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The most serious problem we face is how to replace ourselves. Where will the next librarians come from?

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— Susan Kent, the 2002 Library Journal Librarian of the Year



Propagating the Species: Will Librarians Go the Way of the Dodo Bird?

by Christopher Vallandingham

Given the aging of librarians and the uncertainty of librarianship in the digital age, one might wonder whether librarians are doomed to fade into history like medieval alchemists, certainly leaving their mark on history but no longer a distinct profession. The shortage of law librarians may turn into a crisis if the profession doesn't step up its recruitment efforts. However, the fate of law librarianship may ultimately be tied to how effectively the general library community can recruit new librarians to overcome its own dwindling numbers of information professionals.

The statistics don't look very promising. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are approximately 190,000 librarians in the United States. Nearly 22 percent of librarians will turn 65 in the next decade. Assuming all librarians retire at age 65, about 4,200 librarians will retire each year. In 1999–2000, 4,577 people graduated with master's degrees in library science. Even if all librarians continue in the profession during the course of their careers, the number of library school graduates remains constant and those graduates actually work in libraries, and the number of library positions holds steady, the profession is left with a surplus of only 377 librarians a year. In other words, there's very little margin for error. However, these assumptions don't reflect the reality plaguing the profession.

Using data from the 1990 census, James Matarazzo, dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Simmons College in Boston, found that the average librarian retires at age 63 and far fewer librarians work past age 65 than in years past. Early retirement has upset the delicate balance between new librarians and retiring librarians that existed before the 1990s. As librarians retire early, so shrinks the once large group of librarians of retirement age who continue to work. Prior to 1990, approximately 9,000 librarians labored on past retirement age. Today only 4,000 librarians continue to work past the age of 65. This shortfall of 5,000 exceeds the number of library school graduates each year. However, early retirement is not the only reason for the decreasing number of librarians.

Lured by the hefty salaries of businesses and information technology companies seeking information-savvy professionals, many library school graduates choose not to work in libraries. As library schools offer more and more training in information technology, many companies are hiring graduates of library schools as database managers, webmasters and network administrators. In 2000, about 20 percent of recent graduates of the University of Pittsburgh School of Information Science worked outside of libraries, according to Toni Carbo, dean of the University of Pittsburgh's library school.

The number of librarian jobs is expected to grow about 5 percent between 1998 and 2008. But due to a lack of qualified candidates or even a sufficient number of candidates to form the necessary pool of applicants, many job postings remain open for extended periods of time. As recently as April 2001, the Los Angeles Public Library had a 17 percent vacancy rate among entry-level librarians with no relief in sight. In fact, employers posted more than 1,000 jobs at the American Library Association Annual Meeting in 2000, but only 481 job candidates showed up. At the ALA 2001 Midwinter Meeting, there were 831 job openings with only 260 job seekers; in 1997, 360 jobs were advertised for 436 job candidates.

The impending shortage of librarians has also trickled down to law librarianship. Since the 1996 AALL Annual Meeting in Indianapolis, the number of law librarian positions advertised at the Placement Center during the conference has outnumbered the

number of resumes submitted. At the 2001 AALL Annual Meeting, employers posted 61 job openings and only 40 job seekers registered; in 2000, 88 jobs were offered and 50 candidates showed up.

Law libraries are indeed feeling the pinch as the pool of qualified candidates continues to dry up. For example, the newly created position of reference/instructional services librarian at the University of Miami School of Law in Coral Gables, Fla., has gone unfilled since the summer of 2002. The library initially interviewed numerous applicants. Although many of the applicants had the proper credentials, they “were not a good match for the position,” according to Robin Schard, assistant library director for public services at the University of Miami School of Law Library. Many job seekers initially applied for the position. Now there is barely a trickle. As the number of qualified candidates continues to decline, law librarians are wondering whether they will be forced to offer employment to less-than-ideal job candidates.

