

# EDUCATION FOR LAW LIBRARIANS

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Those aspiring to the profession of law librarianship in this decade have innumerable opportunities for formal and informal education. With a wide range of continuing education programs sponsored by local, regional and national law library associations and specialized courses in law librarianship offered at many library schools, what path should a would-be law librarian take? Is informal continuing education enough, or are one or more advanced degrees required?

This essay will attempt to answer these questions by briefly tracing the history of law librarianship, focusing on educational background and opportunities; by looking at the present skills and educational background of law librarians; and by reviewing trends that have affected and will continue to affect the education of law librarians.

## HISTORY OF LAW LIBRARY EDUCATION

Informal education for law librarians has long been important to the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), beginning with its founding in 1906. Educational programs at the Association's annual meeting and publication of a professional journal (*Law Library Journal*, beginning in 1908) have shown from the start a commitment to improving the knowledge and skills of practicing law librarians. Now AALL sponsors three-day intensive institutes, five to seven day-long workshops and over 56 annual meeting programs every year. In addition, the 29 local and regional AALL chapters also sponsor hundreds of programs each year aimed at keeping law librarians current in subject matter and up-to-date in issues facing the law and library professions.

Formal educational opportunities for law librarians have grown steadily, but the statistical information about the educational background of practicing librarians has a somewhat more complicated and less well documented history. The history of formal law library education is chronicled in Professor Morris Cohen's 1962 article, "Background to Law Library Education."<sup>1</sup> In it, Professor Cohen notes that:

...the earliest formal course in the law librarianship...consisted of lectures given by Frederick D. Colson at the New York State Library School in Albany between 1910-11 and 1916.<sup>2</sup>

These lectures became the first full academic course in law librarianship in 1913. Other formal educational offerings did not appear until 1937 (Columbia, Miles O. Price) and 1939 (University of Washington, Arthur S. Beardsley). By the 1950s, three other library schools had added law librarianship courses: U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School, University of North Carolina School of Library Science and Western Reserve University School of Library Science.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of Professor Cohen's article, only six library schools nationwide included any formal educational programs or courses in law librarianship or legal bibliography in their curricula.<sup>4</sup> Today, over 32 (62 percent) of the 52 ALA-accredited library schools offer at least one course in law librarianship.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there are eight law schools and library schools offering joint degrees (JD and MLS)<sup>6</sup> and 13 library schools that offer a specialization or concentration in law librarianship.<sup>7</sup>

A look at the history of the formal educational programs alone suggests that the graduate degree in library science has played an increasingly important role in law librarianship. This is, in fact, the case and is probably little different from the historical trends found generally in all types of libraries. Early librarians often had little or no formal education in librarianship, while the majority of professional library positions today require, at a minimum, a master's degree in library science.

## EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF LAW LIBRARIANS

The educational background of law librarians has a similar history. A comparison of the earliest figures that could be located<sup>8</sup> with 1962 figures,<sup>9</sup> for academic law librarians shows marked changes in educational backgrounds:

	1936	1962
Law and library degrees	7%	29%
Library degree only	23%	26%
Law degree only	19%	42%
No college or advanced degree	51%	3%

The significant changes over this 26-year period



were 1) a steep decline in the number of law librarians with no college or advanced degrees and 2) a sharp increase in the percentage of law librarians with a library degree (from 30 percent to 55 percent) and in the percentage of law librarians with both law and library science degrees. Overall, law librarians had significantly more formal education in 1962 than in 1936.

These trends have continued, and, even though good statistical surveys are not available, it is fair to say that most academic law librarians today have both law and library science degrees. By far, the most dramatic change over the years is in the requirement of a library science degree.

Although these statistics primarily describe the academic law library world, they are fairly representative of other types of law libraries as well, including county, court, state and firm law libraries. To the extent there are differences, the lack of formal education or degrees of any kind, particularly the law degree, was probably more prevalent in nonacademic law libraries. However, today the law librarian in the nonacademic sector is most often required to have at least a degree in library science and thus the trend has been as dramatic as in the academic sector.

