

## The Law Library Mission Statement\*

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*Mission statements can be used to articulate the goals, visions, values, and strategic behavior of a library. Professor Kelsh explains how to develop a mission statement that accurately represents the unique aspirations of a particular law library.*

¶1 At a point in *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice inquires of the Cheshire Cat, “Which way should I walk?” The Cat parries, “That depends . . . on where you want to get to.” Alice replies, “I don’t really care much where . . . so long as I get somewhere.” “Then it doesn’t matter which way you walk,” responds the Cheshire Cat.<sup>1</sup> The importance of a mission statement might be summed up similarly: “If you don’t know where you’re going, it doesn’t matter which way you go.”<sup>2</sup>

¶2 The objective of the academic law library mission statement<sup>3</sup> differs in no respect from the goal of any other business or nonprofit organization’s mission statement. Mission statements articulate the goals, visions, values, and strategic behavior of the institution or organization. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen Covey suggests that “[a]n organizational mission statement—one that truly reflects the deep shared vision and values of everyone within that organization—creates a great unity and tremendous commitment. It creates in people’s hearts and minds a frame of reference, a set of criteria or guidelines, by which they will govern themselves.”<sup>4</sup> Successful academic law library mission statements are well-conceived, carefully worded documents that incorporate operational and ethical principles to guide the library’s work. The mission statement projects a “sense of confidence” about the law library’s stability, uniqueness, and ability to achieve its goals.<sup>5</sup> It forms the basis of the law library’s marketing strategies and promotional

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1. LEWIS CARROLL, *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* 78–79 (Peter Pauper Press 1940).
2. Internet Nonprofit Ctr., What Should Our Mission Statement Say, at <http://www.nonprofits.org/npo-faq/03/21.html> (rev. Apr. 14, 1997).
3. Although this article is written in the context of academic law libraries, much, if not all of what is said about mission statements is applicable with minor adjustments to all types of law libraries, not just those associated with law schools.
4. STEPHEN COVEY, *THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE* 143 (1989).
5. Gordon T. Butler, *The Law School Mission Statement: A Survival Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 50 J. LEGAL EDUC. 240, 240 (2000).

plans. The mission statement may also justify and explain library activities that might be questioned by other parts of the institution, such as a law school's faculty or dean. If used when making library decisions, mission statements can serve as road maps to consistent and principled action.

### Developing the Mission Statement

¶3 How do staff members go about developing a mission statement for their particular library?

¶4 Since academic law libraries exist to support the mission of the law school, the best way to start is to review the law school's mission statement. Ideally, there will exist such a schoolwide document from which the library staff might glean some ideas about what the law library's mission is or should be. Every ABA-approved law school is required to have a mission statement, although many institutions have not drafted one, or have not made it publicly available if they have one.<sup>6</sup> If the law library is able to consult a law school mission statement, then crafting the library's statement to reflect support of the law school's mission becomes a much easier proposition. For example, the Harvard Law School Library Mission Statement indicates that

The mission of the Harvard Law School Library is to provide information resources and research services that will assist Harvard Law School in becoming the premier center in the world of legal scholarship and training in the twenty-first century. An important subsidiary mission is to deal responsibly with the extensive collections acquired to date, whatever their current level of use.

¶5 If the law school is part of a university, the university's mission should also be examined and incorporated into the law library's mission statement, if appropriate. The University of San Francisco (USF) Law Library staff recently revised its mission statement to reflect support of the university's mission of "educating minds and hearts to change the world," and the law school's mission of pursuing excellence in education, supporting a diverse learning community, and contributing to social justice. The original USF law library mission statement existed before the law school and university mission statements were drafted. A desire by the library staff to align itself more closely with the university and law school missions prompted the revision of the library mission statement to the following:

The USF Law Library staff provides legal information resources, instruction and an environment designed to enable the USF Law School Community to pursue excellence in education, build a supportive, open learning community, and contribute to social justice as we strive to educate minds and hearts to change the world.

- Information Resources—The USF Law Library Staff selects from, describes, organizes, creates, preserves, maintains and delivers information resources in a

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6. *Id.*

variety of media to ensure that the USF Law School Community has access to relevant legal and interdisciplinary information.