Low salaries have often been blamed for the lack of librarians. According to the *Library Journal* 2001 Placements and Salaries Survey, the average starting salary

working outside of libraries are about 11 percent higher. However, according to the National Association for Law Placement, first-year attorneys in private law firms of all sizes are paid about \$90,000 a year.

Because of the high cost of library school and law school, low salaries in law librarianship can particularly discourage those considering the profession or new graduates who have racked up thousands of dollars of debt for their advanced degrees. People with such a heavy debt load can't afford to take relatively low-paying jobs, whether those jobs are in the public-interest areas of law or in law librarianship, says Colleen Manning, chair of the AALL Mentoring Committee, which organizes the Conference of Newer Law Librarians at the AALL Annual Meeting. “At both of the law schools that I've worked for, students routinely graduate with more than \$100,000 in student loans,” Manning says. “Our entry-level salaries end up eliminating people who would otherwise make good law librarians because they can't become law librarians and pay their debts.”

Sheehy, director of library services at North Central College in Naperville, Ill., argues that the intangible benefits of being a librarian are just as persuasive. Cooperation and collegiality, the opportunity to make a difference, intellectual stimulation, the ever-changing nature of the profession, and job security might prove useful for recruiting purposes, she says.

In a society driven by money and prestige, perhaps the most convincing advocates for the profession are those that enjoy their work and are unapologetic about being librarians. The fall 2001 issue of *Law Library Journal* includes 23 essays from veteran law librarians who retain their enthusiasm for their work. In one of those essays, Timothy L. Coggins, director of the law library at the University of Richmond School of Law, explains that his job encompasses a variety of responsibilities. It helps keep his career fresh and interesting. He not only manages the law library but also provides technology support, serves as faculty adviser for an online journal, helps with fund-raising activities, and teaches legal research, among other duties. Despite his many responsibilities, Coggins' career enables him to enjoy activities that have nothing to do with his job. “Life outside of work is very important to me,” Coggins writes in *Law Library Journal*. “To relax by working in the garden or traveling renews me. ... Renewal from activities outside of work makes me a better librarian and manager.”

Paul Callister left the practice of law after nine years to join the reference staff of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's law library in Champaign, Ill., despite the drop in salary. Law librarianship gives him “a chance to be an educator, a chance to lead, and a chance to grow,” he says. “Librarianship is still a noble profession and a profession about service.”

“For the first time in my life I enjoy coming to work on Monday morning. I don't know many lawyers who can say that,” Callister says. “Law libraries are great places to work for and have great people to work with.”

Ideally every law librarian is a recruiter. This notion is reflected in ALA's “Each One, Reach One” campaign of the late 1980s and AALL's Recruitment to Law Librarianship's “Each One, Recruit One” slogan. However, due to the perceived low return on the investment of time expended

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Librarian Odyssey

How I Became a Law Librarian

I became a law librarian because I wanted to stay in academia. Coming from a working-class family, I was amazed and astounded by the beauty of higher education. I worked 30 hours a week in my college's undergraduate library, eventually becoming night supervisor, and I really enjoyed it. While I was in law school, I was lucky enough to meet Morris Cohen, an impressive and kind law librarian at Harvard Law School. At the end of our meeting, I decided that I wanted to emulate him as much as possible. I then became a research assistant to Mike Jacobstein, the law librarian at Stanford Law School. With Cohen and Jacobstein as my role models, I was hooked. I have remained a law librarian because librarianship is the last truly service-oriented profession — and I have never found a better gig.



Robert C. Berring

Director of the Law Library
and Professor of Law
University of California
School of Law Library
Boalt Hall Law Library
Berkeley, Calif.

for library school graduates is \$36,818. The 2001 AALL Biennial Salary Survey and *Organizational Characteristics* indicates that reference librarians in academic law libraries with less than two years of experience earn median salaries of about \$39,185. Starting salaries for librarians

To compete with the large salaries in the corporate sector, successful library recruitment strategies must offer librarians something just as attractive. While good salaries relative to other professions are perhaps the ultimate carrots to dangle in front of potential librarians, Carolyn

in recruiting activities, many librarians view recruitment as an exercise in futility, even though they believe the profession needs to attract more librarians.

