

Help Wanted: Ensuring the Survival of Law Librarianship

by Penny A. Hazelton

In her 37 years of leadership at the University of Washington School of Law Library, Marian Gould Gallagher (professor, law librarian, and one of the great contributors to our profession) looked for these characteristics in those pursuing law librarianship:

"Industrious, alert, charming, attentive to detail, refined, imaginative, unafraid of briefing a judge or getting filthy while moving 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."

The 80 law libraries seeking to fill 101 positions at the 1999 AALL Annual Meeting Placement Office were looking for something much simpler: an applicant pool from which to find even ONE candidate for each open position.

For the past two years, job openings have greatly outnumbered applicants at the AALL Annual Meeting, which is THE national job forum for law librarians.

In 1999, only 61 resumes were submitted for 101 jobs at all levels, and only 26 potential candidates were available to fill 65 entry-level jobs. At the 1998 Annual Meeting Placement Office, only 23 entry-level applicants were available for 40 such jobs.

Perhaps more disturbing: preliminary study by AALL's Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education indicates this situation is likely to continue across our profession—unless we law librarians do something about it.

Reality Is in the Numbers

Our own Association statistics, as well as experiences shared by law librarians and educators across the country, document the declining applicant pool in our profession. Consider the facts:

- **Our profession is aging.** In 1996, the AALL Demographic Survey found that 74 percent of law librarians were 36 years old or older—with 32 percent between ages 46 and 55, and 42 percent between 36 and 45. As the older group retires and the current mid-level managers take charge of our law libraries, who will staff them?

continued on page 20

For years I've listened to colleagues complain about the quality of their library school experience and the unfortunate necessity of learning basic skills on the job. We weighed the merits of teaching theory against the need for new librarians to hit the ground running. As employers we wondered what competencies we could expect an entry-level librarian to have.

The discussion today is no longer just an interesting debate about what constitutes a balanced and high quality curriculum for the library and information science field. The future of the profession is at stake, and it is clear that the scope and quality of education for law librarianship has a direct impact on that future. Excellent courses, exciting job opportunities, recruitment, mentoring, and retention are all part of the package of ensuring the future of law librarianship.

This Members' Briefing, then, is a call to arms for all law librarians to work actively with AALL and with LIS schools to promote a law librarianship curriculum and to recruit to the profession. If all of us act as ambassadors for law librarianship, the profession will thrive.

Special thanks to Penny Hazelton and Nancy Johnson for their willingness to compile this briefing in a very short time frame and to all the members of the Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education for their leadership in this important effort.



Margaret Maes Axtmann
AALL President 1999–2000

AALL 1999 Placement Office Snapshot

Job Openings/Requirements

	# Jobs	MLS only	MLS req/JD pref	MLS+JD	Other
Entry Level	65	16 (25%)	18 (28%)	21 (32%)	10
Mid/Senior Level	36	13	5	16	2
TOTALS	101	29%	23%	37%	12%

Applicants*—Educational Background

	# Applicants	MLS only	MLS+JD	Other
Entry Level	26	6	18	2
Mid/Senior Level	29	11	16	2
TOTALS	55	17 (31%)	34 (62%)	4

*Available by December 1999 for employment—6 applicants who submitted resumes were unavailable until after this time.

inside:



AALL's Various Roles..... 18
How You Can Encourage Law Librarianship Careers..... 19
Law Librarianship Career Info on the Web..... 19

AALL's Various Roles

For a number of years, AALL has worked through various channels to address the need to increase understanding of the educational and professional competencies required to be an effective law librarian, and to effectively match employers with quality candidates. The following highlights some of the accomplishments to date, and some issues that might be considered based on Jonathan Franklin's report to the AALL Executive Board on the ALA Congress. (Citations refer to the report's recommendations.)