- Instruction—The USF Law Library Staff instructs, directly and in partnership with USF Law Faculty, and guides students, faculty and staff in practical skills and research techniques to foster critical thinking and independence in the evaluation and use of legal and interdisciplinary information.
- Environment—The USF Law Library Staff provides a supportive and flexible atmosphere that balances community and study. In this environment, USF Law Library staff furnishes the most appropriate tools to enable the USF Law School Community to best utilize information and accomplish its educational goals. To create this setting, the Law Library Staff plans, anticipates, explores and provides the most current, efficient and cost effective information resources, technologies and facilities.

¶6 Patricia Jones and Larry Kahaner, in their book *Say It and Live It*, advise keeping the actual mission statement simple, although not necessarily short, so that elements of the statement are easy for others to comprehend.<sup>7</sup> As the following examples illustrate, a simply worded statement can communicate the essence of the specific institution to its patron base and to the public.

The Valparaiso University School of Law Library seeks to provide the highest quality service in support of learning, teaching, scholarship and research at the School of Law.

To provide an innovative and comprehensive information environment for study and scholarship to prepare Duke Law students for responsible and productive lives in the legal profession and to support the Law School's national and international leadership in improving the law and legal institutions through teaching, research, and public service.  
[from Duke University Law Library Information Services Mission Statement]

The mission of the University of Nevada Las Vegas Law Library is:

1. To support the instructional function of the School of Law and the broader university.
2. To provide the information resources necessary to support the research efforts of the faculty and students of the School of Law and the broader university.
3. To provide access to legal materials and information to the outside community in the Las Vegas metropolitan area and the entire state, including members of the practicing bar and the general public.

¶7 Often though, the law library wishes to convey more about the institution—it wants to describe what it is doing and why it is doing it. The library seeks to incorporate within the mission statement enabling or supporting documentation of values, vision, and behavior that helps the institution accomplish the statement's goals.<sup>8</sup> This is exemplified in the mission statement of the University of Missouri-Columbia Law Library.

The law library is an indispensable partner with the law school in preparing competent lawyers, advancing legal scholarship, and improving the law. Our highest priority is to

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7. PATRICIA JONES & LARRY KAHANER, *SAY IT AND LIVE IT: 50 CORPORATE MISSION STATEMENTS THAT HIT THE MARK* 264 (1995).

8. *Id.*

design and deliver outstanding and innovative collections and services relevant to the law school curriculum and to the scholarship and service of the law faculty and law students. As a publicly supported academic institution, the law library also strives, to the extent that resources permit, to meet the legal information needs of the university, the bench and bar, and the public.

Strategic Directions:

1. Collection—The law library collects, organizes and preserves recorded legal knowledge, integrating print and digital resources.
2. Facility—The law library provides an environment for effective legal research and law study, including the availability of research experts, access services and technology.
3. Reference/Instruction—Law librarians provide critical expertise on finding, evaluating, and conveying legal knowledge.
4. Technology—The law library integrates educational and research technology in creative and practical ways for the benefit of law faculty and law students and extends the availability of legal resources and library services through its presence on the World Wide Web.

¶8 The appropriate approach for some institutions may not be provided by any of the foregoing examples. Jones and Kahaner suggest that “outsiders can bring clarity and a fresh perspective” to the process of developing a mission statement.<sup>9</sup> The mission statement’s guiding principle in this instance might seek as its goal one set of ideas that is articulated, understood, and supported by all institutional stakeholders: library staff, campus administration, dean, faculty, law students, staff, alumni, local bar, governing boards, collaborating partners, and donors.<sup>10</sup> The following mission statement of the University of Michigan Law Library suggests that it was drafted mindful of various stakeholder perspectives.

The University of Michigan Law Library is “maintained and administered as part of the instruction and research operation of the Law School.” (Board of Regents Bylaw 12.02)

The Law Library’s purpose is to build collections and provide services to support the teaching and research needs of the Law School faculty and students. Therefore, the Law Library’s collections, services, and policies are primarily designed to benefit the Law School’s faculty and students, and others officially connected with the Law School.