Some librarians refrain from recruiting because they expect few people today will view librarianship as an attractive option. In a survey conducted by *Library Journal* in 2000, only 44 percent of the librarians surveyed said that they would pursue a

career in librarianship if they were recent college graduates due to more enticing alternatives elsewhere. Even recent graduates of library school speak somewhat derisively of librarianship. Lynn Boyden, a recent graduate of the University of California at Los Angeles' library program, landed an \$85,000-a-year job designing

Web site applications for a New York-based company. "You've got to have that public service, altruistic thing really embedded, because there's not much reward," Boyden said in the April 30, 2001, edition of the *Los Angeles Times*. "You do get that warm, fuzzy glow from helping people find what they're looking for. But I'm not one to answer the question, 'Where's the bathroom?' 47 times a day."

Some librarians suggest that perhaps there is ultimately no one to blame for the librarian shortage but librarians themselves. Low public images of librarians have perennially hampered recruitment efforts. How can librarians complain about the low quantity and quality of new librarians if they do little to present librarianship as a viable, interesting, rewarding career, says Susan Martin, university librarian at Georgetown University. Recruitment activities should include efforts to counter the negative stereotypes that the general public has applied to librarians, Martin says.

In the May 2000 issue of *American Libraries*, Abby Kalan, an adult services librarian at the Borough of Madison Public Library in New Jersey, urges librarians to adopt a capitalist mentality by viewing their services as if they were products to sell. Their products meet customer demand "when it is provided with professionalism, competence, timeliness, convenience, accuracy and interest," she writes. As the library's services are valued, its image among its employees and patrons improve.

In her article "Choosing Law Librarianship: Thoughts for People Contemplating a Career Move" in the Aug. 2, 1999, issue of LLRX.com at <http://www.llrx.com/features/librarian.htm>, Mary Whisner, head of reference at the Gallagher Law Library of the University of Washington in Seattle, contends that law librarians can actively carve out positive images of the profession among their patrons. "Changing professions can mean swapping stereotypes," Whisner writes. "Some lawyers who become librarians miss the positive stereotypes of lawyers (smart, powerful, important) and regret the negative stereotypes of librarians (dull, mousy, prim). On the other hand, it can be refreshing to lose the negative stereotypes of lawyers (greedy, argumentative, unscrupulous) in favor of the positive stereotypes of librarians (smart, knowledgeable, helpful, committed, energetic)."

Librarian Odyssey

How I Became a Law Librarian

During my first semester at the University of Pittsburgh School of Library and Information Science in the mid-80s, I saw an ad in the Sunday *New York Times* for a reference librarian position at the University of Michigan School of Law Library. The ad described the position and instructed applicants to write to Margaret Leary, director of the law library, for more information. I did so, not thinking in terms of employment since I still had about 10 months remaining in my program. After all, I was still trying to figure out what a Cutter number was!

Several weeks later Leary called me on a Saturday. After realizing that this was not a dream — that she actually took time out of her schedule to speak with me — we proceeded to talk for about 20–30 minutes.

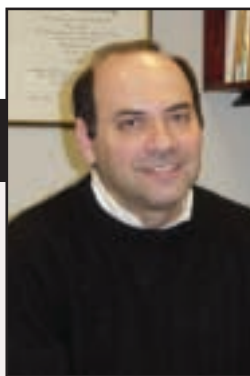
Leary asked why I had not followed up with an application. I explained that I was still in my first semester, and with no library experience, I did not think I would be a viable candidate for a position at such a prestigious institution as the University of Michigan. She agreed that I was too green at that point, but she wanted to find out about some of my future plans for librarianship.

