

**Marketing Toolkit for Academic Law Libraries
Academic Law Libraries Special Interest Section
American Association of Law Libraries**

**Why We Need Academic Law Librarians:
Adding Value to the Law School**

Virginia J. Kelsh
Law Librarian and Professor
University of San Francisco School of Law, Zief Law Library

Introduction

The American Association of Law Libraries Executive Board, in April 2003 adopted the “Statement on the Value Added to Organizations by Law Librarians,”¹ earlier drafted by the professional organization’s Public Relations Committee. This statement defines the main contributions of law librarians to their organizations in terms of their roles as “information managers, resource evaluators, access facilitators, expert researchers, teachers and trainers.”² The academic law librarian will remain an “active and responsive force in the educational life of the law school”³ by emphasizing these and other valuable contributions to legal academia and the profession.

A qualified librarian⁴ understands the complexity and nature of law library operations, the need for coordinated library polices and procedures, and the involved process of legal research. These professionals provide “effective support of the law school’s teaching, research and service programs”⁵ through a “direct, continuing and informed relationship”⁶ with members of the law school community. Academic law librarians are expected to possess knowledge and skill in the areas of management and budgeting, information resources, information access, technology use and management, and teaching or training. They are expected to employ these competencies while managing units within a prominent department of the law school, as well as while providing information services and instruction to the academic and practicing legal community. Law librarians are skilled in evaluating, selecting and delivering resource materials needed for both legal and interdisciplinary scholarship. To maintain their role as valuable contributors to the vitality and quality of the law school, academic law librarians must remain committed to

¹ American Association of Law Libraries, Public Relations Committee, *Statement on the Value Added to Organizations by Law Librarians* at <http://www.aallnet.org/committee/pr/resources/valuestmt.htm> (last updated May 2003), (hereinafter AALL Statement).

² *Id.* at 1.

³ American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, *Standards for Approval of Law Schools and Interpretations*, Chapter 6, ABA Standard 601(a), at <http://www.abanet.org/legaled/standards.html> (latest revision 2003), (hereinafter ABA Standard).

⁴ A “qualified librarian” is used in the context of the institution’s hiring requirements for academic law librarians. In most cases, an MLS or equivalent degree is required and in many cases, a JD degree is also required or preferred.

⁵ ABA Standard, *supra* note 3, ABA Standard 601(a).

⁶ *Id.*

demonstrating and refining excellent service and administrative skills and to learning new competencies throughout their careers.

The Law Librarian Director-Faculty Member's Contribution to the Law School

The law librarian director/faculty member⁷ engages in planning, directing and implementing the activities of the academic law library for the law school. The law librarian and the dean, in consultation with the faculty, determine library policies.⁸ With input from other library professionals, the director establishes the library's annual agenda and priorities. Academic law librarians plan, promote, and implement new programs, services and systems to facilitate library operations. The director guides, delegates, supports and appraises the activities performed by the professional staff. The director and the library administrative staff develop and revise operational policies, procedural manuals and staff training materials. Academic law librarians continuously assess the law library collection, the facility, the services, the personnel and the equipment in order to respond to current patron needs.

The law library director also serves as a fiscal manager, preparing, allocating and monitoring budgets in the \$1.5-\$3 million dollar range, often managing the second largest departmental budget within the law school. Successful directors alone, or with professional support, write and garner grant and donation money to augment the regular budget or fund special library projects.

The faculty member library director often contributes to the law school through teaching and faculty committee service. Some directors contribute to the university through committee or task force service, or by teaching in the Library Science or Information Science department. Since the law librarian is often the sole, or one of few, administrators serving on law school faculty committees, she or he may bring a new perspective to the issue at hand. Some faculty-library directors participate on 'educational programs' or 'curriculum' committees so that they might remind other faculty members of the impact on the library when a new course or program is added to the curriculum, or in order to have a 'heads up' in forthcoming collection development.

A seasoned director might also add value to the institution by filling a leadership role within the law school or the university, serving as a capable problem-solver and decision maker when needed. Various law library directors have served as interim or regular law school deans or in other administrative capacities within the law school. Several have spent time as interim director of the general campus library and in other campus administrative capacities. They have planned and implemented technology infrastructures for both the library and the law school, and have served on university and law school hiring and staff reorganization committees. Some directors have also programmed, planned and guided the renovation or construction of library or law school facilities.

⁷ ABA Standard, *supra* note 3, ABA Standard 603(d).

⁸ *Id.*, ABA Standard 602(b).

Managerial and Other Professional Librarians' Contributions to the Law School

Experienced academic law librarians employ appropriate business and management approaches to develop annual work plans and budgets to support law school and library goals. They organize and preserve institutional data as archival material, thus contributing to the historical record of the law school.⁹ Law librarians participate in preparing short and long-term development plans and self-studies, and conduct formal appraisals of their supervisees. Librarian-administrators add value as they communicate the importance of information services to law school administrators and faculty through service, committee work and publication.

