



Some people look at their career as a journey. Maybe because I grew up in Maine I have always viewed my career as a mountain that I am summiting. When I joined AALL as a student member, the career mountain before me seemed incredibly high. I wondered if I should be getting more involved with associations locally and nationally, if I should be focusing on writing and presenting, or if I should be working to find new ways to approach old processes at the library where I worked.

I soon found myself asking these questions to the law librarians where I was interning. Through their stories and experiences, I gained further insight into my own career mountain. Over the years, I have continued to ask my peers in the profession about their careers to help guide me in my own. Perhaps you will glean insight about your own career from the questions that were posed at 2009 Association of College and Research panels and the answers provided by law librarians and former law librarians about their own career mountains.

Learning from Others as You Summit Your Career Mountain

Law librarians share their thoughts on the profession

By Kathleen Brown

Q What catchphrase summarizes your path?

Ron Wheeler

associate director at the Georgia State University College of Law in Atlanta

“ Around the world in 20 years. Focusing on jobs that feed the soul can lead you to unexpected and varied locales. After law school, jobs I never thought I’d be doing in places I never thought I’d live have led to unexpected pleasure and fulfillment. You can’t be afraid of a little adventure. ”



Christine Graesser

legal information specialist at Brown Rudnick LLP in Hartford

“ Take what you have and run with it. The library field doesn’t always offer the perfect job at the perfect time but every job provides a learning opportunity. ”



Jennifer Murray

family court administrator at the Maricopa County Superior Court in Phoenix

“ Best-laid plans get waylaid. I always had a 10-year career plan that ended up having to be adjusted every year. At the beginning, it was about the destination and not the journey. Now it’s about the journey and not the destination. The result is unexpected experiences and following less-traveled paths. ”



Bonnie Shucha

head of reference at the University of Wisconsin Law School in Madison

“ Accidental enthusiast. Although law librarianship isn’t the career path I had laid out for myself initially, I’m very pleased that it’s where I’ve wound up. I love my profession and am very enthusiastic about seeking innovations to make our lives easier and improve our patrons’ experiences. I also enthusiastically share my love for my profession with anyone who will listen. ”

Meg Kribble

reference librarian and outreach and community relations specialist at Harvard Law School in Cambridge

“ Right time, right place, right social networks. I was extraordinarily lucky to have connected with role models, informal mentors, and important career connections very early in my career—sometimes by meeting them at conferences but far more often than not online. From coming home from my first Annual Meeting and putting my pictures in the AALL 2006 Flickr photo pool, social media has been a major way I’ve kept in touch with far away colleagues between conferences. Flickr led to Second Life, Twitter, Facebook, and other sites that enabled me to get to know and learn from them much faster than I would have otherwise, sometimes on a daily basis. I’m not sure where I’d be career-wise without social media, but I’m certain my professional life would be much poorer and far less satisfying. ”



Marcus Hochstetler

law librarian and director at the King County Law Library in Seattle

“ On-the-job training. Each work experience builds upon the next and, even if the current task seems insignificant, it will have rewards down the road. Take a job and learn through mistakes and successes to improve service. ”

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Q What role has publishing and presenting played in your lives?



Helane Davis, *director of the University of Kentucky Law School in Lexington*

“Publishing and presenting help me stay engaged in the current trends of librarianship, legal information, and legal academe. They are also the intellectual balance to my administrative life, making it easier to keep perspective of the short and long term, the minute and the aspirational, and the forest for the trees. Whether its innovation in the administration of the library or innovation in legal research instruction, publishing especially provides intellectual space for exploring new ideas, new theories, or old ideas in light of new facts. A purely administrative life without these aspects would not appeal to me.”



Jason Eiseman, *librarian for emerging technologies at Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut.*

“They have played very important roles. Some of my earliest connections were from articles I wrote from LLRX[.com] and presentations I made. Presentations can even be useful inside your organization. Several years ago I created an internal presentation on blogs for the law firm I was working for. That led to an article for the local chapter of the Legal Management Association and other presentations to their group. It was a great way to show off to other firm managers what librarians could do.”