Studying core competencies and educational effectiveness. A 1997 study sponsored by the AALL Professional Development Committee's Subcommittee on Credentialing 1) evaluated members' attitudes and beliefs about the value of a credentialing program; 2) found broad agreement on a range of competencies and skills pertinent to the work of law librarians; and 3) identified areas where gaps exist between the skills law librarians need for their daily work, and those they obtain through traditional library education. (See "President's Briefing: Law Librarian Competencies," *AALL Spectrum* 4/98:18–19)

Continuing education. The AALL Professional Development Committee is addressing these identified needs in its critical role of coordinating continuing education programs for law librarianship—at the Annual Meeting and beyond. Further coordination with ALA and other peer organizations could further enhance the opportunities for law librarians to learn from and teach non-law librarians. As ALA considers the creation of a centralized center or databank for continuing education programs, AALL should consider the benefits and drawbacks of playing a role in such a project. (Recs. 3.2, 3.3)

Investigating opportunities in law librarianship education. The AALL Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education, appointed by AALL President Jim Heller in 1998, is charged with investigating the need for greater offerings of law librarianship courses to library science students. The Task Force surveyed

library school deans and directors in 1998, and identified two key opportunities:

- 1) **Library science/information school deans** could be much better informed about law librarianship, including educational needs and career opportunities, and
- 2) **More courses for law librarianship** could be offered in more locations to offset the limited numbers of courses offered by accredited schools.

The Task Force has begun to address these opportunities with information on AALL's Web site (see "Law Librarianship Career Info on the Web"). It is working on recommending other ways AALL might enhance the availability of law librarianship education in the nation's library and information science graduate programs.

Increasing awareness of law librarianship as a career. Making educators more aware of law librarianship as a profession would enhance their ability to guide students toward careers. In 1999–2000, the AALL Recruitment Committee plans to increase its contact with library and information science program directors—to establish and continue relationships with educators, and to make them aware of law librarianship and AALL with materials and ongoing communication.

Fostering dialogue among educators and professionals. The Conference of Law Library Educators, a group of law librarians who teach in library schools, meets each year at the AALL Annual Meeting to talk about common issues and concerns. Its Web site includes course syllabi and other information to assist law librarianship educators (www.courses.unt.edu/chandler/CONFERENCELAWLIB/aallconeducators.html).

Continuing this dialogue between Library/Information Science (LIS) educators and professionals is an important goal. Clearly this can be achieved through teaching law librarianship in LIS programs, and general involvement in LIS education. However, the strengthening of the bonds between

the Association of Library and Information Science Educators (ALISE) and AALL also could play a substantial role in the future of law librarianship education, and an ongoing forum for discussions could reap substantial benefits for the profession. (Rec. 5.1)

Bringing employers and candidates together. The AALL Placement Committee, created in 1956, exists to facilitate in-person interviews at the Annual Meeting, and to provide policy guidance on career issues relating to placement in the profession.

Encouraging research on the profession. It is a boon to any profession to physically form a body of literature and demonstrate scholarship. AALL's proposals for research projects stand us in good stead in this area, but if more promising projects are being proposed than are being funded, there may be more we could do to increase the number of research grants. In addition, further publicity about the results of AALL-funded research could be made more prominent in Association print and electronic channels. (Recs. 4.4, 4.5)

Mentoring. AALL already has an excellent mentoring system in place through the efforts of the Mentoring and Retention Committee. AALL could expand this program—a critical component in the development of professionals—to include librarianship students, particularly in cases where law librarianship is not taught or not taught regularly, and thereby help those who might otherwise not enter the profession. Further outreach to LIS students via print and electronic media could play an important role in recruitment. (Rec. 5.4)

Training educators. The Annual Meeting of Law Librarianship Educators and the ongoing listserv sponsored by AALL form a basis for such activities, but there could be a larger role for AALL, particularly in training law librarianship educators. AALL might want to consider formalizing the discussion of pedagogical techniques, texts, and other issues in teaching in an LIS (as opposed to a JD) program. (Rec. 5.5)