The early volumes of the *Law Library Journal* carry much debate over the question of the educational preparation needed for law librarians, specifically as to the role of the law degree. In 1926 Professor Frederick Hicks expressed his view, which is clearly controlling today:

It has always been my contention that the only important difference between law library work and other kinds of library work is that resulting from a different subject matter and a different clientele. The underlying principles of library economy and technique are the same in all libraries. The differences, so far as they exist, manifest themselves in the application of library technique to a special class of literature, and in looking out for the convenience and habits of thought of specialized groups of readers....

Training in the general principles of all these phases of library work is given in library schools, and should be the basis on which to build such knowledge as is peculiarly useful in the respective special libraries or departments.<sup>10</sup>

A law degree may acquaint its holder with the body of legal literature, but it does little to prepare one to manage or work in a law library.

The American Association of Law Libraries recognized this preeminence of the library degree when its Educational Policy Committee drafted and had approved its "Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Law Librarianship."<sup>11</sup> The document is divided into

general library science competencies and subject (law) competencies. The guidelines recognize the roles played by four general competencies: the provision of reference and research services, library management, collection management, and organization and classification. The subject competencies are described as the legal system, the legal profession and its terminology, the literature of the law, and law and ethics.

A review of job descriptions for vacant law library positions will quickly alert the reader to the fact that the graduate degree in library science is a must. The competency in the law can be fulfilled in any number of ways — a law degree, some legal training, law library experience, or continuing education.<sup>12</sup>

## THE FUTURE

What do we see for the future? What current trends will affect the educational needs of law librarians and employers of law librarians in the next 20 years? Three trends are related to libraries in general and three can be attributed to the subject matter of our librarian — the law.

The information explosion and the development of new technology have both had dramatic impacts on libraries, librarians and librarianship. Speculation as to which development has shaped the other is probably futile. It is sufficient to note that the sheer amount of information available on any topic or subject is generally unmanageable. Librarians must be trained in the management of that information and ways to make it accessible to those who need it.

Undoubtedly, the development of vast new technologies that make library systems more efficient and effective requires librarians who understand automation and computer systems as well as libraries. We will never see an end to the continuing need to update our knowledge to keep pace with rapidly advancing changes in technology.

The vast amounts of data that can now be stored and retrieved have forever changed librarianship. No more can librarians learn about just one format of information — books — and then stop their inquiry. Competent librarians must understand the variety of formats of information sources and must master their use and interrelationships, whether applied to reference, cataloging, or collection development work.

Law libraries, fueled by both technological developments and the vast amounts of information available, have become more complex organizations. Even the small library must provide a high level of service, which requires personnel management, communication, budgets and accounting, serials, cataloging, teaching, cooperative networks, automation, selection and other skills. Educational preparation designed to meet these demands is essential. A good librarian



today cannot simply be a person who loves books or likes to read.

## TRENDS AFFECTING EDUCATION FOR LAW LIBRARIANSHIP

Specific to law librarianship, because these changes relate to the law itself, are three trends that will directly affect the education of law librarians. These are: the increasing complexity of the law, its growing interdisciplinary nature, and the changes in the practice of law.

As administrative law and legislative enactments come to form a more significant body of our law (as compared with the common law), relationships among these three sources of law must be understood by librarians. Quality legal research can be accomplished quickly and efficiently only if the researcher understands the complex interplay of our sources of law. The number of times a court decision controls the rule in a particular situation is likely to decrease, and our methods of researching legal problems must reflect such changes in the sources of our law. Knowledge of legal bibliography alone is not enough. Law librarians must understand the sources of the law as well as the strategies needed to find answers to legal problems.

In addition, the more complex the body of law, the more highly specialized its jargon becomes. The more specialized the language of the law, the more sophisticated the researcher must be. Instead of being excluded from the circle because of a lack of expertise, the law librarian becomes an important link in the chain of access to information. But it will be necessary for law librarians to become subject specialists and to learn the new, ever-specialized jargon.

Another change taking place in the law is the increasing relevance of nonlegal information. Most law firm librarians spend an increasing amount of time identifying, locating and retrieving statistics, information about companies, economic news data, as well as medical, biographical and other kinds of non-legal information. Most lawyers lack training in non-legal research, so librarians must provide assistance. Law librarians must have broad knowledge of all general reference sources, including online databases and CD-ROM products. Thorough familiarity with legal materials alone is not enough, even in an academic or court law library environment.

