



American Association of Law Libraries
MAXIMIZING THE POWER OF THE LAW LIBRARY COMMUNITY SINCE 1906



June 3, 2010

The Board of Supervisors
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA

VIA EMAIL: rrasmus@lsu.edu

Dear President Lombardi, Assistant Vice President Rasmussen, and Members of the Board of Supervisors:

We write to you today, on behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries and the New Orleans Association of Law Librarians and as proud graduates of the Louisiana State University School of Library & Information Science, to urge you to reconsider the recommendation announced by Chancellor Michael Martin on May 24 to eliminate the Master of Library and Information Sciences (MLIS) program. While we understand the need to carefully review academic programs in light of the current fiscal crisis facing Louisiana, we believe this decision is shortsighted and should be reversed because of the importance and value of the MLIS program to the citizens of Louisiana.

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) is a nonprofit educational organization with over 5000 members nationwide. Our members serve the information needs of the legal community and the public at more than 1900 academic, firm, state, court and county law libraries nationwide. AALL's mission is to promote and enhance the value of law libraries, to foster law librarianship and to provide leadership and advocacy in the field of legal information and information policy.

The New Orleans Association of Law Librarians (NOALL), founded in 1983, is a non-profit chapter of AALL. NOALL exists to further the interests of persons in the New Orleans and surrounding areas working in or with law libraries. Membership is comprised of law librarians from the area's law school, court, and law firm libraries, as well as library assistants, paralegals, legal administrators, attorneys, and legal information vendor representatives

The mission of the LSU School of Library & Information Science is uniquely important, "to prepare individuals for positions of responsibility in the field of library and information service and to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field." As graduates of LSU's ALA-accredited MLIS program and leaders of our Associations, we can attest to the program's

excellence. A significantly high number of librarians in Louisiana have received their MLIS degree from LSU, and provide their knowledge and expertise on a daily basis to the citizens of our state. In addition, many Louisiana residents are able to pursue their studies through the SLIS distance education program while holding full-time non-professional positions in libraries across the state. Were the MLIS program to be eliminated, most of these aspiring librarians could not afford to leave Louisiana to pursue their graduate studies elsewhere. Further, those who are able to attend a program out of state may not return to Louisiana following their graduation. The result would be a shortage of trained professional librarians in our state.

Louisiana's network of libraries is, for the 57% of our residents who do not have Internet access either at their homes or workplaces, the *sole access point* where they can find the information they need which is increasingly available only in digital forms. Two reports by the Pew Research Center focus on the increased need for libraries and professional librarians in the digital age. The first, published in December 2007, [*In Search of Solutions: How People use the Internet, Libraries, and Government Agencies to Find Help*](#), challenges the assumption that libraries are losing relevance in the digital age. It found that libraries drew visits by more than half of Americans surveyed (53%) in the preceding year for all kinds of purposes, including locating needed information from agencies at all levels of government.

A follow-up Pew report issued this past April, [*Government Online—The Internet Gives Citizens New Paths*](#), found that 82% of Internet users (representing 61% of all American adults) looked for information or completed a transaction on a government Web site within the preceding year. As more and more government information becomes available *only* online, the report found that 41% of those surveyed downloaded government forms; 25% located advice or information from a government agency about a health or safety issue; 23% got information about or applied for government benefits; and 19% found information about how to apply for a government job.

A majority of the citizens of Louisiana rely on their local library for free access to computers and, equally important, the assistance of skilled librarians to help them locate and evaluate the information they seek. Locating a government form online, one needed to obtain crucial government benefits, for example, is a daunting task for members of the underserved community who may not even know how to use a computer. In this digital age, it is more important than ever before that libraries are adequately and well staffed by professionally trained librarians to help our citizens find the information they need. As law librarians, we are deeply committed to ensuring that all citizens have equitable access to justice by being able to locate government information available through the Internet at their local public library.

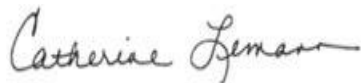
It is important to note that the LSU School of Library and Information Science was recently awarded a grant of \$763,901 from the federal government's Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to recruit and educate 30 new librarians for employment in Southern Louisiana libraries that continue to experience staffing shortages due to damage caused to communities by hurricanes, including Katrina and Rita. IMLS grants are exceedingly competitive and a prestigious honor to institutions receiving them. It is a tribute to the excellence of the SLIS faculty that they received federal funding for [*Project Recovery Scholars*](#). These new students came together this spring to begin their studies. Obviously, the elimination of the SLIS

program will end the IMLS grant and the dream of these thirty ambitious scholars to become librarians and serve their communities. It will also disenfranchise residents of Southern Louisiana from the expertise of professional librarians in the future.

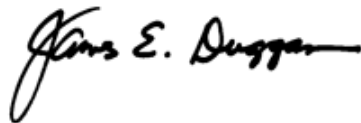
On behalf of the American Association of Law Libraries and the New Orleans Association of Law Librarians, we urge you to carefully study the negative impact of closing the LSU Master of Library and Information Sciences program. As you learn more about the crucial importance of the program to the residents of Louisiana, we believe that you will agree with us that the recommendation to eliminate the program must be reversed.

Please contact either [Prof. James E. Duggan](#), Director of the Law Library and Associate Professor of Law at Tulane University Law Library, or [Mr. Brent T. Hightower](#), Librarian at the U.S. Court of Appeals 5th Circuit Library, if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your consideration in this important matter.

Sincerely,



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Brent T. Hightower
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