

Critical Conversations About Social Justice

5 Topics in 5 Days: A joint online discussion of LISP-SIS, RIPS-SIS, SR-SIS and GLL-SIS
May 22 – 26, 2017

Day 1 (May 22): Law Library Inclusiveness

Day 2 (May 23): Unconscious Bias & Microaggressions

Day 3 (May 24): Law Librarian's Role in Social Discourse

Day 4 (May 25): Critical Thinking about Sources of Information

Day 5 (May 26): Stereotyping in Law Libraries

Each day's discussion is reflected chronologically through the discussion threads. Individual commenters are identified as "Response".

Day 1: Law Library Inclusiveness

May 22, 2017

Moderator: Stefanie Pearlman

Moderator

Good morning everyone! Welcome to the first day of the 2017 "5 Topics in 5 Days" program. Today's topic is law library inclusiveness.

Our first question to discuss is: How can we make our libraries more welcoming to patrons with disabilities?

Response

First of all by being aware of who those people are and what are their specific needs.

Response

This year, I held a mandatory training with all of our student workers who are in public-facing roles on working with patrons with disabilities. Everyone was really engaged and it turned out that many staff members had questions about this topic, so the training ended up being really dynamic and valuable.

Moderator

That's a great point! Any suggestions on how to determine who they are and what their specific needs are? Ask directly? Are there resources anyone knows of that will help train new law librarians in how to assist patrons with disabilities?

Moderator

Thanks, Responder! Are there any specific resources that you used to prepare for the training session?

Response

I'm thinking that you could identify the students with disabilities through the registrar's office, or through your student services office. I believe that the college's are notified ahead of time and the library can be a part of that conversation. I think asking the student their specific needs would be best.

Response

I will take a look through my files to see what I used, but honestly most of it came from what I've gleaned from many years of working with people with disabilities, being friends to folks with disabilities, and having disabilities myself.

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I think we can learn a lot by asking questions and listening - many people with disabilities have been living with the disability for many years, if not their entire life. Asking them what is helpful or not, or what behaviors drive them up the wall, can be really instructive.

Response

I agree that asking the students what they need is important; so is talking to other faculty members who have interacted with the students.

For example, we discovered from another faculty member who had a student in the first year that the student needed PDF handouts with hyperlinks to sources, as opposed to print handouts, so that she could access websites a lot more easily. Now when we have trainings that she's going to attend, we can email them to her in advance so she can more easily follow along. Or, if we help her with research, I know she's going to want scans of the print resources so she can access the digital copies.

Response

I really like Responder's idea. I'd be interested in integrating this sort of training into the onboarding/orientation process for all new hires. If anyone already does this, I'd love to hear about it. I think this sort of training is relevant for all library staff -- public facing and not. We may not all interact with patrons in the same way, but all of our work serves our patrons one way or another. Being sensitive to how our services are/aren't accessible is important and I think Responder's comment is where we should start: be aware enough to ask, and then listen when we are told how we can improve.

(Thank you for organizing this conversation! I'm so glad we're having it.)

Response

I agree with Responder that all staff, not only front facing staff should take part in training. I'm the HR Coordinator for our library and I think some sort of on-boarding training requirement is a great idea!

Response

Nice ideas here for getting in touch with the needs of students with disabilities. How about public patrons? Have any of your libraries undertaken initiatives in this regard? What have you tried? How has it worked out?

Moderator

I hope we can keep the discussion on patrons with disabilities going (especially if anyone has a response to Responder's recent question), but I also want to add another topic:

As so-called "bathroom bills" have dominated the news (see: Texas bill for a recent example in Texas, host for this year's AALL annual meeting), has your library developed policies for how to work with transgender patrons so that they feel safe and comfortable? Have you had any push-back from other departments in your firm/law school/government when implementing these policies?

As mentioned earlier: Because this week's discussions may be uncomfortable for some, we have provided an anonymous way to contribute to the discussion. Fill out this form and the content will be emailed directly to one of the administrators of this event who will post the content:
rwu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_54HKeh0YwYn0auF

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Responder

I have a feeling that I may be representative of many when I say that I haven't worked at an institution yet that has developed any policies for this. And please don't read this as a knock on any place that I've worked (or you've worked). But these "bathroom bills" seem to have erupted fairly recently, and I think it's catching a lot of institutions off guard. I have a feeling that a lot of places, maybe most places, just honestly don't know where to begin on this. And, in fact, if I'm honest about this, I myself don't have any ideas on where to begin. I'm wondering if we are all thinking that this is so rare that it won't ever be an issue in our buildings, which is setting ourselves up for failure when the situation does occur (as in failing the transgendered person and their needs and safety).

Responder

Luckily I work in a fairly liberal institution in the most liberal state in the Union. Yay for Massachusetts! So, we have university-wide policies for inclusion. We have gender neutral restrooms and single-occupancy restrooms in our law school building. However, just last year, this issue became an issue. We had a student who is a lesbian woman and who, although she dresses in what may appear to some to be a masculine style, she is nonetheless a woman. We had female students complaining in raised voices, that "there is a man in the women's room." Of course this made this poor young woman not want to use the women's room. Luckily we had alternatives restroom situations in place here at my employer already. Yet, even without having a trans person that we know of in the building, it brought the issue of gender, perceived gender, and restrooms to the fore.

What did we do? The Student Affairs office sent out emails stating our policy on restroom usage which is that students get to use the restroom of their chosen gender identity or expression. Anyone uncomfortable with that policy was directed to use the single-occupancy restrooms.

Responder

Also, I know my comment seems to be focused on the bathroom part of the issue. I know there are a lot of other issues and challenges that transgendered people face that we and our institutions need to be aware of ...

Response

Our bathrooms are down the hall in the courthouse, not in the library itself. So I'm pretty glad I don't have "bathroom police" in my job description.

But Responder makes some good points that the physical design can really help with these issues - it would be great to have a couple of single person bathrooms in our building. That really helps take the heat out of the situation, and makes it easier for everyone to feel comfortable.

Response

We have 3 restrooms available at our public law library - 2 that are gender-specific and open to anyone and one that is single-stall but the sign on the door says it is for staff only and you need a key to get in. It is in a public area, however. The director here recently made it explicit that public patrons can use the staff restroom if they ask - we don't need to and should not ask any questions. That being said, the patron still has to actually ask to use the staff restroom which could be uncomfortable to them. And though the librarians don't "police" the public gender-specific restrooms, we are in a government building and not in charge of security.

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As for working with transgender and gender non-confirming people more generally, I think we should all always be careful not to ever assume someone's pronoun. The SR-SIS distributed "My Pronouns Are..." ribbons at the annual meeting last year for this reason - and they were a huge success! We tried to encourage everyone to wear them - not just people who might feel they need to clarify their gender. It's important for cisgender people to wear them too because the whole point is to not assume gender for anyone! Even if you think the person you are speaking with "looks" like a particular gender, you might be wrong. We will have the ribbons available again this year so I hope everyone will consider wearing them!