Administrative academic law librarians demonstrate managerial competency in hiring, supervising, disciplining and supporting the activities of their supervisees. They recommend and justify staff promotions and salary increases to the law school dean. They revise job descriptions, as well as engage in staff reorganization, when the need arises. The manager librarian writes and conducts formal performance appraisals and promotes and supports staff development training. Often times, the library is the single largest employer of student employees within the law school, preparing this work force to enter the professional business world.

The qualified law librarian participates in the development of the collection, its maintenance, housing and preservation. Today's academic law librarian has a refined knowledge of the content of information resources, including how to critically evaluate and filter materials. For example, collection development professionals evaluate print, microform, CD-ROM, and electronic versions of information. Law librarians are trained to evaluate and negotiate the purchase of a myriad of legal content formats in order to select the best resources to support the curricular offerings of their law schools. These professionals add value when they monitor and evaluate information product costs to ensure that purchases are cost-effective and aligned with institutional needs.¹⁰ Skilled law librarians write collection development policies and prepare collection valuation documents for insurance purposes. These law librarians engage in the selection and de-selection of library materials as well as in disaster planning and recovery planning and implementation.

Academic law librarians also develop and manage convenient, accessible and cost effective information services that promote the mission of the law school. They seek out challenges and new opportunities for service both inside and outside the library, taking on new roles as information literacy educators or technology specialists. A valued information services staff conducts intermediary searches, obtains documents for researchers, builds a core in-house reference and research collection, and analyzes or synthesizes information as required in order to enhance faculty productivity.¹¹ Other skilled librarians organize efficient and effective access to these library materials. As information evaluators and managers, they monitor and share knowledge about new

⁹ AALL Statement, *supra* note 1, at 1.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

modes of information delivery, such as just-in-time document delivery, or innovative information and technology resources with faculty and law school administrators.¹²

Academic law librarians provide value to the law school through their effective instruction and research support for faculty and students.¹³ They teach LEXIS/NEXIS and Westlaw search strategies not just to first year students but also to upper class students and faculty. They impart research techniques in specialized subject areas of the law, provide personalized research instruction, and teach Internet research strategies. Academic law librarians often teach substantive law courses in the legal research, writing and analysis area or in areas unrelated to legal research and writing. They develop, among the students they train, efficient researchers,¹⁴ competent to practice legal research as part of their future legal practice.

Academic law librarians actively seek opportunities for improvement and strive for ‘best practices’ regarding key patron services such as current awareness, reference, research assistance, and document delivery. These professionals assess information needs and design value-added services, such as guides and pathfinders, to meet identified needs. They conduct assessment needs using surveys and focus groups. They identify and meet information needs by becoming active members of project teams and faculty committees. They look for partnerships and alliances to optimize resource sharing and to improve the quality of the law school. They contribute unique assessment and analysis of library and legal issues in the professional literature. Law librarians monitor academic and legal practice trends, disseminating this information to key administrators in the law school.

Academic law librarians are knowledge managers who know how to compile and distribute valuable information within the parent institution. Their research expertise in locating the relevant documents, regardless of location or format, saves faculty and students the precious commodity of time. Academic law librarians digitize or otherwise preserve specialized institutional information they believe has value to their law school and often to other legal institutions. These professionals establish and maintain “response files” for FQAs and web blogs for journaling, linking and indexing important and timely legal information. They collaborate with their professional colleagues in order to remain “au courant” about court and legal developments that they know will interest their faculty and student patrons.

Experienced law librarians bring value to the law school in selecting and managing appropriate information technology to acquire, organize, and disseminate information.¹⁵ Examples of law librarian contributions include the selection and maintenance of an online catalog for the library collection, designing a library web site page for patrons, providing support service for electronic information users, or keeping current with electronic information product releases. These professionals also add value to the law school by working with other law school staff in recommending or selecting appropriate

¹² *Id.*

¹³ AALL Statement, *supra* note 1, at 2.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at 1.

hardware and software for desktop access to the library catalog and other information databases. Academic law librarians also provide trouble-shooting service for library patrons and staff who have difficulty accessing information from a computer workstation, reducing patron frustration.

The academic law librarian is capable of developing specialized information products for use inside or outside the law school. Law librarians create in-house documents such as reports, technical procedural manuals, and resource pathfinder materials. They create searchable full-text document files and make available online training manuals. They create and maintain home pages on the web and link the home page to other relevant legal sites to save researchers time and effort. They participate in management activities that create, capture, exchange, use and communicate the law school's intellectual capital.

A relatively new competency required of the academic law librarian is that of marketing or promoting the law library and the law school. When planning a new facility, the law library director and professional staff often are asked to promote the project to faculty, alumni and other potential donors. The director might recommend naming opportunities in the proposed facility. Other professional librarians promote their instructional skills to law or undergraduate faculty who invite them into the classroom to offer training in legal research strategies. Marketing and promotion opportunities also arise from the work of a librarian engaged in web site development for the law library. Responsive and helpful service to future alumni and practicing attorneys using an academic law library also may be viewed as a positive marketing effort.

Academic law librarians have always demonstrated qualities of intellectual creativity, innovation, and leadership, traits highly prized in the legal community. These professionals will continue to recommit themselves to learning new skills and embracing new opportunities as the academic, legal and library professions evolve, and academic law librarians will remain a valued and vital force within legal academia.