Holly A. Lakatos, *law librarian at the California Court of Appeal Third Appellate District in Sacramento*

“Presenting makes some of the day-to-day tasks a bit more interesting because I’m continually looking for opportunities to improve our workflows and share our experiences. Publishing is a way that I can contribute a tiny part to the profession as a whole. Neither presenting nor publishing has been a major part of my job duties, but each has enhanced my overall job satisfaction because they are ways to keep my job interesting. Staying connected to other professionals helps me grow as a librarian.”



Ron Wheeler, *associate director at the Georgia State University College of Law in Atlanta*

“Publishing and presenting has played an unexpectedly significant role in my career. At my first law library job, my director encouraged me to publish short practice-oriented articles in the state bar journal. From then on, I tried to take every opportunity to write and present that I could.

“After almost nine years, I’m always amazed when people approach me and/or write to me to comment or to question me about something that I wrote or about a presentation that I did. It’s a real thrill to think that your words, either written or spoken, can motivate or inspire or aid someone in their research, their career path, or their everyday job.”



Marcus Hochstetler, *law librarian and director of the King County Law Library in Seattle*

“I can say that my publishing exploits have not been as extensive as some of my academic colleagues. This is not to say that I am not writing or presenting regularly. I am presenting the case for funding of our library to the local government annually and writing a compelling reason to keep that in place, and securing access to justice through our library. Presenting helps one gain confidence in the mission and goals of the library.”



Cornell H. Winston, *law librarian at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Los Angeles*

“Publishing and presenting forces you to confront the subject matter more closely. When I am asked to give a presentation, I have to ‘kick my game into high gear’ because there is a level of expectation in what I am doing. Anyone who presents has an obligation to be clear, concise, informative, and enthusiastic about the subject matter. If a person is not excited and thrilled about what they are doing, our reader/listener will know it immediately.”

Q What's your perspective on innovation and entrepreneurship in developing your career strategy?



Catherine Lemann

state law librarian at the Alaska State Court in Anchorage

“ You cannot stand still and let change happen around you. You have to be in charge of educating yourself and promoting yourself and your work. It's important to try new techniques and strategies. It's also important to recognize when a strategy or innovation doesn't work for you. Innovate, promote yourself and your institution, and evaluate the results. Repeat. ”



Meg Kribble

reference librarian and outreach and community relations specialist at Harvard Law School in Cambridge

“ Innovation has been essential. It was my involvement in Second Life that helped me find my first speaking and writing opportunities. At first I was worried that I would be known as 'that crazy Second Life librarian' but I soon found that the phrase had translated in most people's minds to 'that techie librarian.' Even though Second Life turned out not to be useful for libraries, exploring it was a valuable lesson in the importance of trying out new things even if they don't work. ”

Roy Balleste

director at St. Thomas University Law School in Miami Gardens, Florida

“ Our careers—indeed, our profession—would begin to lose value and relevance without innovation and entrepreneurship. Both of these elements fuel law librarianship. It is here that we define our work and set the frontier of the future. ”



Cornell H. Winston

law librarian at the U.S. Attorney's Office in Los Angeles

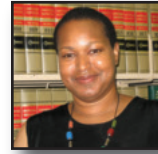
“ The first law firm I worked for had a saying that has impacted my life and work: 'The best source of new business is the work currently on your desk.' The best thing I can do as a law librarian is to seek to handle accurately the work currently on my desk. I may need to be creative in answering the reference question or utilize the expertise of colleagues, but my responsibility is to handle the assignment I currently have. ”



Holly A. Lakatos

law librarian at the California Court of Appeal Third Appellate District in Sacramento

