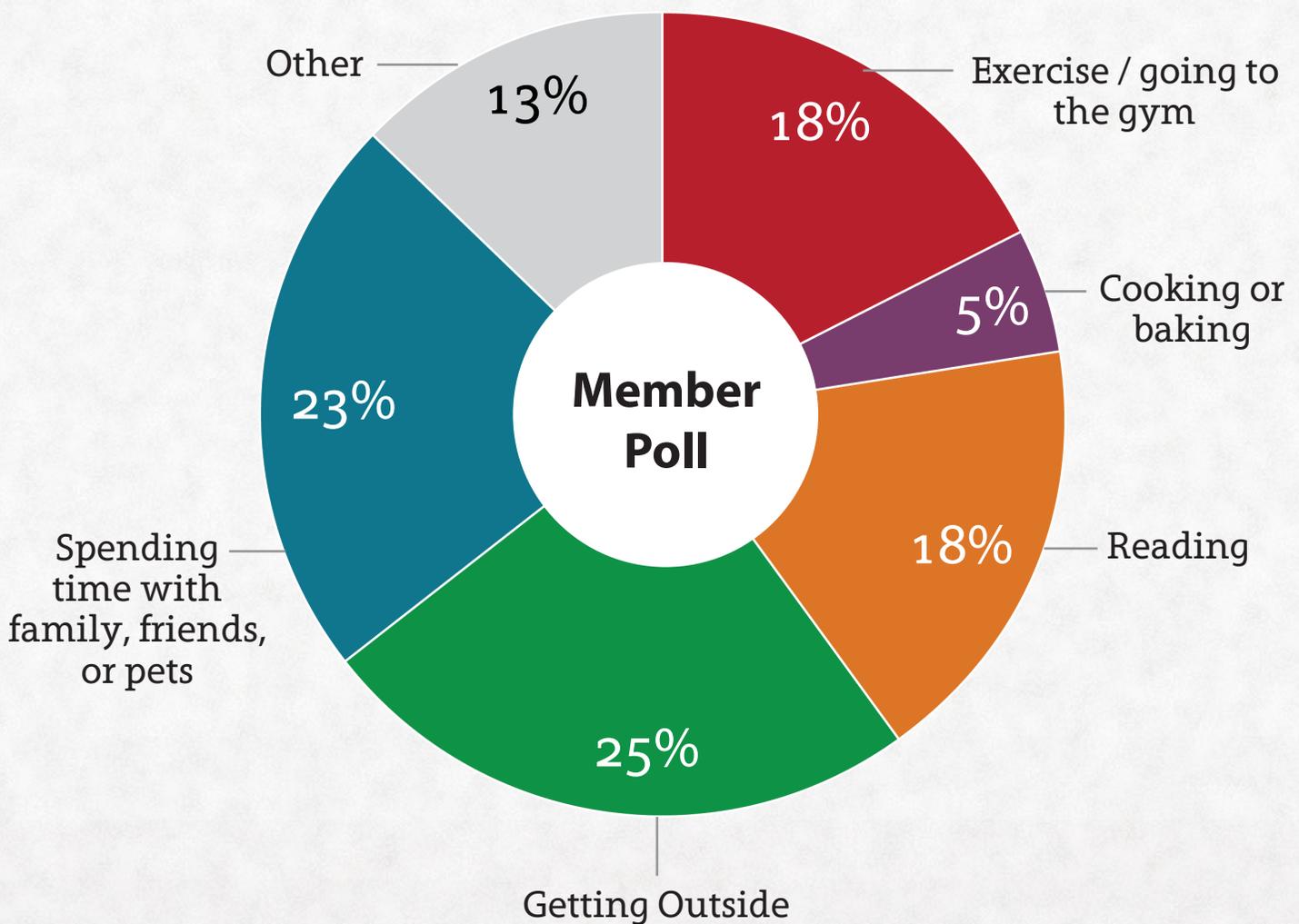
LLSDC members are encouraged to keep an eye out for announcements about our scholarships and grants. You can find information about these opportunities – including application forms and guidelines — at: <https://www.llsdc.org/scholarships-grants>



Member Spotlight, Continued

Way before COVID-19 shut downs started — it feels like an eternity ago — we distributed this Member Poll question to find out how our members take care of themselves. Thankfully, many of these pastimes are still available to us, albeit some in altered forms. (We hope that tools like Skype, Zoom, and Facetime are helping you through not always being able to spend in-person time with friends and family!)

What is your favorite way to destress?



Tech Talk

Technology and Frustrated End Users: Building in Room for Error

Jeff Gerhard

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You search the library catalog or a database for something that has to be there, but you get zero hits. The LibGuide that was so useful a few months ago is now giving you 100% broken links. You're used to sharing documents on your workplace intranet, but you've just migrated systems and you're totally baffled by the new one.

We're all familiar with this type of frustration when dealing with our libraries' technology. It's bad enough when it happens to us; it's worse when our clientele – researchers, students, legal professionals – run into tech problems when using library resources. Our patrons are smart and tech-savvy, but we work in stressful environments full of frightening deadlines; it's natural for them to become irritated when things fail to function correctly. Technical glitches and snafus undermine users' faith in the library, and mounting frustration may ultimately strain the mental health of patrons and library support staff alike.

The responsibility for mental health is shared between individuals and broader systems. To the extent that libraries manage and create broad systems ourselves, it's crucial that we take our patrons' mental health into account and provide services that are reliable and user-friendly. Whenever I stare at cryptic, proxied URLs that won't behave, I am reminded of the time when my niece punched and broke a laptop screen because the Lego website had incorrect instructions. For those of us who are building, purchasing, updating, or configuring library systems, the baseline goal should be to make sure no one ever becomes upset enough to punch the screen.

Tech Talk, Continued

“The responsibility for mental health is shared between individuals and broader systems. To the extent that libraries manage and create broad systems ourselves, it’s crucial that we take our patrons’ mental health into account and provide services that are reliable and user-friendly.”

Sometimes aggravation emerges from the way a platform is designed. This is the crux of user experience design, often abbreviated as UX. UX includes topics like interface design, usability testing, and information architecture, all of which clearly overlap with librarianship. Libraries and library vendors simply lack the resources to invest in UX at the same level as companies like Apple, Google, or Amazon – and even those companies’ products have UX problems all the time. It’s our responsibility as stewards of our systems to pay attention to usability and UX issues and advocate for better systems that can empower our users; for example, we can call out vendors and service providers whose systems need to be improved.

Other times, the glitches really are our fault and have nothing to do with UX. Somebody accidentally deleted a file, ran a batch update in a catalog, or changed a configuration setting without thinking through its potential impact. To mitigate these crises, we need to be adept at soft skills like managing communications and setting realistic expectations. This might be as simple as making sure that there is always an obvious and convenient method of contacting technical support.

In supporting our patrons, it’s also important to make it clear that technology is not magic – it’s developed by people and always flawed. If we make technology seamless and the workers invisible, it’s easy to be enraged if something goes wrong – worth venting about breathlessly on social media, or even punching a laptop. It’s important to attach names and faces to our work, to make it clear what the library is contributing even when that contribution is entirely electronic, and to demonstrate that human effort is required to build and connect various technology systems. When we make our labor more apparent, we can also build in space for things to go wrong. We can advise our frustrated users to take a breath; somebody built these systems and somebody can fix them. ■



Law Librarians' Society of Washington, D.C.

A Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries

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