It's also important to develop your collection to include books and other resources specifically for the trans community.

If you are interested in learning more about these issues, I hope you will join me at a panel on meeting the needs of transgender patrons at this year's annual meeting. It will be on Sunday July 16 at 2:30. More info here: eventmobi.com/aall2017/agenda/213084/1115830.

Responder

Interestingly enough we have a similar situation with a single use restroom. Though it's because of the sexist history of the Supreme Court building. When it was completed in 1914 it had only one women's restroom in the Judges' chambers for their secretaries. There was only one public men's restroom on each floor. Women were not expected to be practice as lawyers or use the law library.

The result is that we have divided up the restrooms to include a solo rest room! It's ironic that the tool of architectural exclusion helps us to be more inclusive.

As a note about disabled patrons. We're lucky to be a public library and I've thought a lot about what to do when a patron seems to be having difficulties because of a disability. I think we don't patrons any favors in politely ignoring their difficulties. I sometimes feel awkward approaching a person just because they seem to me to be having trouble because of a disability. Am I singling out disabled patrons? Wouldn't they rather just be left alone?

I've come to the conclusion that they know about their disability. I think the best approach is forthright questions. I've decided me not offering help to protect their feelings is condescending. I try to let them decide what they need and that be best way to do that is make sure they know help is available. I think it's especially importing considering the intimidating nature of libraries generally and law libraries in particular.

I generally approach any patron who I think is struggling and ask if there is anything I can do to help. I let them tell me what they need. I do get sometimes a defensive look like "Does he think I don't belong here!" and then I try to say something like "Please feel free to take your time and let me know if there is anything I can do." I think the important thing is to be receptive to any request.

Of course declining requests can have serious ADA repercussions.

Response

As part of our Judiciary's "Discrimination/Harassment free policy" in the workplace, we've been given guidance regarding respecting gender identity. Re: the bathrooms, we are a public law library within our

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judiciary building, our bathrooms are down the hall, and they are open to the public. A person who identifies as male uses the men's, and vice versa. This isn't just for our building, but all Judiciary facilities state-wide. Also, we are guided to use the name/pronoun of a person who self-identifies as such.

Moderator

The first two questions were very specific. Let's talk more generally...

*What has your library done to create a more inclusive environment for your community?
This could include patrons and co-workers.*

Please continue to discuss the earlier questions, if you are just joining us!

Response

We are a public law library so for the most part we see people who have disabilities once or twice, not enough to get to know them and find out what they need in a meaningful way.

Due to the nature of the library, people need to advocate for themselves. I do what I can, but I'm limited to disabilities that are obvious, like someone who comes in using a wheelchair or walker. For that type of thing, I will ask people things like "need help with the copier?" or when we are done I'll say "want me to get the door?" I try to be helpful yet casual about it. Depending on circumstances I have run copies for people, which is something we normally avoid. Or I'll carry books to a table for someone, or hold the door open. I've typed conversations with someone who is deaf - we will take turns at a computer and just pull up word and type things. This makes me more comfortable that they are really getting what I say, since in this field those details really matter.

Mostly I try to come across as approachable and open. If people have a disability that is not obvious, they need to advocate for what they need. We just don't see people long-term like a student or employee, so we can't really find out a lot about what they need unless they ask. But I've gotten more comfortable over time saying things to indicate a willingness to offer help without trying to take over. We have never had formal training - in my library there are 2 of us and we work by ourselves, each part-time. So when you are one on one, your options are much more limited than in a big institution.

Moderator

I have often thought about the need for AALL programs providing training to law librarians in assisting patrons with disabilities. In the SR-SIS, we are also hoping to compile (if we can get enough volunteers) a bibliography on this topic.

What do you all think? Would either of these (AALL programs/webinars or a bibliography) be useful to you?

If you are interested in helping with a bibliography, please let me know.

Response

I would be particularly interested in educational programming about patrons with learning and social disabilities, too!

Response

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I think Responder raises a great point about how differently resourced institutions have different levels of support to accommodate the needs of their patrons -- as well as training for staff. I wonder how much we can reach out to organizations as representatives of different communities to give us ideas about what we could do to help so we aren't relying exclusively on the perceived needs of individual patrons. The examples she used of being sensitive and accommodating reminded me of a situation where I failed to do that and how mortified I was after the fact. I was helping an older individual and happily took the stairs (as usual) up three flights. It was a real challenge for him and I should have taken the elevator or asked if he minded taking the elevator. This may not rise to the level of disability, but if I had been more sensitive, I would have avoided putting him in a difficult position.

I've worked at institutions that have options (e.g., single occupancy restrooms) that make it easier for folks to make the choice that is most comfortable for them. I don't know how much of that has been in response to recent legislative activity or not. I don't believe any library I've worked at has a specific policy about transgender folks, but there are definitely policies at the university level that address discrimination. Georgetown has a Transgender and Gender Non-Confirming Resource Guide as well as more general policies.

Moderator: I'm interested! Including guidance/recommendations about how to foster a space that is accommodating for folks who don't have disabilities that are readily apparent would be especially helpful.

Response

On the topic of training for working with patrons with disabilities, we hosted a session recently here by the group Pathfinders for Autism (www.pathfindersforautism.org). The speakers not only talked to us, they involved the group in a few exercises designed to show the behaviors someone with autism might exhibit, and demonstrated ways we could respond that would be effective. It was a wonderful session, very informative. I am not unfamiliar with the behaviors sometimes exhibited by persons with spectrum disorders, but putting those into the context of my job as a reference librarian gave me a whole new perspective. One of the most illuminating bits of the discussion, for me, came when one of the speakers, who had picked up our Patron Rules of Conduct on her way in, pointed out multiple places in our Rules where someone with autism could easily be in violation of the required behavior. While I could assure her that we do not hard-line the conduct when there is clear indication of need for flexibility, connecting the dots between our expectations and a reasonable level of accommodation, and recognizing the gap, hit me hard.

Moderator

Thank you so much for your participation in today's discussion on inclusiveness! I especially need to thank AJ Blechner and Sara V. Pic for drafting questions and publicizing the event today.

Please feel free to add your comments throughout the rest of the day.

Tune in tomorrow for a discussion on unconscious bias and microaggressions, moderated by Nicole Dyszlewski & Rebecca Sherman.

Response

Thank you, Stefanie, for doing a fabulous job and for getting what promises to be a really interesting and helpful week of discussions off the ground!

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Response

Someone posted the following comment anonymously:

I have found that when you feel like you are underserving a certain segment of the population, it is better to seek out the guidance of organizations that support those segments and get feedback/suggestions from them directly.