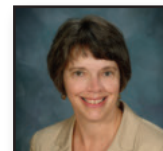
“ When I first became a professional librarian, I realized that many professional librarians were not good supervisors, even though they had to take on supervisory duties to 'move up' the career ladder. I also realized that most law librarians wanted to work as reference librarians. So I tried to develop a set of skills that would make me a competitive candidate: supervision, documentation, workflow analysis, and non-reference duties. Simply following the 'traditional' career path probably wouldn't have worked for me, so I had to develop a path that did. ”



Helane Davis

director of the University of Kentucky Law School in Lexington

“ I think innovation is key. That said, it's also very personal. Each of us has to take the initiative to learn what options are available, to determine our wants and needs, and then to position ourselves accordingly. There is no one blueprint that fits all. You may be innovating within an existing organizational structure or 'entrepreneur' outside of an existing structure. To the extent that you're parlaying experience, talent, ambition, and credentials into new opportunities, you have to know your own limits and your willingness to embrace risk. Always be thinking about the next best thing to accomplish an end, be smarter, grow new skills, learn new ways of operating—that type of innovation will keep you fresh, keep you engaged, and feed your drive. If you can harness that kind of energy, it's easier to build a satisfying career. ”



Christine Graesser

legal information specialist at Brown Rudnick LLP in Hartford

“ It's the engine that keeps me running and is essential to successful responses to the many changes in the information field. ”

Q What's the next step in your career?



Catherine Lemann

state law librarian at the Alaska State Court in Anchorage

“ I'm not ready to retire. I still get excited about trying to create the best law library in Alaska to serve all Alaskans. I will have more opportunities to work collaboratively with other parts of the court system, which should improve the library's visibility. I also hope I can be a resource for new members of the profession. I admire their energy and creativity. ”

Jennifer Murray

family court administrator at the Maricopa County Superior Court in Phoenix

“ This is a tough question. I'm honestly not sure. If you take the label of librarian off of yourself, then who are you? What do you want? Where could you go? The possibilities become endless. Sometimes I think it might be easier just to slap the label back on. But innovation and entrepreneurship aren't easy. So I'm struggling through trying to answer those questions now. I firmly believe that I'll be a better person for answering these questions. Shouldn't everyone stop periodically to think about the labels they have for themselves and make sure they still fit? ”

Kathleen Brown (kabrown@stu.edu) is faculty and student services librarian at St. Thomas University Law Library in Miami Gardens, Florida.



Jason Eiseman

librarian for emerging technologies at Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut

“ At this point I honestly don't know. When I was at the law firm, I aspired to become a law firm library director. But the recent cross-country move to an academic law library has forced me to re-evaluate everything about the future of my career. What type of library do I want to work in? What location do I want to work in? Where do I see myself in five or 10 years? I may have had more concrete answers to that last year. Today, I am forced to re-evaluate everything I was thinking about my own career.

“But I am happy with the current situation. I like that I will have the ability to compare and contrast different work environments. I will be able to make an even better assessment of my future career a few years down the road. And I am okay with doing that. As I am reminded with the recent passing of John Hughes, 'life moves pretty fast—if you don't stop and look around once in awhile, you might miss it.' ”



Bonnie Shucha

head of reference at the University of Wisconsin Law School in Madison

“ For me, the next step in my career is continued learning and professional development. Toward this goal, I have enrolled in law school and am currently a part-time 1L here at the University of Wisconsin. I realize that nurturing this side of my career may lead to a reduction in other professional activities, such as writing and presenting. However, I think that it will benefit my overall development as a law librarian—hopefully one who is capable of taking on new positions of increased leadership within my organization and the Association. ”

Roy Balleste

director of the St. Thomas University Law School in Miami Gardens, Florida

“ My next career step will be defined by new technological innovations. This is a fact difficult to ignore and worth observing. Our profession may be threatened if our customers perceive us to be obsolete. Understanding technology and embracing its power will enhance our effectiveness. I believe that having a deep understating of the Internet and all of its characteristics opens us to many future possibilities. ”