

Part 1:

Law Librarianship: An Unexplored Career Path for GSLIS Students

by Jessica Almeida, Associate Librarian, UMass School of Law and Nicole P. Dyszlewski, Head of Reference, Instruction, and Engagement, Roger Williams University School of Law

Many GSLIS students don't know about or really consider law librarianship as a career option. However, many URI MLIS grads have gone onto careers in this area. Part 1 of this article is an introduction to law librarianship. It is written by 2 URI GSLIS grads who are currently working in the field of law librarianship and are eager to talk to students interested in this type of special library.

Law librarianship is a catch-all term for librarians who work in law schools, legislatures, judiciaries, trial courts, prisons, law firms, and other places with legal and governmental information and data. Because of the wide array of organizations in which a law librarian may work, being a law librarian can be more similar to being a public librarian or more similar to being an academic librarian. Just like other types of librarians, law librarians help people find the information they need. The key difference is we specialize in the discovery of legal information, providing access to cases, statutes, regulations, and other materials that can help analyze the law.

Academic librarians provide collections and services to law school students and faculty. Many law school librarians teach legal research classes or help faculty with research for their scholarship. Government law librarians work at state houses or in the court system. They provide access to legal information for the legislature, judiciary, attorneys, and the public. State law librarians archive and make accessible legislative and court documents, while providing reference services to the public. Many trial court librarians help self-represented litigants better understand the court system, helping them access the legal information and forms they need. Firm librarians provide access to materials and research services to attorneys. Depending on the size of the firm, they may be a solo librarian or part of a team that keeps their attorneys up to date in the latest legal information and technology.

To be a law librarian, you do not need a law degree. In fact, according to the [American Association of Law Libraries](#), “fewer than 20% of the law librarian positions being filled require both degrees”. However, many management positions (such as Director of an Academic Law Library) require both degrees. Understanding how the law is organized and searched can be learned through on the job training and coursework. Like many librarians in other fields, law librarians start out working as an intern or library assistant at a law library. Through these experiences, they learn legal research methods, developing knowledge of legal materials and search techniques.

One of the best aspects of law librarianship is the wonderful community of law librarians. In this area, many law librarians belong to the [Law Librarians of New England \(LLNE\)](#). LLNE began in 1946 and is a chapter of the [American Association of](#)

[Law Libraries \(AALL\)](#). The organization is home to over 250 law librarians from all over the New England area. LLNE organizes two professional meetings a year on a variety of topics of interest to members. The most recent meeting was a virtual conference on dismantling bias in the fall, organized by the UConn School of Law Library. LLNE members are active in the community as well. They offer an introduction to legal research course for non-law public librarians, present on access to justice issues at regional public library conferences, and provide donations of time and money to a variety of non-profits and charities. Recently, LLNE members held a trivia night to raise funds for the Re·Center of Hartford, an organization that promotes anti-racism education in schools and communities. LLNE is a great way to meet other law librarians and discuss changes, problems, and solutions in law librarianship and beyond. Students can join LLNE at a [reduced cost](#) and serve on committees, meeting law librarians and helping with a variety of organizational and outreach work.

If you are interested in learning more about law librarianship, please reach out to Jessica and Nicole.

Part 2:

Law Librarianship: Hot Topics

by Jessica Almeida, Associate Librarian, UMass School of Law and Nicole P. Dyszlewski, Head of Reference, Instruction, and Engagement, Roger Williams University School of Law

Many GSLIS students don't know about or really consider law librarianship as a career option. However, many URI MLIS grads have gone onto careers in this area. Part 2 of this article is a brief discussion of current hot topics in law librarianship. It is written by 2 URI GSLIS grads who are currently working in the field of law librarianship and are eager to talk to students interested in this type of special library.

Law librarians serve a variety of roles in a variety of institutions. Some are essentially public librarians who specialize in legal information. Some are academic librarians who specialize in legal information literacy. Still others, are non-partisan government staff who specialize in policy and legislative research. Others are firm librarians who are adept technologists. This article is an introduction to some of the current hot topics in law librarianship.