Response

Someone posted the following anonymously:

Make sure to train all employees no matter their position. Especially those that are out there in public areas. I started as a page at a public library and we were never trained on how to deal with patrons [at all] which led to many issues, especially with assisting the disabled. Administration seemed to think only certain staff needed training but we were just as likely to deal with the public as the librarians were. Luckily this thinking was starting to be implemented around the time I left. I hope things have changed!

Response

This is a really good point.

Day 2: Unconscious Bias & Microaggressions

May 23, 2017

Moderators: Nicole Dyszlewski & Rebecca Sherman

Moderators

Today's conversations will be about unconscious bias and microaggressions.

The first question to get us started today is:

What types of microaggressions have you witnessed or experienced in your workplace? How did you react?

For some background on microaggressions, Dr. Derald Wing Sue's definition of microaggressions:

"Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment. While microaggressions are generally discussed from the perspective of race and racism, any marginalized group in our society may become targets: people of color, women, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people (LGBTs), those with disabilities, religious minorities, and so on. The most detrimental forms of microaggressions are usually delivered by well-intentioned individuals who are unaware that they have engaged in harmful conduct toward a socially devalued group. These everyday occurrences may on the surface appear quite harmless, trivial, or be described as "small slights," but research indicates that they have a powerful impact upon the psychological well-being of marginalized groups and affect their

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standard of living by creating inequities in health care, education, and employment." (citations omitted)
Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact 3 (Derald Wing Sue ed., 2010).

For examples of everyday microaggressions, see:

<http://www.microaggressions.com/>

<http://lismicroaggressions.tumblr.com/>

Modertor

In my own experience, I have had patrons ask to speak to a man or ask to speak to a "real lawyer."
Neither of these requests sat well with me. Has this happened to any of you? Are these
microaggressions?

Response

This is such a great question and I've been struggling to articulate a response that might add to this
conversation. For me, the bottom line is microaggressions are awful. They are both demoralizing and
infuriating. The younger I was when I experienced them, the more likely I was to feel demoralized. The
older I get, the more likely I am to be exasperated or angry. I'm less inclined to write these comments
off as well-intentioned because they can do so much damage. In my experience, they have often
focused on appearance. More recently, I've had some comments that questioned my ability to identify
my own interests/aspirations. None of these comments were ever solicited.

I think it's difficult to call out this behavior in a manner that isn't perceived as threatening, petty, or
over-sensitive. If folks have been able to do that successfully, I'd love to hear about it.

Moderator

Responder, you make an excellent point which works nicely with our second question...

How can you tell if something is a microaggression?

As one blogger wrote, "Too little sensitivity and we play a role in perpetuating real inequality of dignity.
Too much sensitivity and we erect another kind of oppression, where we must all be paranoid a
thoughtless remark will unleash the Twitter tempest or worse."

Some critics argue that the concept is too nebulous, that there is no common understanding about what
the term includes and excludes, and that it relies on subjective perception. Do you think this term has
the effect of suppressing different viewpoints? Is it divisive?

Response

This is a microaggression, at the least. Fortunately, when folks ask to talk to a lawyer, we can always
answer, "we are not a drop-in clinic, and cannot provide legal advice to you." Nevertheless, it's quite
true that women face more hassles and burdens in dealing with patrons than men do. I would not
tolerate it in the least, and would never expect anyone else to.

Moderator

Just a reminder, if you prefer to contribute anonymously, please do so at
rwu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_54HKeh0YwYn0auF

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Response

I've had people ask me if I'm studying to be a lawyer since I work in the law library. Since I'm female I tend to assume they figure I can't be an attorney because I'm female, and it's basic sexism. (and normally these comments are from older males) I've gotten that comment less as I've gotten older.

Someone said many of these comments are based on appearance. And I think that's true, and we are all guilty at some point. It's easy to make an unconscious assumption about someone based on their race or their age or their clothes or whatever, and if you speak without being thoughtful those unconscious assumptions come out. When I practiced law I was regularly called "sweetie" and "honey" by male attorneys, and I had to actually tell them to call me by name.

And when I was pregnant (and I'll admit it, carrying large), I had people ask me if it was twins and then argue with me when I said no. As if the doctor and I had no clue. Arguing with someone about their own life is pretty microaggressive.

It is a nebulous concept, for sure. But at its heart it's the comments that make you go "ouch" and feel demeaned. They tend to assume that you are in a less-than position to whoever is talking.

Response

Certainly, people may experience calling attention to microaggressions as divisive, or that the person raising the topic is being overly sensitive, no matter how you go about it, but I think it is important to engage in the conversation. The anticipated protest reminds me of the people, generally white, who complain or otherwise act like race wasn't an issue until a person of color brings it up, like it wasn't even in the room before that.

Response

A comment from an anonymous member:

I've noticed one person where I work who makes statements that are probably considered microaggressions, although I don't think she really realizes she is doing this. For example, she's said to our new head of technical services on more than one occasion that she forgets he's a librarian and that's why she hasn't included him on an email or in a conversation. I know this rankles him no end as he's come to talk to me about it -- mostly to get it off his chest. Another time she commented to him that he must have been totally bored at a librarian's meeting because it was all about teaching, which "you don't do here." Maybe these aren't micro-aggressions, so much as thoughtlessness. What is the line between the two?

Response

This is a topic I'm also interested in from the perspective of the patron.

This has come up for me working with staff members who have sought to enforce library rules with special zeal against patrons who happen to be POC, or from outside our school community. (I work in a public academic library.) I've struggled to have a conversation about this that doesn't immediately result in the other person throwing up defenses ("I'm not racist! I'm just enforcing the rules!") and shutting down the conversation.

Response

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A comment from an anonymous poster:

A group of white students at my law school recently banded together to propose and campaign for a fellow white student to speak for the graduating class, opposing the candidacy of a nationally recognized black student, claiming he would be "too political." Their candidate won.

I'm not sure if that qualifies as an example of a microaggression. Whatever it was, I found it horribly depressing.

Response

I think that microaggressions are thoughtlessness. I don't think that most of us want to antagonize or annoy others. But I think also that the microaggressor fails to remember the "Golden Rule" when interacting with others. I think that the relationship between microaggressions, thoughtlessness, and, I'm sorry to say, solipsism or self-aggrandizement, is quite strong. Folks who think that their opinions are always correct are not likely to entertain the concept that others might find those opinions to be incorrect, or even offensive.

Response

A comment from an anonymous poster:

Overall, following the conversation the past two days has been very interesting. As a public law librarian, I do find some of the comments to be more directly appropriate in the academic setting vs. public setting. With that said, I would like to point out that those of us who have our doors open to the public frequently get questions related to being a lawyer, paralegal, law student or even on occasion as to being a Judge. In most cases, they are asking, because they misunderstand the role of the public law library and expect to have a legal professional who can devote the time/effort/knowledge to assisting/advising them with their legal issue. At our law library we generally take the question at face value and point out our role is to assist them in finding resources to assist, whatever training we may have. The response is the same when someone states "you are only a librarian" I need someone who can help or similar wording. We do generally do not take offense. We understand that many of our customers/patrons are desperately seeking help and probably need to have the help before the end of the day.