The Law Library’s secondary users—whose needs are met only after those of the primary users—are other University of Michigan faculty and students who have legitimate need to use the collection, and attorneys.

The Law Library accommodates others only so long as their use of the facilities does not interfere with use by primary and secondary users.

¶9 When developing a mission statement, the drafters should determine the library’s purpose and articulate that purpose in a written document to inform others and to guide current and future library action. Each mission statement will be unique to its institution simply because each institution and law library staff has its own values, perspectives, and goals. The mission statement cannot be

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9. *Id.* at 265.

10. Internet Nonprofit Ctr., *supra* note 2.

generic because it offers the fundamental reason for the *particular* law library's existence.<sup>11</sup>

### **Importance of the Mission Statement**

¶10 The mission statement is so important to a library because it serves to reflect the actions, goals, and beliefs of its drafters and to act as a road map for future action. Furthermore, the statement provides a sense of stability and reassurance for employees and institutional stakeholders. The document may be referred to at times when library activities are called into question.

¶11 The actual mission usually can be stated succinctly in a preamble sentence. Supplemental language enumerates how staff will accomplish the mission and articulates guiding principles or values that direct employee work in the present and the future.<sup>12</sup> A good example of this approach can be seen in the mission statement of the University of North Carolina Law Library:

The Katherine R. Everett Law Library supports the education of Carolina Law students, acts as a research partner with the faculty and students, and serves the legal information needs of University students and faculty, the legal community, and the residents of North Carolina.

To that end, the Law Library's mission is:

- To research, develop and implement innovative services, instruction and creative uses of technology to access, manage and communicate knowledge;
- To collect, organize and preserve legal resources, and provide access to information to enhance and support legal and law related research and scholarship;
- To maintain a physical environment conducive to study, research and scholarship, and;
- To foster research, education, and leadership in law librarianship, legal research and information and library science.

¶12 Failure to clearly state and communicate the law library's mission may result in negative consequences,<sup>13</sup> such as the following,

- law library staff may waste time and energy on activities that do not forward the mission of the library or law school, or on activities that are low priority;
- law library staff may not think imaginatively enough about action alternatives if the mission statement is not clear or not broad enough in scope;
- law library staff may not realize when it is time to change or evolve to meet changing external circumstances; and
- other law school administrators or faculty may not understand or value activities library staff undertake.

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11. Butler, *supra* note 5, at 240.

12. JONES & KAHANER, *supra* note 7, at 264.

13. Internet Nonprofit Ctr., *supra* note 2, at 2.

## Drafting the Mission Statement

¶13 A mission statement may be difficult to write just because so many stakeholders are charged with determining the core reason for the library's existence. Participants in the drafting process may differ in their views as to what is really important.<sup>14</sup> Once agreement is reached as to the core concepts of the business of the organization, however, disagreement often evaporates and is replaced by enthusiasm and energy for drafting the statement.<sup>15</sup>

¶14 Jones and Kahaner suggest that the top manager or management team draft the initial mission statement and then distribute it to other managers and employees for review and comment.<sup>16</sup> The more widespread the participation in developing the mission statement, the more acceptance it is likely to garner from those who will live the ideas it embodies.

¶15 Once drafted, the law library mission statement may need approval by the law school faculty, or another group governing library policies and procedures, before it becomes effective. At the very least, a copy should be sent to the law school dean for comment and consideration. The wider the acceptance gained for the mission statement at its adoption, the more credibility the document will have when it is relied upon to support future library activities.

## Content of the Mission Statement

¶16 Karl Albrecht stresses that the effective mission statement should address:

1. The *customer*—defined not in terms of some market segment or statistical category, but in terms of a basic defining *need premise* that leads that person (or entity) to consider doing business with your enterprise.
2. The *value premise*—defined not in terms of what your organization does, makes, sells, or delivers, but in terms of the fundamental *value* it represents in matching the customer's need premise.
3. *What makes you special*—your special *means for creating value*, in order to win and keep the customer's business.<sup>17</sup>

¶17 Albrecht gives an A grade to Rodale Press's (publisher of health and self-help books) mission statement which reads: "Our mission is to show people how they can use the power of their bodies and minds to make their lives better. 'You can do it,' we say on every page of our magazines and books."<sup>18</sup> Albrecht commends Rodale Press for putting the customer value premise up front in its mission statement, explaining how the company does that, and identifying the business the company is in.<sup>19</sup>

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14. Butler, *supra* note 5, at 242.

