

# DIALOGUE

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## Off to Campus: Raising Student and Staff Awareness of LRIS Programs

*By Charles J. Klitsch*

Lawyer referral service directors looking for ways to expand into additional markets would do well to consider their local colleges and universities. As of 2008, according to a report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau, 18.5 million people were enrolled as either full time or part time students at America's institutions of higher learning. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education reports that nearly 3.5 million people are employed by colleges and universities.

Salaries paid by these institutions place university professionals, administrators and support staff in the group most likely to benefit from lawyer referral programs – middle income individuals who can afford to pay for legal services but who do not know or have never used an attorney.

While college students are often financially stretched, they or their parents may find it necessary from time to time to hire lawyers for problems such as DUI, debtor-creditor issues, identity theft, landlord-tenant disputes and minor criminal offenses.

College legal service programs – where they exist – generally limit representation of staff to situations where their legal problems stem from matters related to their employment by the school. Likewise, such legal service programs generally limit representation of students to university-related or housing matters.

Nevertheless, employees and students with personal legal issues often contact their school's legal services program or general counsel's office to ask where to go for legal help. Lawyer referral services are an ideal resource – if school administrators and legal staff know they exist.

What is the current state of affairs across the country when it comes to the information our institutions of higher learning provide about LRIS to employees, students and third parties? A review of college and university websites is revealing. Some schools have a keen awareness of the value of LRIS programs, listing the contact information, hours and a description of one or more lawyer referral services in the area. Many other schools make no mention of lawyer referral services, even while stating clearly on their sites that they do not provide legal representation to students and staff. Some websites name local lawyer referral programs, but have inaccurate or outdated information about them. Still others have made the unwise decision to list specific lawyers for site visitors to contact.

Making a list of colleges and universities in your service area and then checking their websites is a good first step to determine what kind of outreach is needed and who you need to contact at your local schools. Keep in mind that lawyer referral services may be listed as a resource at various places on a website, depending upon the perceived needs of the audience.

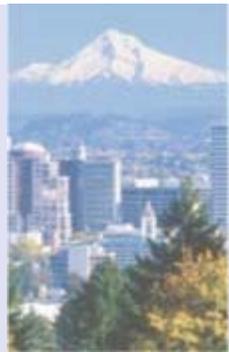
For example, schools such as Stanford University, Dartmouth College, Tufts University and Arizona State University list local lawyer referral services as resources for employees and students on their Office of General Counsel web pages.

**SAVE THE  
DATES!**

**2010  
ABA  
LAWYER  
REFERRAL  
WORKSHOP**

**OCTOBER  
27 - 30**

**PORTLAND,  
OREGON**



MIT and the University of South Carolina list lawyer referral services on their Office of Housing web pages. The University of California at San Francisco lists LRIS on its Office of Student Life web page. Similarly, the University of Pittsburgh names LRIS as a resource on its student government web page, and the University of Texas at Austin has information about LRIS on the web page of the Dean of Students.

Cal Poly and University of California at Santa Barbara place LRIS contact information on the Human Resources Department pages of their websites. Other schools, such as the University of New Mexico and the University of Washington, recognize the immigration needs of a significant number of their constituents and provide information about LRIS programs on their web pages devoted to international students.

When you investigate the websites of your local schools, remember that many colleges and universities have community outreach programs where information about finding legal help may already be posted or would be beneficial to site visitors. For example, the University of New Hampshire names LRIS as a resource in its Women's Commission Legal Handbook, while the University of Idaho lists LRIS on its community resources page.

Once you have surveyed the websites of schools in your service area, you can formulate a plan for reaching out to each institution. Your goal, of course, is to convince school officials to recommend LRIS whenever and wherever a student, staff person or member of the general public may approach the school seeking legal help.

If a bar leader has a connection with a particular local school, by all means recruit that person to communicate the advantages of LRIS to appropriate school officials.

If a school has a general counsel's office, begin there. The general counsel will know whether there is a legal services plan, an office of student housing or an assistance program for international students. The general counsel is also likely to recognize the value of using a lawyer referral service as a resource for staff and students.

Absent a general counsel's office, contact the dean. The dean's office is often the first stop for a student or staff member seeking help with a problem. Present your LRIS as the "go to" resource for legal assistance in your area. More than likely, your LRIS brochures and contact information for a school's website will be a welcome addition to the information various college offices can provide to students, staff and the public.

Another way to reach out to local colleges and universities is to offer to provide programs at the school. A local campus can be the ideal setting for events such as a people's law school, a Law Week program, citizenship ceremonies, student moot court competitions or themed free advice to the public programs.

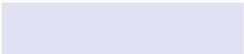
Establishing a relationship with a college or university can lead to collaborative programs that benefit all parties involved. For example, the Lawyer Referral Service of Central Texas has entered into an agreement with the University of Texas at Austin, one of the largest university campuses in the United States.

Under the agreement, the Legal Services for Students office will send all students they are unable to help to the Lawyer Referral Service of Central Texas for a referral. LRS has agreed to waive the initial consultation fee for students referred from Legal Services for Students.

On the website of the University of Texas at Austin, the Legal Services for Students office says that it is "delighted to announce" the agreement and terms the arrangement as "this great offer of valuable free legal advice." These words should be music to the ears of any LRIS director.

It is often said that the system of higher education in the United States is the greatest in the world. With millions of students and staff, it is also an outstanding market for lawyer referral services.

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*Bar Association*

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