That said, sexist or in our situation racist or ageist language is NOT tolerated. We will also not continue discussions that focus on descriptions of staffers related to the above or how the customer perceives they look (weight, facial, clothing, etc.) Depending on how it was said the person will receive one pass with a reminder that type of discussion (or inappropriate language) will not lead to continuing the conversation and may lead in the person's removal. (Which has happened on occasion.)

Moderator

My next question was *do you respond differently to microaggressions that occur in the workplace than you would to microaggressions that occur in public or social settings?*

I am now curious, based on the comments, *if microaggressions are, or should be, handled differently depending on library type? Are or should they be handled differently with public patrons, students, or firm attorneys?*

Response

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This conversation makes me feel sane! Thank you all! I have written about microaggressions in my own life. See About Microaggressions at ssrn.com/abstract=2782511 if you are interested.

Also, for me, the goal is not to inhibit conversation. It is just to let people know the impact of their words. That's it.

Response

I think that is a great question Moderator. Personally, with students, I view it as part of my job as an educator to address these issues with them when I see them. I think it is part of building the emotional and cultural competency they need to work effectively with clients, witnesses, opposing counsel, court personnel, etc.

Response

First of all--thank you so much for having this discussion today. That this topic of micro-aggression exists in a professional forum at all is in my eyes, huge.

I've definitely wrestled with this through the years, as a trans-racial adoptee, i've been on one side of this experience due to my gender/race, and also on a more 'privileged' side, as raised by a white family in a moderate income community. My consciousness of implicit bias (where i organize micro-aggression/racism/sexism in my head) continues to grow and something that has helped me, especially when confronted with the comments about bringing micro-aggression out into a public forum or responding to comments as being "divisive" is this--no, we aren't all born racists, but we have inherited a system of racism. (I thank Toussaint Romaine, I just experienced a talk with him): Erase the guilt (i.e. no, you don't own slaves, and no, people don't just 'get over' systematic oppression) but the privilege is there, and instead of feeling guilty about it, use it to uplift others. Instead of my seething here at the injustice of inequality, or the rise of domestic violence, or the stupid comments I've received for being a women, use this energy to uplift others and make a difference--(at the same time honoring the authenticity of the feelings). Just because one light shines, doesn't mean yours has to diminish.

I realize those sentiments are good supports in my head when thinking about this, as for how to enact it in the workplace, I'm still considering it. At the moment I can't think where I experience this, we've been pretty lucky around inclusiveness, being in our blue bubble in the middle of the ocean, but I know we aren't perfect, and I know there will be opportunities to improve. (In my past work lives, I can think of a few things, but my youth and inexperience internalized it as being young and inexperienced. I'm hoping I can help my daughters feel confident in their voices as they grow up.)

Moderator

I really struggle with this. Because of the dynamic that we are in a service profession, I am not sure when/if/how it is appropriate to "correct" someone (or at least voice my opposition to perceived microaggressions). Is it appropriate to correct a student? A professor? The dean? Somehow power dynamics play into to this somehow...

*Also, I would like to go on the record as saying I have a pretty awesome dean who would be totally open to hearing me out, but I am talking about a theoretical dean in the context of this question.

Response

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Responder, your paper gives a very good and easy to read explanation of the different kinds of microaggressions. I especially appreciated the episode in the park about how the comment about your spouse alienated you from the group of friends.

I actually find myself guilty of microaggressions far too often!

I think my most common offense is when I try to narrow in on my patron's level of competence. Since we are a public library and the court's library we get patrons of all levels of knowledge. Often when responding to a question in person I say something along the lines of "I assume you are looking for state court rules" or "You might want to start with a more basic text to build up your knowledge of X".

While not necessarily targeted at a group marginalized in the greater society I think in the law public library context poorer and pre-se patrons are significantly marginalized. They are discouraged by the legal system and alienated from the legal culture. I can see in their faces the hurt that these statements inflict and how they add to the discouragement they already feel.

I find these statements reflect a conflict in the duty I owe patrons. On one hand I need to direct them to appropriate materials. On the other hand the communication is a very real expression of condescension.

I wonder how other librarians approach this kind of communication. How can we both give good reference service and communicate with alienated non-lawyer patrons in a way that does not assault their sense of worth?

Response

I've struggled with this as well.

I've had attorneys and public patrons make (what I perceived to be) microaggressive comments about my appearance and marital status. I've had some success by politely but firmly re-directing the conversation to the topic at hand, e.g., "I'd prefer for us to focus on your question about how to find [XYZ]. May I show you where we keep our [XYX] resources?" I don't think this is effectively schooling anyone about their thoughtlessness, but I do find that it helps me feel better by drawing a boundary.

Response

I think drawing a boundary is teaching a lesson in its own way. Perhaps there was no boundary there before, but there is now (and maybe a consciousness of one that wasn't there before?). And that's valuable all in it of itself. Kudos to you.

Response

Following this discussion with interest!

As an academic librarian, when working with non-law student patrons (including the occasional pro se) whom I suspect could benefit from some background reading and explanation, my method of attempting to not condescend is to frame my advice to them by way of "I'm going to recommend to you exactly what I recommend to our law students-start with a secondary source because...explanation of ways they can help, blah blah blah."

Moderator

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Would any other firm librarians be willing to chime in on this (or via the anonymous message feature)? I would imagine that the dynamics are somewhat similar and somewhat different at a firm?

Response

I don't know if this helps, but I try to always start by finding out what research the patron has already done, then offer them choices and provide information about the choices so the patron can make an informed decision. For instance, with a patron dealing with divorce and visitation, after asking and determining that they are not familiar with the applicable statutes, court rules, and related case law, I offer to help them get started researching those sources directly, but also offer the option of starting with a practice aid or other source where an author has already done the work of reviewing and summarizing how those sources interrelate, and I explain that is where we teach law students to start when they are dealing with a topic they are not familiar with.

Moderator

I encourage people to take time to think about the questions and feel free to chime in on this thread (or anonymously) throughout the week if you think of something you would like to add.

In the meantime, our next question is:

Does your workplace offer any training on how to recognize and respond to microaggressions? Are there any strategies that you have found helpful in responding to microaggressions?

Response

Thanks! I like the idea of asking them what research they've done already. It's a solid question and it puts the agency back on them.

Day 3: Law Librarian's Role in Social Discourse

May 24, 2017

Moderator: Lewis Zimmerman

Moderator

Good Morning Everyone!

Today's topic is the law librarian's role in social discourse.