How You Can Encourage Law Librarianship Careers

There are a number of ways that law librarians—whether they are employers, AALL Chapter members, or working professionals—can help attract qualified personnel to law librarianship and help ensure they have the educational background needed to deliver excellent results. Here are a few thoughts:

- **Teach a legal research/law librarianship course** in your local library/information science (LIS) graduate program.
- **Volunteer** to be on the visiting committee of your local LIS graduate program.
- **Be an active member** of the alumni association of your LIS graduate program, and volunteer.
- **Learn about curriculum** in today's LIS programs.
- **Offer to host a library school student** for an academic fieldwork or internship placement.
- **Post jobs and hire** LIS graduate students to work in your law library.
- **Offer to give a presentation** to Special Libraries, Government Documents, Reference, and Online Searching courses in LIS graduate programs.
- **Talk to the faculty member** who teaches the Special Libraries course about your work.
- **Give a colloquium for students** and LIS graduate students about law librarianship.
- **Offer law library tours** for local LIS graduate students.
- **Participate in the career days** offered by your law school—talk about law librarianship.
- **Seek outstanding law and library science students** in your legal research classes and tell them about careers in law librarianship.
- **Offer scholarships** to library students who attend the AALL Annual Meeting.
- **Know the facts about our profession;** it is particularly important to debunk the prevalent myth that you can't be a law librarian unless you have a law degree.
- **Mentor** outstanding and interested students in selection of LIS graduate program courses, networking, job opportunities, and the like.
- **Visit LIS graduate schools** likely to have a pool of good candidates for your jobs and do on-campus interviewing.
- **Contact those who regularly teach** law librarianship courses in LIS graduate programs to learn of strong candidates.
- **Consider becoming involved** in the ALA accreditation process to enable us to better educate LIS administrators about the issues central to law librarians.

Law Librarianship Career Info on the Web

People interested in pursuing a law librarianship education can now find information on courses and career opportunities on the new Web page, "Education for a Career in Law Librarianship" (<http://www.aallnet.org/committee/tfedu>). Created by AALL's Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship, the Web page is a useful guide for those who might be interested in working as law library professionals. It addresses many of the questions often asked by those interested in law librarianship, including such information as:

- What law librarians do and the kinds of organizations in which they work
- Links to articles and other writings on law librarianship as a career
- Suggestions for evaluating a graduate program with a career in law librarianship in mind
- Links to programs that offer such formal education
- Scholarship and other information

AALL Needs Your Knowledge & Educational Experience

If you have ideas that would increase the number of law librarianship courses taught in graduate programs, have experience with distance education courses in graduate programs, or would like to comment on this topic of formal education for law librarianship, please feel free to contact Penny A. Hazelton, Chair, AALL Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education, Gallagher Law Library, University of Washington, at pennyh@u.washington.edu.

AALL Support At-A-Glance:

- AALL Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Law Librarianship
- Regular forum for law librarians who teach in library schools (Conference of Law Library Educators)
- Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education
- AALL presentation at Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) Meeting
- Scholarships to library students who attend the AALL Annual Meeting
- Board member visits to library/information science schools when doing Chapter and other AALL business
- Free registration at AALL Annual Meeting for Deans and Directors of library/information science schools
- Active participation in ALA Congress on Professional Education
- Actively working with WESTLAW and LEXIS-NEXIS for free access program to all databases for library science students