Access to Justice:

Access to justice (A2J) is the concept that there is a high need for legal services in the United States among those who cannot afford adequate representation by an attorney. There is this myth that everyone who needs legal help but cannot afford it will be provided a court appointed attorney, but this is not true. "The right to an attorney pertains only to criminal—not civil—matters. A 2017 report conducted by the congressionally established Legal Services Corporation estimates that 86% of civil legal

problems reported by low-income adults in the US that year received inadequate or no legal help. Further, if someone is accused of a crime, they might not financially qualify for representation, or a court-appointed attorney might have so many cases that they may be able to spend only 10 minutes on each of them.” (See [this article](#) for more about how a group of local law librarians are working to help this problem in New England!) Unrepresented litigants may turn to libraries or the internet to help understand and research their legal issues and that is where law librarians, and also public non-law librarians, interface with this tremendous unmet need. Law librarians work tirelessly with other stakeholders on access to justice initiatives locally, regionally, and nationally. This has been, and continues to be, a hot topic in the field of law librarianship.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is another hot topic in the law and law librarianship. According to a Brookings Institution report [How Artificial Intelligence Is Transforming the World](#), artificial intelligence (AI) is described as follows:

Although there is no uniformly agreed upon definition, AI generally is thought to refer to “machines that respond to stimulation consistent with traditional responses from humans, given the human capacity for contemplation, judgment and intention.” According to researchers Shubhendu and Vijay, these software systems “make decisions which normally require [a] human level of expertise” and help people anticipate problems or deal with issues as they come up. As such, they operate in an intentional, intelligent, and adaptive manner.

[AI intersects with law and librarianship in a variety of ways](#). It helps automate tasks and is integral to research in legal databases. However, AI is not without concern. [One article explains](#).

When it comes to the use and application of AI in our legal system, the unseen implicit bias in datasets reflected in machine learning and automated decisions may accentuate patterns of discrimination. Automated systems and datasets do not tend to take into account the complexity that goes into judicial decisions, the concepts of fairness and due process, or the social context. Implicit bias in our judicial system is not a new phenomenon. However, the cognitive phenomenon of automation bias—the normal tendency to trust a computer to make decisions—is at play.

AI is here to stay but the extent of its impact on law and law librarianship is not yet fully realized. For more on how technology is changing law and law librarianship, check out [this blog](#) by local lawyer, writer, and media consultant, Bob Ambrogi.

Surveillance and Big Data

A third hot topic in law librarianship is the issue of privacy, specifically the use of invasive data by law enforcement. [One scholar has described this issue](#) in the following way:

When we talk about defunding the police, we focus on what we can see. We imagine hiring fewer cops to flock in subway stations and wander sidewalks. We picture fewer high-priced tanks and military-grade tools of war in our communities. But today's policing infrastructure also spends millions of dollars on an invisible, sprawling data surveillance industry. Policing with data has weaponized our private information, turning it into a tool that tracks us and builds cases for stopping, detaining, and even deporting us... The government has not yet determined the contours of our digital privacy, which gives us an opening to participate in decisions about how the government, and especially law enforcement, use data brokers' products.

This issue is very relevant to law librarianship because law librarians find themselves often using some products owned by the so-called data brokers. Legal researchers and law libraries use legal research databases by vendors which appear to be selling data or appear to have relationships with entities which sell data. (for more info, [see this article](#)) Law students have recently been discussing this issue on both the East Coast and West Coast. For an example from UCLA, [see this article](#). This issue is one of both information policy ethics and practicality as these databases are arguably necessary for lawyers to complete accurate and up-to-date research.

These are just three hot topics for your consideration. They show to breadth of some issues currently facing our profession but they are no means the only issues with which we are wrestling. Ours is a vibrant interesting, if oft overlooked part of the profession. If you are interested in learning more about law librarianship, please reach out to Jessica and Nicole.