The first discussion question today is:

What responsibility does a law librarian have to confront a patron's misconceptions about the law? How should a librarian balance the need for impartial reference assistance with providing responsible and correct information? For example how should a librarian respond to requests for UCC documents or original constitutional documents that correspond with the sovereign citizen movement?

Response

In the interests of both contributing to the conversation and not re-inventing the wheel, I'd like to remind folks that there is a fantastic article that addresses this very question: Vicenc Feliu's "Meeting the Information Needs of Constitutionalist Patrons: A Guide for Reference Librarians," at 25 Legal Reference Services Q. 89 (2006). You can find it on HeinOnline.

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Response

Thanks for pointing to the article, Dennis, I like how it pulls together typical questions and resources for responding, always helpful at the desk, particularly when under pressure.

What the article does not address is the potential ethical dilemma posed, namely, what responsibility - if any - does the librarian have to confront misconceptions, and how to balance impartiality with a need to present correct information. I would argue that the example of a Constitutionalist patron's request, on the face of it, doesn't present such a dilemma - if the patron is requesting specific materials, and we have the ability to point them to those materials, we can do so. Attempting to argue the inaccuracy of their understanding of the law may, in many instances, risk sending us over the line into interpretation. We are so careful about drawing that line in other instances, why waive it here? Should they manage to bring a particular matter to a courtroom, the judge will have the opportunity to educate them on the interpretive aspects of their argument.

When we serve patrons who misunderstand the processes of the legal system, or believe that their answer lies best in a particular area or source of the law, and we know differently, then I do believe we should make an effort to turn the patron towards those materials. For example, a patron asking for the statutes on how a particular easement would be defined or applied, might be informed that easements are most often a matter of case law, and directed to secondary sources discussing easements and their application and interpretation under case law. We have any number of patrons who ask for materials that we know will not be of assistance to them because what they are trying to do or argue doesn't fit within the system or resources. However, we point them to materials as best we can, and to sources when they are requested specifically, and do not judge their own perception of need.

As to providing "impartial and correct information", we do have a responsibility to assess the materials we have in our collection and make sure to include only reliable materials. We have the same responsibility to assess web-based resources we provide, meaning we should assess what we link to on our website and links we include in an email response to a patron (see the AALL Guide to Evaluating Legal Information Online). However, our public computer terminals do not filter out websites that we would assess as inaccurate, incorrect or unreliable. To a large extent, we have to let people believe what they believe.

Response

While I haven't thought about this in-depth yet this morning, my first thought is that I have to recognize when I need to remove myself from any conversation that evolves out of my attempt to find resources for these patrons. I'm sure you're all aware of the tendency for these types of questions to turn into a heartfelt diatribe about Constitutional rights, and I personally sometimes struggle with disengaging in a polite manner. While I agree with Responder that it's imperative that we direct patrons to the most applicable materials, I frequently let the tone of the conversation drive my actions: If I'm getting a lot of defiance or if I'm asked whether I agree with an opinion or not, I fluctuate from wanting to assert my own (reality-based) POV and running away from the encounter entirely.

For patrons who are certain they can easily represent themselves in court, that they're definitely in the right and most assuredly will "win, (but we know they're suing local police or the governor or something with a weak complaint), I will direct them to the civil action resources I think might be more or less helpful -- but I usually step away after that because it seems pretty clear I'm not going to convince them they really need a lawyer to get a reality check on their legal claim...

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Still, I try to keep my own tone in check, by saying "good luck" and not revealing my personal misgivings...which is hard for someone like me whose feelings are most often written all over her face!

Response

I agree, it is difficult to manage one's own reaction to such inquiries, whether "sovereign citizens" or other (shall we say) misguided patrons. It often takes quite a bit of practice of deep breathing and stepping-back techniques so I can apply them when needed. In writing, I'm just shooting for a philosophical best. In daily practice, I can only hope I don't fall short.

Your comments took me back to yesterday's microaggressions discussion - I have experienced or witnessed a number of interactions when microaggressions have been employed against library staff by patrons who are misinformed, misguided or otherwise have a misunderstanding of the law and the legal system. I presume they are in a defensive posture and microaggressions are a subconscious way for them to feel a little more in control. Still. Breathe deep....

Moderator

We talk a lot about sovereign citizens because they are visible and have a somewhat consistent group of beliefs but I think that this discussion applies to any persistent and systematic misconception on the part of a patron.

I think that their presence in the library is an interesting psychological and ethical problem separate from the particularities of their beliefs. The ethical problem is well discussed by Responder and covers the old ground of librarians' professional identity and relationship to other legal professions.

Reflecting on it now I think interaction more interestingly raises certain psychological problems. I think this is because the conversations often represent a contradiction. The misguided patrons reject what the library represents. An organized and rational legal system based on a shared and evolving literature. However what are they doing here? Do they want to research the legal literature they reject almost entirely?

The psychological problem is that they are primed to be defensive. The librarian is never the first person who is skeptical or hostile to their beliefs. They know that other people think their ideas are wrongheaded. I've found this means the most honestly curious are also the most defensive. If they are there as a researcher and not an evangelist they are looking for help from what they must view at least in part as a hostile institution.

In my experience this conversation is psychologically fraught. Any guidance away from irrelevant materials to relevant authorities is easily interpreted as an attack. To be honest it is an attack on their ideology. I think this interaction is a difficult one to navigate. On one hand the mere retrieval of UCC or other materials requested that we know is irrelevant fails to satisfy our responsibilities as librarians. It also perhaps ignores the request for better information inherent in the visit. However a too aggressive guidance can destroy a chance for honest discussion.

I think Responder is exactly right, the best approach is to remain flexible. Read the patron's body language. Test them with initial general texts. "Would you like to see this manual on real estate agreements?" Couch alternate recommendations as alternatives and not more correct books.

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Moderator

Here is the second question for discussion:

Does the library by enforcing certain norms of behavior reinforce existing inequalities of the Justice system? What responsibility do librarians have to be aware of patron's or potential patrons' expectations of the library?

For example if a patron's culture encourages discussion and talk as a part of research do rules requiring silence degrade the ability of that patron to find legal information? Are such restrictions justified and by what criteria should librarians privilege one patron over another?

Response

A comment from an anonymous poster:

I believe our libraries reinforce the idea that quiet study is the correct way to interact in an academic realm. Last year a group of black (african-american, caribbean-american, and african) students repeatedly violated the noise policy and I had a very difficult time enforcing it because I thought the policy was working in a discriminatory way. There is more than one right way to communicate and more than one right way to work through a legal issue. Our spaces should accommodate a variety of cultural norms in the way we use our space.