15. KARL ALBRECHT, *THE NORTHBOUND TRAIN: FINDING THE PURPOSE, SETTING THE DIRECTION, SHAPING THE DESTINY OF YOUR ORGANIZATION* 149 (1994).

16. JONES & KAHANER, *supra* note 7, at 265.

17. ALBRECHT, *supra* note 15, at 153.

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

¶18 In the academic law library setting, the customer might be a law student patron who needs training in evaluating legal information sources. Instruction and training in evaluating legal information is an example of Albrecht's "need premise" which defines the customer, a patron seeking out a particular law library service because she believes it will meet her need. Such training provided by the law library is an example of what Albrecht means by "value premise"—that is, the law library's fundamental value achieved through its ability to deliver on the student's need premise by offering the training desired. What makes the library special is that the librarian possesses the expertise and ability to help students develop critical thinking and independence in the evaluation of legal materials.

¶19 A mission statement incorporating the needs and values in the law library example outlined above might read as follows:

XYZ academic law librarians, specialists in evaluating legal information sources, impart this knowledge to law students through formalized instruction as part of the professional training designed to equip XYZ law students for the practice of law.

¶20 Law library mission statement drafters might incorporate the following components to achieve a customer-based, value-premised mission statement that reflects the uniqueness of their institution.

### ***The Purpose Component of the Mission Statement***

¶21 The *purpose* component of the mission statement articulates clearly and concisely what the academic law library seeks to accomplish. It answers the questions: "Why does this law library exist?" and "What is the ultimate achievement of this library's activities?"<sup>20</sup>

¶22 Purpose statements usually include two phrases:

- an infinitive indicating a change in status,<sup>21</sup> such as "to provide services and resources," "to support the curriculum," "to provide legal research instruction," or "to foster learning, research, and service activities of faculty, staff, and students," etc.
- an identification of a problem or condition to be changed,<sup>22</sup> such as "to prepare students for responsible and productive lives in the legal profession," "to teach students to retrieve, evaluate, and manage information in an efficient, professional, and ethical manner," or "to serve the public welfare through cooperative efforts to collect and preserve information at the regional, national, and international levels," etc.

¶23 In defining purpose, one should focus on outcomes and results rather than methods.<sup>23</sup> What will change? How will this academic law library make a

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20. Internet Nonprofit Ctr., *supra* note 2, at 3.

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.*

difference to its patrons? Thus the purpose of the academic law library is not simply to provide legal research services as that describes a method. Rather, the mission purpose might be “to produce lawyers competent to perform complex legal research using print and online resources.”

¶24 Most law libraries creating a mission statement have, at minimum, established a purpose component. Here are a few examples:

The Mission of the Syracuse University College of Law, H. Douglas Barclay Law Library is to promote and to serve the educational and research needs of the College of Law Community and to advance the development of legal scholarship and law librarianship. The Law Library creates, develops, and supports appropriate services, resources and facilities; promotes the dissemination of information and the creation of knowledge; and serves as a gateway to information sources beyond the scope of its collections.

The mission of the William and Mary Law Library is to provide access to law and law-related resources and a wide range of services to support Law School curriculum and programs, to promote the advancement of legal scholarship, and to fulfill the information needs of library users. The Law Library provides resources and services to its users in the following order of priority:

1. Law School faculty, students and staff
2. The College of William and Mary community;
3. Law School alumni;
4. The Virginia bench and bar; and
5. other library patrons.

The mission of the University of North Dakota Thormodsgard Law Library is to provide resources and services necessary to support the curricular, research, and service goals of the faculty and students of the University of North Dakota School of Law. We also serve as a source of legal information for the University of North Dakota community, the practicing bar, the bench, and other law-related professionals, governmental entities, and the general public.