During our conversation, Leary gave me some of the best career advice I ever got. She suggested that I attend the Annual Meeting, which was going to be held in Washington, D.C., the following summer, because there would be numerous opportunities to interview for positions. At the time, I was unaware of the job opportunities at the Annual Meeting. After learning more through the year about the Annual Meeting, I did attend the meeting, where I was offered and accepted a position at Columbia University Law Library in New York City. I worked there for seven years before coming to Duke University in 1993.

After I thanked Leary for calling and reiterated to her my astonishment that she called me even though I had not applied for the job, she said something else that I will never forget. "I like to treat people how I like to be treated," Leary said. "And someday you will be my colleague and we may work together on a project, or I may need to call upon you or you upon me for something."

After I hung up the phone still in shock, I was convinced I was doing the right thing in pursuing my M.L.S. and a career in law librarianship. I'm sure Leary does not recall this particular discussion because I'm certain she has called other library students to discuss their future profession many times throughout her career.

We can all play a role in recruiting people into our profession through a variety of formal and informal encounters. You never know what impact even a simple phone call may have.



Mark Bernstein

*Deputy Director and Senior Lecturing Fellow
Duke University School of Law Library
Durham, N.C.*

Promoting librarianship requires that the public view the full range of activities of professional librarians. However a librarian's significant duties often remains hidden from public view. When students encounter librarians in academic libraries, they often see librarians fixing electric staplers, loading paper in printers, explaining to unhappy patrons that noncirculating does in fact mean that they can't check those books out (even for the amount of time it takes them to photocopy the pages at the nearby copy shop), or directing people to the bathroom. In fact, librarians juggle many different tasks. On any given day, a librarian might assist a professor with complex tax treaty research, redesign a Web page, attend a faculty meeting and write an article for publication.

Some libraries often fail to introduce their student workers to the more interesting aspects of librarianship. Instead student workers are usually given the most routine, mundane jobs in the library. "Fifteen hours a week of shelving or arguing with patrons about overdue books are representative of the tasks that are likely to turn more people away from the profession than they attract; it takes a sturdy mentality to overlook the seduction of a legal or a business career to join a profession that has presented a less-than-compelling image of itself," Martin writes in the May 1995 edition of the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*.

"We are fortunate to be able to hire one or two students each year to work in the law library, where they will get a chance to work at the reference desk and be exposed to the profession," says Paul D. Healey, head of public services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's law library. "But there are many more students each year who are interested or who could be interested, and we don't have any good opportunities for them at all."

Even though the recruitment efforts of librarians as a profession leave much to be desired, there seems to be no lack of recruiting activities by library organizations, such as ALA and AALL. The list of strategies has included listservs for people interested in librarianship, mentoring programs, internships for library students, scholarships to encourage people to attend library school and law school, participating in job fairs, mailing informational brochures, maintaining

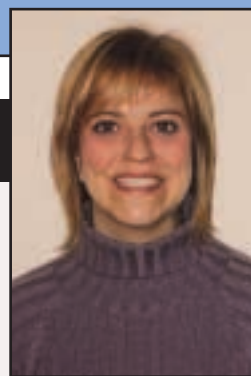
Librarian Odyssey

How I Became a Law Librarian

I first became interested in law librarianship while I was a student at Chicago-Kent College of Law from 1993–1996. I was fortunate to have Gretchen Van Dam, then law librarian at Chicago-Kent, as a professor in a legal research and writing class. Van Dam and I discussed her path to academic law librarianship, and I immediately became interested in librarianship as a career option. However I also felt that practicing law would prove to be important also. And so, I continued on my original path of becoming a patent attorney.

While practicing law, I never lost sight of my interest in academic law librarianship. After several years, I decided that I wanted to continue with a career that would allow me to do what I liked best about being an attorney, such as conducting legal research and working with legal resource materials. I also wanted to pursue a career where I could teach others how to navigate and use legal materials.

So I attended library school at the University of Michigan. While I was student there, I was fortunate to work at the law library. That experience helped to confirm that I had made the right choice about my new career.