If you would like to comment anonymously, go to
rwu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_54HKeh0YwYn0auF

Response

The anonymous poster brings up a very important point, and something that I freely admit I struggle with. My idea is that, although we need to be welcoming to differing cultures and ways of being, we still need to be cognizant of the institution and entity where the behaviors are taking place. And I can never get past the idea that, in its basic form, a library should be a place for quiet study and research and reflection, which can only be impeded by loud discussions. So, in this case, I am wondering if it is okay to ask the visiting cultural groups to be respectful of the culture of the entity they are in.

Response

We encounter this quite a lot as well. For me, the distinction is simple: are the students in question law students, or not? As Responder says, we have foundational rationales for treating law students with a bit more deference. I'll kick undergrads who behave like this out in a heartbeat: they have their own separate library to go to. But if it's law students engaged in group study, well, I may tell them to keep it down a bit if others complain. But likely as not, I'm generally willing to let law students go.

We've also had groups from the community come in and try to offer lectures on their own time. That doesn't sit too well with us, and we've had to work with them to get them to understand that we are not the proper forum for their classes.

Response

This is an interesting point!

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I've noticed that students coming to the law library from other disciplines (who may be from any number of backgrounds) also have different ideas about library norms. I think this may have to do with how non-law academic libraries are evolving.

Classrooms in my library's building are increasingly hosting students from my school's nursing program. The nursing students sometimes use the law library because it is close to class and convenient. These students are often more inclined to work in groups and vocalize while they study. There are spaces for this kind of group work at the undergraduate library, and the students sometimes seem surprised when we tell them they have to be very quiet. (We have two study rooms, but reservations are limited to law students.) So we're set up for conflict between law students and non-law students.

Response

I've been thinking about variations on this theme for a while. It seems to come up a lot with respect to norms around noise and conversation. Public patrons who come to the library are more likely to be experiencing current legal problems that often leave them stressed and casting about for solutions. They need to make cell phone calls, or leave their belongings while they run outside to feed the meter. Sometimes people cry. Or they need to talk-through their thought process with a companion (out loud). I sympathize with our students who want a guaranteed silent study-space, which we aren't able to provide. One solution, of course, would be structural--to provide specialized spaces that allow us to accommodate different user needs without conflict.

To some extent, the same thing happens when we build collections that favor academic and theoretical texts over practice guides, or materials for pro se patrons. Or when we decide not to dedicate funds towards other kinds of A2J resource development.

When [some colleagues] and I were researching a paper we wrote a couple years ago about dealing with disruptive patrons, once recommendation that we heard more than once was that libraries should be explicit about patron hierarchies--e.g., an academic library serves its students and faculty first, and the needs of other patrons come second. The idea being that patrons will be on notice that our resources are limited and directed towards fulfilling particular institutional goals. But it's also an explicit statement of privilege--the library supports a system of justice that reifies the role of lawyers. We prioritize the education of future attorneys in the hopes that they will advance justice, possibly at the expense of helping people seek justice in the present.

Moderator

I think the idea of explicit hierarchies is a very good one!

As Responder points out collection development is a cultural choice too. Like the anonymous poster pointed out we often MUST chose a culture to win out. I think there probably are no neutral choices in this regard. Making the choices explicit opens the possibility of frank dialog about the choices.

Response

I should add that I feel somewhat uncomfortable with the hierarchy, even though I think being explicit about it is helpful.

In other words, if we're opening ourselves up to patrons who are unfamiliar with the legal system, we should have something substantive to offer. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

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Response

Regarding the hierarchies, because our State Law Library system is housed in the Judiciary, our Judiciary staff (judges, law clerks, staff attorneys, general personnel) are afforded more privileges when it comes to library services/resources. When I came to my position, I inherited this system of, for lack of a better word, privilege, almost an elitist attitude that the staff were really here to serve only the judges and attorneys in our community. However, my predecessor and I discussed that we are also open to "anyone in need of legal resources" and that includes the public, and we've been focusing on opening our doors here in the Supreme Court Law library as well as in our branch libraries on the neighbor island to the public. Over the years, especially after 2008, we saw an increase in the public accessing our library resources and I'm glad for it. Of course we serve the Judiciary as our number one priority, but we also welcome all who would like to enter in search of legal information, resources, and services. We've partnered with and work with a number of LSPs to publicize their resources--as their resources help our patrons, we recently added a self-help station for litigants to create their forms, and we've waived service fees for pro bono attorneys who are volunteering their time to help people.

Moderator

Thanks Responder! I think law librarians can be especially susceptible to elitism. We deal with a pretty esoteric knowledge and interact with pretty powerful people. I work hard to be on guard against that kind of thinking in myself.

While we have more materials available to Judicial and State employees I consciously try to treat everyone who comes through the door with respect and consideration. I often say to myself "This is the right place to come if you're confused"

Tune in tomorrow for day 5's discussion: Critical Thinking about Sources of Information / Moderator: Genevieve Tung

Response

Comment from an anonymous poster:

I hesitatingly disagree with the anonymous poster who said "our spaces should accommodate a variety of cultural norms." While I want to be sensitive to cultural behaviors, I also think we have good reasons to insist upon certain library behavior. We certainly don't expect silence and whispered voices only, but still there are library patrons who are studying or reading, and I believe we have an obligation to ensure our spaces are conducive for all users.

(I see Responder has already posted similar thoughts!)

I'm not sure how this opinion will be received but: I wouldn't expect to live/work in another country and not adjust my own cultural behaviors, so I'd like to think others can appreciate the need to adapt as needed too...

Response

The only thing I would add to the cultural norms conversation is that I don't think they have to be mutually exclusive. The libraries I have worked in (all academic) have included spaces for both quiet study and more collaborative study. Both spaces have been used actively and appropriately, which

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seems to suggest anecdotally that the demand exists for both. We even tell our students on library tours which spaces are appropriate for which type of use to help manage expectations and to help students pick the most appropriate space that meets their needs. I realize this may be a luxury smaller libraries don't have, but when possible, I think accommodating different types of use allows us to meet the needs of a greater number of folks.

Response

A comment from an anonymous poster:

My response to the last anonymous is that there are no such norms anymore. In librarianship we can't even agree on the norms, so why would we impose them on our patrons?

We have libraries that are more traditional with distinct space with quiet expectations, libraries that are the center of the academic community that have counseling or clinic centers in them, and ones that are architecturally designed to foster collaboration.

We need to continue to break down boundaries and put the needs of ALL of our patrons first, not just the ones who insist on traditional quiet study or are the "priority" of our institution.

Also, I applaud the last anonymous poster for speaking out. I think this conversation is made richer by having a variety of opinions. Thank you!

Moderator

We've had some excellent responses to our second question! Please feel free to continue that discussion. The last question is about librarian's limits on their own behavior:

What are the appropriate limits of librarian's advocacy of a particular viewpoint? What topics are appropriate for discussion and what are not? Do these limits extend in any way to the librarian's life away from work?