Finally, the practice of law itself is undergoing significant change. Mergers leading to megafirms and more attention to the bottom line have made many think of the practice of law as more of a business. Professionally trained legal administrators and others in the law firm support network are handling many of the more complex management functions. Firms are more highly specialized — working with a body of law

that is much more specialized — but because of their size, many firms can offer nearly all kinds of legal services to their clients. The need to have access to their own work product, to quickly obtain information not available in the firm itself and to professionalize and streamline firm operations has significantly influenced the roles played by law firm librarians. And by the trickle-down effect, these changes will affect law librarianship in other sectors as well.

The law librarian of the future needs a graduate degree in library science (MLS) excellent grounding in the law and legal profession through a law degree (JD), substantial experience in a law library or some law courses, a continuing interest in learning (about the law, technology, librarianship and the world in general), and a commitment to excellence and professionalism.

Although this article has been directed primarily to formal education for law librarianship, I would like to share with you Marian Gould Gallagher's recipe combining qualities for the successful law librarian:

...industrious, alert, charming, attentive to detail, refined, imaginative, unafraid of briefing for a judge or getting filthy shifting books, dependable, receptive to taking and following orders, able to direct underlings to inspired heights, incorruptible, sincerely interested, attractive...amusing, cheerful, imperturbable, diplomatic, and summa cum laude.<sup>13</sup>

## REFERENCES

- 1 Cohen, Morris, "Background to Law Library Education," *Law Library Journal*, v55, n3, August 1962. pp. 190-199.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- 3 *Supra*, note 1. pp. 194-199.
- 4 See also, *Annotated Recruitment Checklist*, pp. 22-25. (AALL Recruitment Committee) (June 1965 Revision).
- 5 Library schools offering at least one course in legal bibliography or law librarianship are: University of Arizona; San Jose State University; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Los Angeles; Catholic University of America; University of South Florida; Rosary College; Indiana University, Bloomington; University of Iowa; Emporia State University; University of Kentucky; Simmons College; University of Michigan; Wayne State University; University of Missouri, Columbia; Rutgers University; Pratt Institute; Queen's College; St. John's University; State University of New York at Albany; University of North Carolina; Kent State University; University of Oklahoma; Drexel University; University of Pittsburgh; University of



Rhode Island; University of South Carolina; University of North Texas; University of Texas, Austin; University of Washington; University of Wisconsin, Madison; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

- 6 Schools offering joint law and library science degrees are: University of California, Berkeley; Southern Connecticut State University (with University of Connecticut School of Law); Catholic University of America; University of Iowa; Indiana University, Bloomington; Pratt Institute (with Brooklyn Law School); State University of New York at Buffalo; Syracuse University.
- 7 Schools offering a specialization or concentration in law librarianship are: University of California, Los Angeles; Catholic University of America; Rosary College; University of Michigan; University of Missouri, Columbia; Pratt Institute; St. John's University; Syracuse University; University of Oklahoma; University of Washington; University of Wisconsin, Madison; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.
- 8 Frantz, Laurent B., "The Education of the Law Librarian," *Law Library Journal*, v44, n2, May 1951. pp. 94, 97.
- 9 Bolden, Connie E., "Educational and Experience Backgrounds of College and University Law Librarians," *Law Library Journal*, v57, n1, February 1964. pp. 58, 62-64.
- 10 Hicks, Frederick C., "The Widening Scope of Law Librarianship," *Law Library Journal*, v19, n3, October 1926. pp. 61, 66.
- 11 "Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Law Librarianship," *AALL Newsletter*, v20, n5, December 1988. pp. 147-8.
- 12 In a recent survey of the 185 jobs advertised in the *AALL Newsletter* from June 1989 to May 1990, 80 percent required an MLS, 3 percent required an MLS or JD, and 10 percent permitted law library experience to substitute for an MLS or JD.
- 13 Gallagher, Marian G., "The Law Librarianship Course at the University of Washington," *Journal of Legal Education*, v5, n4, 1953. pp. 537, 539.