

LAW.COM IN-HOUSE COUNSEL FEATURING: • In-House News • Compensation Information • In-House Blogs • Sample Forms • Briefing Papers • CLE Webcasts	SEARCH NOW 	CORPORATE counsel DIGITAL EDITION click here to subscribe
--	--	---

LAW.COM

Select '**Print**' in your browser menu to print this document.

Copyright 2007 ALM Properties, Inc. All rights reserved.

Page printed from: <http://www.law.com>

[Back to Article](#)

Librarian-Podcaster's Goal Is to Bring Scholarship 'Outside the Academy'

Thomas Adcock
New York Law Journal
05-08-2007

Every law school records for posterity faculty conferences, workshops and long-winded lectures from visiting scholars, but few campus officials approach the task quite like professor James G. Milles, associate dean for information services and director of the law library at the University at Buffalo Law School in New York.

Who but a podcaster, his colleagues note of Milles' special passion, would think to plop down a passel of professors for dinner, drinks and discourse at a Buffalo boite -- along with himself as "the interested friend" and occasional interviewer with his trusty M-Audio Microtrack, an uncomplicated bit of gear about the size of a cigarette pack.

The result of his handiwork may be downloaded for free by visiting Milles' Web sites:

- For official Buffalo Law events, go to www.ublwapodcast.com.
- For Milles' informal programs, which he said are often law-related but also involve "libraries and life in a northern border town," check out www.checkthisoutpodcast.com.

Listeners will hear ambient sounds behind learned conversations -- the tinkling of goblets, the soft shifting of a chair, a stray bit of jazz -- that somehow make them feel as if they are members of the party. The effect is powerful, akin to that of radio at its very best: theater of the mind.

Milles' particular theater has focused on such legal matters as workplace equity, pensions, economic development, transracial adoption, federal foster care funds -- even Russian forestry.

Upcoming installments of "UB Law Faculty Conversations" on the official program site include the topics of strategic planning for community development, anthropological approaches to personal injury law in different cultures and gender-based barriers to economic development.



LAW.COM
LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

Visit today for free access to the latest:

- Legal technology news & info
- Legal downloads and white papers
- Featured technology articles

A Law.com SuperSection

Besides Buffalo Law's own faculty members, scholars from Columbia Law School, Emory University School of Law, Rutgers University School of Law and St. John's University School of Law have participated in the UB Law Faculty Conversation series as follow-ups to research presented at the school's Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy.

"We take some time before or after their presentations ... and we usually go to a restaurant," said Milles, who then edits the resultant conversation to a range of 30 to 45 minutes. "The podcast is one way to bring their scholarship outside of the academy."

He added, "The conversational format makes these topics more accessible to law and nonlaw communities. Plus, the podcasts underscore our law school's emphasis on civic engagement."

As both a librarian and admitted techno-geek, Milles knew that the number of people who sit down and listen to long, conventional and inevitably low-quality recordings of law school symposia could be even fewer than those who plow through tens of thousands of dense words and footnotes constituting law review articles.

He reasoned: Why not perk up some weighty matter of jurisprudence by scaling down the presentation to create an intimate atmosphere, available to anyone at any time? If listeners should be so moved, they could link to the full and even weightier details of the matter.

Such notions developed as Milles tortured himself by researching conventional examples of the genre, or what he termed the "deadly dull" audio recordings of law school talks.

"I was listening to this one really excellent program from Harvard, but the problem was, you could tell they just set a recorder out in the audience someplace," Milles complained. "Somebody was blowing their nose right next to the recorder, and somebody else was rattling paper. To me, that's just discourtesy to the listener."

He added, "You don't have to have audiophile quality, but you should have the listener in mind."

Milles, who is active in podcaster conferences and conventions around the country, said the only other U.S. law campus with a dedicated podcaster is California Western School of Law in San Diego.

ENTHUSIASTIC COLLEAGUES

His colleagues count themselves fortunate.

"I have stacks of things on my desk that I'd love to read -- great articles by brilliant people -- but it's so hard to find time to read things I don't absolutely have to," said Buffalo Law professor Martha T. McCluskey. "It's very hard to keep abreast."

Because she does "a lot of things like running and driving and washing dishes," McCluskey explained, she purchased an iPod MP3 player for the conventional entertainment purpose.

"Once I realized it wasn't just for music, I'd found a way to keep up with things," said McCluskey. "The conversation format is great. It's like having lunch or dinner with all these interesting people."

Milles' innovative podcasts, she said, "zero in on the sense of someone's topic, enough so that I can go delve into the article behind it when I've got the time."

Susan V. Mangold, vice dean for academic affairs at Buffalo Law, said of Milles' work, "He has given us a whole other way to communicate. He gets these podcasts up in a day or so. People listen to them all the time. Even the people who come to make presentations access them to listen."

Though it is her style to generally resist new technology, Mangold now says, "I'm like the convert who became the evangelist."

Her conversion came about one day at a city pool where she is enrolled in master swimming classes.

Soon after participating in one of Milles' podcasts -- over coffee and sweets at a café -- there she stood at poolside

when suddenly confronted by a stranger in a bathing cap.

"I don't know who she was," said Mangold. "But she said she recognized my voice from the podcast."

Thus, one by one, does Milles' audience grow. Though it is difficult to measure listenership for the faculty conversation series, he reckons it to be a larger number than those clamoring to read published presentations.

As for his weekly informal offering of "Check This Out," Milles pegs his audience at 300 and growing, as indicated by his increasing recognition at podcaster conventions in New York state and Ontario, Canada.

Milles credits his newfound popularity with a signature opening line he uses for "Check This Out," a bit of voice-over dialogue borrowed from the 1999 movie "Black Mask," about a secret martial arts combatant in Hong Kong disguised as a geeky librarian: "I like it here. ... It's quiet. ... Nobody ever bothers a librarian."