Day 4: Critical Thinking about Sources of Information

May 25, 2017

Moderator: Genevieve Tung

Moderator

Good morning and welcome to day 4! Today's topic is "Critical thinking about sources of information." Here's my first question to you all:

For at least the past year and a half, there has been an extraordinary amount of questioning of the legitimacy and methods used by traditional sources for news and information. We have also seen new levels of concern about transparency and the availability of government information. Have you, or has your library, been called upon to help patrons navigate these changes? How have you approached such questions?

Response

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We have definitely seen concern over transparency in government. I haven't been asked myself, but a colleague of mine was asked by a faculty member to archive certain government websites and documents pertaining to human rights before the new administration took office.

Moderator

I've had a couple of experiences related to this phenomenon.

Several faculty and students came to the library with questions after they read news reports about major changes to government websites after Jan. 20, as well as the "regulatory freeze" announced by the President's chief of staff Reince Priebus. I had to do some self-education to tease out what aspects of these developments were novel and which were fairly standard for a change of administration. (For example, Rahm Emanuel also issued a "regulatory freeze" memo in 2009, but it was narrower in scope than the Priebus memo.)

We've seen an uptick in patrons who are interested in issues around digital preservation and archiving, which is very satisfying to me as a librarian!

Moderator

Here's another question for the group:

Do you use current events as catalysts for research instruction? What's your approach?

Response

Yes, definitely, but I would say I use pop culture more often than world or political events. Some of the librarians I work with use big federal issues as examples (i.e., teaching legislative history via the Clean Water Act) but I tend to use smaller, more ridiculous examples (i.e., teaching legislative history via the Roller Skating Rink Safety Act).

Oh a slightly different topic, I am interested in hearing how other people integrate the topic of evaluating online resources into the 1L research program. I am struggling to come up with a way that balances the fact that they should already know that you can't use Wikipedia with the fact that they might not actually understand why...

Any help would be appreciated!!!

Response

One theme or concept that has really resonated with me since the election is the notion: there is this unique or hypercritical moment in time where library work is extra crucial as current social norms about information/facts have gone awry.

What do I mean about "gone awry": I mean the whole Fake News cycle explosion; the fueling of dislike/disbelief in science; the need for a March for Science; the current administration's approach to funding research. One example that makes me smile is the 2016 debate between Rapper B.o.B and astrophysicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson regarding the previously (one would assume) well-established fact that the Earth is round: Flat-out wrong: Rapper B.o.B. duels with Neil deGrasse Tyson over whether Earth is round

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So to the point: while we could be going "outside our lane" as law librarians to advocate for planned parenthood or some other social or fiscal program, when it comes to news/facts/regulations/laws/digital authentication and so on, I believe that we should advocate about it. This could be a perfect moment to have an even bigger presence due to these issues being at the heart of the law librarian's role in providing access to justice.

And to answer the discussion questions, I have not been asked about lost government information and the like because many of my patrons are not aware that the information can disappear and be replaced, but when I bring up the issue of data removal as an administration changes over, people are interested, impressed, learn something new type of conversation. I see a gap in public knowledge that is an easy fit for the librarian to fill.

Moderator

I've been talking about this with some of the legal writing faculty at my school. One idea I've been floating is that we need a basic information literacy refresher to happen early in the first semester-- before digging into WL/LN or other formal research tools.

I see this as incorporating some very fundamental stuff (how is legal research different than what you might have done before? why do I need special databases versus things I can find for free online?) and something of a tutorial on how to Google effectively as a lawyer (because we know they will do it regardless--they might as well do it thoughtfully). Sometimes I think that the students think they're really getting one over on us because they can find everything they need so quickly with their amazing Google searches.

Response

I have also been talking to the legal writing faculty and am mulling the idea of creating a libguide or a page of an existing libguide. Does anyone in the group have a libguide on the topic they would be willing to share?

Also, I am interested to find out what you tell your students or public patrons about the reliability/authenticity of the LII website, specifically?

Response

I am perhaps biased about this, as one of my colleagues does a significant amount of work with the LII. The LII also maintains a virtual reference desk (<https://help.law.cornell.edu/>) that exists to answer questions from the public about its collections.

The ILL collection definitely has its limitations, but I appreciate how up-front they are about those limitations, and the thoughtful ways they've gone about making their resources more useful and user-friendly. For example, the way they've built connections between their USC and CFR databases is really interesting and useful (particularly w/r/t going from the statute to the regs).

I think you're absolutely right to draw students' attention to the site, and point out its strengths and weaknesses, since it is often the top Google result for a legal citation!

(One other thing: the LII's search engine doesn't seem great, so it can help to navigate it by doing a Google advanced search limited to the base URL.)

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Response

While I've tried to avoid getting political in the classroom (for many reasons), I do think the current tumult in American politics has made for many interesting possibilities for teaching administrative law research in particular. For example, EO 13771 (on "reducing regulation and controlling regulatory costs") opens the door to a basic conversation about what legislative rule-making looks like in practice and the documents involved in rule-making. Knowing that background would, in my opinion, give someone a much better vantage point to determine whether or not such a policy is sensible.

Response

I am curious what others say to their students/patrons about the fact that the LII site includes attorney advertising and the dates are missing from many of the pages.

These are two features that give me pause yet I still want to show my patrons the LII site. How do others discuss LII with students/patrons despite these negative features?

Response

I agree with you, Moderator. I also use political examples like Executive Orders and newly revised statutes/regulations for legal research work. The in-class conversation is not political, as it's about legal research skills, but I do find that discussing things that have made a "splash" in the news tends to give the students interesting and concrete ways to think about legal research in a "real world" context.

Moderator

Here's my next question for the group:

Do you see information literacy as a tool for promoting social justice, or a politically "neutral" skill?

Response

I taught Advanced Legal Research semester and ... well, you can imagine. In fact, honest to goodness, I was smack-dab right in the middle of my lecture about presidential executive orders (just the way "other administrative law" fell in the syllabus), when a student raised her hand and said, "uh, Professor Etheredge, I just got an alert on my phone from the NYT ...", and sure enough, it was the revised one from March 6th that had just been released by the WH not five minutes earlier. Well, I'll say this here – I am against the ban, in no uncertain terms – but I didn't say that then. I just said, well, okay, let's take a look, let me show how to find it on the WH website, let's talk about how it's not official until it's in the Federal Register, let's look at the FR on FDSys, nope, it's not up there yet but here's where it will be, etc., etc. We even dissected it a bit, the students were alert enough to see that the admin was trying to put in some examples this time. I just kept saying things like, "whether you think this is a good idea or not, this shows ...", etc.

I'll be honest. It can be very difficult to keep your opinions out of things (always watching for my eye rolls and voice inflections, LOL), but it can be an incredible pedagogical experience for everyone if you can. Talk about making it real.