¶25 Additional parts of the statement can be used to further flesh out the library activities and values driving the mission purpose. These are the “business” and “values” components in the mission statement.

### *The Business Component of the Mission Statement*

¶26 The *business* component of the mission statement outlines the activities or programs the law library selects to accomplish its purpose.<sup>24</sup> In the Cornell and Georgetown examples set forth below, the staffs not only have stated the purpose of each law library but also the activities that accomplish that purpose.

¶27 The business component identifies the activity or program that best exemplifies the law library’s approach to accomplishing its purpose. It should answer the question “What activities do we engage in to accomplish our purpose?”<sup>25</sup>

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24. *Id.*

25. *Id.*

For example, there are several ways to teach legal research skills: creating Web-based research tutorials, participating in the first-year legal research and writing program, instructing students one-on-one on how to conduct a specific search, or providing online research training sessions.

¶28 Business statements often include an action verb such as “to provide” or “to establish” that links the purpose statement with the words “by” or “through.”<sup>26</sup> For example, “**to** develop competent research attorneys **by** providing online LexisNexis and Westlaw training.” Here are some examples from actual law library mission statements.

The mission of the [Cornell] Law Library is to support legal scholarship and education by providing outstanding and innovative information services and resources to the Law School, University, and the worldwide research community.

The mission of the [Georgetown University law] library is to support fully the research and educational endeavors of the students and faculty of the Georgetown University Law Center, by collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating legal and law related information in any form, by providing effective service and instructional programs, and by utilizing electronic information systems to provide access to new information products and services.

### *The Values Component of the Mission Statement*

¶29 Values are common beliefs held by the law library staff members that they attempt to practice on the job. Values guide staff in performing activities, services, and programs.<sup>27</sup> In developing a mission statement, staff members should first determine what values they share or what values the law school administrators, faculty, and students share that they will adopt and attempt to foster.

¶30 Values might include: pursuit of excellence in education and service; diversity among staff, faculty, and students; initiative; innovation; globalization; social justice; and integrity, etc. Adding a shared *values* component to the mission statement provides another key guidepost in the quest for successful staff achievement.

¶31 Values come alive only when people are involved in executing important tasks.<sup>28</sup> It is hoped that an employee’s personal values will align with the articulated and unarticulated values of the law school and law library.<sup>29</sup> Staff members have an opportunity to contribute to the articulation of these values by developing a written statement of the institution’s values. During this process individual staff members will also be able to evaluate how well personal values and motivation match the institution’s values and belief.<sup>30</sup>

¶32 The Pace Law Library Mission Statement provides an example that includes values, business statement, and purpose:

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26. *Id.*

27. *Id.*

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

The Pace University School of Law Library is a gateway to information. As an essential component of legal education, the Library collects and organizes information to support the curriculum and programs of the Pace University School of Law, makes effective use of all available resources to promote student and faculty scholarship, and teaches Pace University School of Law students, faculty and staff how to retrieve, evaluate, and manage information in an efficient, professional, and ethical manner.

¶33 The wording and tone of the mission statement should reflect the actual or desired public image of the law library. The personality and shared values of the California Western School of Law Library staff shine forth in its mission statement:

The Library of the California Western School of Law exists as an educational and cultural resource supporting the Law School's mission to train ethical, competent, and compassionate lawyers who are creative problem solvers committed to the improvement of our legal system and society. Reflecting the diversity of the educational, research, and public service goals of the School, the Library conceives its basic mission to include the following:

1. To select and acquire or provide effective access to those resources, in whatever format, that support the current and anticipated instructional and research needs of its users;
2. To organize and bring under bibliographic control the materials acquired;
3. To interpret the collection to users, to assist them in utilizing the resources of the Library, and to provide access to needed information located elsewhere;
4. To make the collection available to users while at the same time preserving materials for the future;
5. To provide library users with instruction in the use of information resources both through interaction with individual patrons and formal training in the classroom;
6. To provide and support the equipment and technology to enhance scholarly activity;
7. To cooperate with other libraries and organizations for the advancement of scholarship and the effective utilization of resources.