Jennifer Loope Selby

*International Law Librarian
University of Michigan
Law Library
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

Web pages with information about librarianship, working with local bar associations, and contacting student organizations in library schools.

AALL's Recruitment to Law Librarianship Committee is charged with recruiting people into the profession. The committee prepares informative materials describing opportunities in law librarianship; distributes information on law librarianship annually to library schools, law schools, paralegal programs, bar associations and other target groups; answers questions from people interested in the profession; coordinates career-day programs; staffs booths at career conferences and library-related meetings; and encourages law librarian recruitment efforts at chapters.

"We have recently redesigned the committee Web site. It now invites inquiries from anyone who might be interested in law librarianship," says Mark Bernstein, chair of the AALL recruitment committee. "We had 35 inquiries in the first week alone. We were contacted by library school students interested in law librarianship, by librarians in other areas interested in making a switch, and from lawyers and members of the public."

With the library associations actively engaged in recruitment, the question remains: To whom should they direct their recruiting efforts? Library school students? Undergraduates? High school students? Those seeking a change of career? All of the above? Each group poses special challenges.

Martin calls librarianship an "accidental profession" because many librarians originally sought careers other than librarianship. Librarianship as a second career or a stepping stone in one's current position is reflected in the fact that more than half of library school students are age 35 or over.

Many students pursue degrees in library science to gain the professional status needed to potentially reap the benefits of higher salaries and greater upward mobility in their current jobs, according to Jane Robbins, dean of the School of Information Studies at Florida State University. Library students who are interested in becoming librarians in specialties such as medicine and law have often worked in law and medical libraries prior to entering library school. However many library school graduates, like new law school graduates, specialize only after landing their first jobs. Targeting undecided library school students demands

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distinguishing law librarianship in the library school curriculum and offering more classes in law librarianship. Recruitment also means convincing those students to apply for positions in law libraries despite the low entry-level salaries. But many students scrambling for jobs in their final year of studies are often too worried about student loan repayments or supporting their families to actively seek out law librarian positions.

“We must be able to go to library students with courses in and information about law librarianship,” Healey says.

every year. Established in 1940, the program only accepts students with law degrees. It is designed to prepare lawyers to serve as law librarians in courts, federal and state units of government, legal departments of banks, law firms, associations of legal practitioners, and law schools. Attorneys enter the program because they prefer the service aspect and less stressful work environment of law librarianship, says Penny Hazelton,

on the lookout for promising law students or lawyers they know who might want to change careers.”

Many law librarians recommend that the profession beef up its recruiting efforts at law schools. For example, because some positions in academic law libraries require both a law degree and a graduate degree in library science, one way to encourage students to consider law librarianship is to shorten the amount of time required to complete joint M.L.S./J.D. degree programs, which usually require four years of study. At the State University of New York at Buffalo in Buffalo, N.Y., library students have the option of completing their dual M.L.S./J.D. program a semester early. “I’m not sure how much of an obstacle the length of the program presents,” says Jim Milles, associate dean and director of the law library at SUNY Buffalo. “I see the time savings as more of a competitive measure to attract students to our program.”

Law librarianship should devote some of its recruitment efforts to help librarians pursue their J.D.s in part-time law school programs that are more conducive to their financial situations and professional schedules, Milles says. While library programs allow students to take courses over several years on a part-time basis, the American Bar Association allots a limited amount of time for part-time students to earn their J.D.s. “I have received numerous inquiries from prospective students wanting to stretch their law school programs over six years or more,” Milles says. “ABA standards require that part-time J.D. programs take no more than five years at the most, and for working librarians looking to change careers and unable to afford full-time law school education, this is prohibitive.”