In my classes, I try to see information literacy as a politically "neutral" skill. In what I say and do outside the class, then it's for promoting social justice (if I'm in an appropriate forum)

Response

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So I will share my experiences here...We get written and phone information requests from inmates at the local jail and workhouse. We have parameters for their requests, but as librarians we still have to let them direct their information search. We cannot advise them with "[T]hat is a poor information source...you would be better served with this." So as long as it's about their immediate criminal case, we wind up sending them materials from dubious sources. (Often it relates to the sovereign rights discussed previously on this platform.) I can only add in materials that might be of a more credible source and more useful (IMO) for their needs where page limits permit. This is especially true for written requests, where there is no reference interview.

Similarly, I might want to report through our communication channels on our local legal happenings, but must take care that I don't espouse a viewpoint either way. Once I re-tweeted a local editorial article which reported critically about a county sex offender treatment program being shut down by the county. It was county- and law- related, but I later got an irate call from a county department that I was making the county "look bad." At the present time, there is a nationally-visible criminal trial about to commence in our courthouse, which has much relevance to "social justice" discussion at large. I however feel the need to play it safe with no blogging or tweeting about it whatsoever.

Moderator

Thanks to all who've shared thoughts today. Join us tomorrow for the final day of conversation on the topic of "Stereotyping in Libraries," moderated by Sarah Lamdan and Joshua LaPorte.

Day 5: Stereotyping in Law Libraries

May 26, 2017

Moderators: Sarah Lamdan and Joshua LaPorte

Moderator

Good morning! Our final discussion for the week will be about stereotyping in libraries. We've gathered questions and comments from the group about perceived stereotypes in our professional setting, and especially stereotypes within and even unique to law librarianship. The first question we received is about generational preconceptions in the law library setting:

With people in many professions delaying retirement (here is an article about this phenomenon) and staying in the workforce longer, have you noticed more generational issues and age-related stereotyping in your library? Does your library have any practices to build intergenerational relationships?

Response

This is an interesting topic - I have definitely noted generational stereotypes, and have probably engaged in generational stereotyping myself.

One way I've observed this is when younger staff members presume that older staff are not up to speed on current technologies. This presumption often puts the older staff member(s) on the defensive, and stifles an opportunity to build a mentoring relationship.

Response

I work at a county public law library. After reading the posts all week I have decided that the public law library experience and issues are quite different than they are in academic law libraries. Something that I

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noticed a large increase in the last 5 years is the number of grandparents trying to navigate the court system to get legal custody of their grandchildren. This is mostly because of drug, alcohol or mental illness issues of the parents. Most of these law library users have never used the court system before and are anxious about finding the forms online and correctly navigating the court system. Some are very computer savvy, most are not, we try to assist them in using the State Self-Help Center webpage (which is excellent) to get instructions and forms and frequently refer them to a Lutheran Social Services program designed to assist relatives raising relatives children.

Response

I hesitate to state something so obvious to me, and I also hesitate to feed a stereotype about myself by making this suggestion, but here goes....

I have found that hosting a happy hour social or cocktail hour type event for the library helps to build intergenerational relationships. It, at least, encourages the younger folks on my staff to interact with me, the old man. For that very reason, I usually have a bottle of cheap champagne in the library refrigerator for the occasional "pop up" happy hour. On a larger scale, our faculty has impromptu happy hour events every so often in the faculty lounge. Sadly, these events are just for faculty. People bring wine and beer and we put some sporting event on TV (don't ask me what sports?) and we all chat. I have found that the older folks (older than me) really open up and have SOOO much to offer to the younger faculty that other forums just don't facilitate.

Also, the older faculty usually have the best wines.

Response

Good suggestion, Responder!

I also have had a lot of great experiences working with older and younger colleagues on projects in the library. One of the biggest lessons I learned early in my working life from my older colleagues was that almost every great, new idea had been considered at some point in the past. Sometimes valuable lessons were learned which helped us steer in a better direction.

Response

I definitely support keeping champagne around for a pop-up social event! :-) I also like the idea of making intergenerational connections by building community and encouraging social workplace interactions. I know that I always gain more of an understanding for all of my coworkers perspectives when we've had the opportunity to talk about who we are and what we're up to.

Response

We are not the only ones thinking about this topic. It turns out that May is "Older Americans Month" and my local public library system has put together a list of leisure reading (linked below). Looks like some fun and interesting reads - hope you enjoy. Oh - and champagne on hand for a pop up social hour? I love that idea (although, sharing a refrigerator with another county department probably precludes that for me, but the rest of you enjoy!).

50 and Older: Books featuring people in the prime of life - Hennepin County Library

Moderator

Critical Conversations About Social Justice

5 Topics in 5 Days: A joint online discussion of LISP-SIS, RIPS-SIS, SR-SIS and GLL-SIS
May 22 – 26, 2017

Thanks for sharing that reading list! We can continue to discuss the topic of intergenerational stereotyping issues, and I'd like to add another law librarian's stereotyping in libraries question to the mix:

Law librarianship is a vibrant profession full of people from a multitude of educational and skills backgrounds. For instance, some members have JDs and some do not, and some members are involved in AALL, participate more in ALA, SLA, and other non-law librarian-centered library professional organizations. How can we overcome the stereotyping that occurs within our own profession around degree-types, and beyond our profession, when interacting with librarians who are not law librarians?

Response

First, Responder, can I please come to your social? Shameless self-invitee over here who loves wine.

I agree there's some stereotyping about librarians that I struggle with, people often are shocked to know that I'm a librarian (and that's curious). I've kind of worked this to my advantage in some ways, especially with Access to Justice initiatives in which I participate--I tell court people all the time that our experiences shows us more of our residents are more comfortable seeking information from the friendly librarian than from the scary courthouse (it's not my fault we're friendlier than the bailiffs, etc.--kidding/not kidding, and of course there I go stereotyping the bailiffs when actually they're very helpful!).

All jokes aside, I've been attending the Equal Justice Conference for the last few years and this year we had maybe four librarians there; last year there was a whole crew of us. It's nice to represent librarianship and how we can help in a large body of attorneys/judges. My co-presenter, Joanie Bellistri (Joanie, are you reading this?) commented that in years past, EJC participants were perplexed that libraries were there, now it's more of a rule rather than an exception, of course librarians are here and are valuable partners. So there's been some headway in breaking stereotyping that librarians are a bunch of shushers among that group.

As for within our profession, I interact with our public library, have friendly relationships with our law school librarians (many who have JDs), and yes we are a group of diverse people. I agree with the other poster about much of the academic law library setting is different than what we experience working with the Judiciary and the public, but there are some similarities. I think working together on different projects can help--the public library, Judiciary, and legal aid recently worked on a grant project together on expanding and increasing access to interactive court forms, and that created a bridge of understanding, too.

Thanks for the great discussion. Have a wonderful aloha friday, all!