¶34 The Texas Tech Law Library offers another value-centered mission statement.

We will provide library services in the highest standard of excellence while pursuing continuous quality improvement in order to:

- Serve and support the educational, instructional, and research needs of the Law School
- Provide the University, the legal profession, and the people of Texas with full access to legal information

We will accomplish this through Teamwork, Service, and Innovation.

¶35 Law librarians in libraries that currently possess mission statements might evaluate them against the criteria set forth above. Does your mission statement set forth behavioral direction that will change the institution? Does your mission statement encompass both technical services and public services unit activities of the law library? Does your mission statement identify how your library is unique and differentiate it from other academic law libraries? Is your mission statement as relevant today as the day it was originally written? Is your mission statement

inspiring and exciting for both library staff and patrons? Does it help you make strategic decisions for the library? If your answer to any of these questions is “no,” this might be the time to update your mission statement.

### Living and Marketing the Law Library Mission

¶36 Jones and Kahaner state that the most difficult part of developing a mission statement is disseminating, adopting, and sharing it.<sup>31</sup> Once the mission statement is in place, it forms the basis for your library to market its unique services, staff, and collection. Linda K. Wallace advises librarians to distinguish their institution’s role and contribution as unique from that of the competition.<sup>32</sup> The effective mission statement forms the basis of a successful library marketing effort, designed to consistently project a “clear and distinctive image.”<sup>33</sup> Noting that shorter mission statements have become the norm in the past decade, Wallace believes the shorter the mission statement, the better it is for communication purposes.<sup>34</sup> While the “T-shirt” type slogan, using a few words to communicate the essence of a library, is still the exception, Wallace says that it should be possible to distill the core of your mission into a few words or sentences that is sometimes called a “branding” or “tagline” statement.<sup>35</sup> Wallace’s main point about turning mission statements into marketing tools is to keep the statement succinct, dynamic, and evocative.<sup>36</sup>

¶37 Law libraries have many tools and opportunities at hand to succeed in such a marketing effort. Post the mission statement on the library Web site, disseminate it on bookmarks, inscribe it on employee notepads, post it in staff work areas, and refer to it in presentations and library reports. Tie the mission statement to annual work plans, performance evaluations, and annual reports. Employ the mission statement to justify legitimate library activities that nonlibrary personnel might question. Use it when recruiting new library staff to give candidates a sense of excitement about your operation and to provide some criteria in determining who is the best fit for your law library.

¶38 Giveaways such as pens, pencils, pads of paper, and brochures might announce a *sound bite* version of the law library’s mission. For example, the University of San Francisco identification card is inscribed with the university mission of “educating minds and hearts to change the world.”

¶39 The main challenge for staff is to *live* the library mission statement: relying on it for guidance in the daily activities of the library, basing collection development and operational decisions on it, using it as a benchmark for per-

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31. JONES & KAHANER, *supra* note 7, at 266.

32. LINDA K. WALLACE, LIBRARIES, MISSION, & MARKETING: WRITING MISSION STATEMENTS THAT WORK 5 (2004).

33. *Id.* at 6.

34. *Id.* at 8.

35. *Id.* at 9.

36. *Id.* at 10.

formance and a method to evaluate that performance, and revising it as necessary to keep it relevant and vibrant. The mission statement is the reflection of a particular law library staff's shared values and committed activities, the guiding beacon to where that library wants to be positioned in the academic law library profession. The dissemination of this message is a powerful marketing tool to both internal stakeholders and external constituencies.

¶40 Law library staff should refer to the mission statement when formulating library policy, when creating procedural manuals, when constructing new facilities or renovating current ones, when creating new programs and services, when drafting annual library priorities, and when marketing library services to others. Virtually every activity undertaken by the library staff can be benchmarked against the mission statement.

¶41 The mission statement can be just a statement, or it can be a statement to live and work by. Unlike Lewis Carroll's Alice, a law library staff that has articulated its values, vision, and desired behaviors in a mission statement will have a clear road map to guide its steps to successful achievements.