Help Wanted

continued from page 17

- **Only 36 of the 49 accredited U.S. library schools offer any law librarianship courses**—seven of these graduate schools offer two courses.
- **Only three library/information science programs in the country offer three or more courses in law librarianship**, and all three schools combined graduated fewer than 35 law librarianship students in 1999.
- **Library school students, faculty, and leadership are underinformed about law librarianship**, its educational needs and career opportunities. A survey of library school deans by the AALL Task Force to Enhance Law Librarianship Education found that many thought law degrees were required for work in law librarianship, and others did not regularly see job postings for law librarianship positions.
- **There are fewer people with library degrees now than 20 years ago**—5057 people received masters or doctorate degrees in Library Science in 1995, compared to 7001 in 1971, a figure no doubt affected by the closing of several major library graduate programs in the early 1980s.
- **Limited numbers of applicants are available for law library jobs**, particularly at the entry level. At the 1999 AALL Annual Meeting Placement Office, for example, job openings outnumbered applicant resumes nearly 2 to 1.
- **The best library/information science graduates are taking high-paying jobs** in business and high tech industries, rather than pursuing work in libraries, according to some graduate school deans and directors.

Formal, Competency-based Education

In addition to declining numbers of potential candidates from fewer library and information sciences graduate programs, there is concern that even MLS graduates may lack the specific skills and competencies required for law librarianship. Most law librarians agree that high quality applicants are those with law library experience and/or formal classes in legal research and law librarianship. With only 36 schools offering

any law librarianship courses—and only three of these graduate schools with three or more courses—there are limited possibilities of finding entry-level staff who have been exposed to the legal system, the legal profession and its terminology, the literature of the law, the legal and ethical concerns of librarianship, and the legal profession.

Why Should We Care?

Working to encourage qualified graduates to pursue law librarianship careers is not just a nice thing to do—it is essential to the success of the law libraries we operate and the clientele we serve. As the current law library directors retire and are replaced by their middle management, the effectiveness of our libraries is inexorably linked to the quality of staff we are able to attract and hire. Library budgets, always limited, no matter what the type of law library, will be increasingly difficult to manage if we must spend staff time and training dollars to educate librarians in law librarianship rather than hire them with appropriate expertise.

Working Toward Solutions

Attention to core competencies and the national shortage of professionals were among the issues discussed by a group of information professionals at the 1999 Congress on Professional Education, sponsored by the American Library Association (ALA). Three law librarians were among more than 100 library and information studies educators and professionals who met to gain consensus on the values and core competencies of the profession and to identify possible actions to address common issues and concerns.

The Congress Report recommended a number of areas in which library professionals from all specialties could work to enhance competencies and skills, and expand their profession. These include:

- fostering diversity,
- pursuing accreditation,
- expanding access to graduate professional education,
- coordination of continuing education programs,
- encouraging research,
- continuing the dialogue between educators and professionals,
- mentoring, and
- training educators.

Jonathan Franklin (Senior Reference Librarian, University of Michigan Law Library) was AALL's representative to the Congress steering committee. Also attending the Congress were Roberta Shaffer (now Dean, University of Texas at Austin Graduate School of Library and Information Science) and AALL President Margie Axtmann (Assistant Director for Collections and Technical Services, University of Minnesota Law Library). In a report presented to the AALL Executive Board, Franklin recommended that AALL investigate, or reinvigorate, efforts in a number of these areas.

AALL has addressed many of these issues over the years in the activities of various committees and task forces—identifying needs through research and addressing them with ongoing professional involvement. As THE professional organization devoted exclusively to the interests of law librarians, it is important that AALL continue to look at ways to build awareness of law librarianship and the many professional rewards it can bring. However, it's not just AALL's problem—each law librarian must take personal responsibility for encouraging participation in our profession.

It's Up to ALL of Us

It's in every law librarian's best interest to care about this issue now—before it is too late. None of us want to be in the position of having jobs available with no one to fill them ... to feel forced to choose from less-than-qualified candidates ... or to add the ongoing challenge of major on-the-job training to the workload of already-strapped staffs and budgets.

Looking at this issue NOW, and working toward increasing interest in law librarianship for the future, will only benefit all of us and the institutions and customers we serve. It will help ensure the continued quality of our law libraries' resources and customer service. It also will contribute to fulfilling the mission of our profession—to serve our democratic society by making legal information available to all people.

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