Targeting groups outside of library schools, law schools and the legal community may require a shift in thinking. Moving recruiting efforts into the larger community may mean that law librarianship needs to focus less on recruiting people to become law librarians and concentrate more on recruiting people to become librarians. Encouraging high school students to enter law librarianship makes about as much sense as persuading them to become cardiologists. Law librarians recognize that they must first bring those students into the profession

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Librarian Odyssey

How I Became a Law Librarian

I’m almost afraid to say this because it sounds trite, but as a boy, I liked books. I liked books, from novels such as *Black Beauty* and *Swiss Family Robinson* to the *World Book Encyclopedia*. As I grew older, I loved the library and thought of librarians as guardians of knowledge, but I never thought of becoming a librarian until law school.

While attending Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, I needed money and a job. Luckily the law library also needed workers. And work I did — every hour available. I was a filer, a shelver and a circulation assistant. I provided “low-level” reference assistance. And I loved it.

The librarians and the staff became my friends and support group. The librarian was my favorite faculty member, a model scholar and my mentor.

CWRU allowed law students to take two courses “outside” the law school. I chose two at CWRU’s world-renowned library school. They involved early explorations of computer applications and information storage and retrieval. By the time I graduated from law school, I was bitten by the law librarian bug.

As I approached graduation, I discussed a law librarian career with my mentor. He recommended that I practice law first, which I did. But a few years later, I literally answered his call and have been loving it ever since.



Al Podboy Jr.

Director of Libraries
Baker & Hostetler LLP
Cleveland, Ohio

“AALL needs to be a presence in library schools in the same way that ALA and the Special Library Association are. We also need to be able to tell library students that they will make a decent salary if they join the profession.”

Another recruitment option is to target people who are looking for a career change. The law librarianship program at the University of Washington Information School in Seattle attracts new graduates of law schools and practicing attorneys seeking a certificate in law librarianship

professor and associate dean for library and computing services and professor of law at the University of Washington School of Law. Law librarianship offers them a 40-hour work week, the chance to help patrons learn about the legal system and solve legal problems, and the opportunity to use their legal education in a non-combatant situation.

“There are 200 graduates of the program and over half are still employed as law librarians,” Hazelton says.

“Graduates of this program are regularly

of librarianship before routing them into specialties.

“Most people don’t even know about this profession [of law librarianship],” Hazelton says. “I don’t think law librarianship is beleaguered — librarianship is.”

The Ad Hoc Task Force on Recruitment & Retention Issues of the Association of College & Research Libraries is certainly not ready to give up the fight. Its recent white paper on recruitment and retention, located online at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/recruit-wp.html>, suggests how librarianship can improve its recruiting efforts. Those suggestions can easily be adapted for law libraries. For example, law librarians can promote their profession as an alternative legal career to law students via law schools’ career services offices. Offer internships in law libraries for students and others

interested in the field. Provide financial assistance for support staff to attend library school. Create a “testimonials” Web page where law librarians explain why they enjoy working in law libraries.

“I see a widespread recognition among law librarians that we have a responsibility to recruit and train new law librarians, and there is a wealth of experimentation and creativity going on with both dual-degree programs and library school programs offering a law librarianship specialization short of the J.D.,” Milles says. “However, resources are tight, and not all law libraries can afford to give their reference librarians, catalogers and others time to teach in library schools. Law library directors could examine their resources, both financial and in terms of people on their staffs, and look for ways they can contribute to the need to train the next generation of law librarians.”

Statistically the future of law librarianship is less than rosy. The decreasing numbers of qualified applicants, the imminent swell of librarian retirements in the next 10 years, and its low salaries and status don’t bode well for profession. But law librarianship still has time to overcome the librarian shortage by aggressively promoting the advantages of the profession to potential librarians in both the legal and general library communities. So despite the gloomy forecast, bookstores should continue to wait before they release John Fenimore Cooper’s long-awaited sequel *The Last of the Librarians* because the profession is not quite there yet.

Christopher Vallandingham (valland@law.ufl.edu) is the electronic information reference librarian at the University of Florida Levin College of Law in Gainesville, Fla.