

LEADER PROFILE

# THE 25th LAW LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS

2017 was a big year for Jane Sánchez. On February 1, 2017, Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden announced that Sánchez would become the Law Librarian of Congress, succeeding fellow American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) member Roberta Shaffer.



Jane Sánchez had previously served as chief of humanities and social sciences at the Library of Congress. Her time as a legal information professional and law librarian has included several important private sector and governmental positions, each of which has contributed to what has become a remarkable career at both the Library of Congress and the Law Library of Congress.

Sánchez has worked in libraries most of her adult life—since her undergraduate days at the University of New Mexico, as part of a work-study program. “Upon graduation, I worked at two libraries at Harvard University—Lamont, the undergraduate library, and the Gutman Library in the Graduate School of Education,” notes Sánchez. Her first experience with legal materials came when she was working as a manager for a judicial opinions unit at BNA, Inc. “We acquired slip opinions from federal and state courts, and I supported the legal editors by supplying them with slip opinions that matched their subject areas, and later wrote a proposal for

served as a business unit managing director at the U.S. Government Publishing Office, as an associate director of justice libraries in the Justice Management Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, and finally as departmental head of history and culture libraries at the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, before becoming chief of humanities and social sciences at the Library of Congress in 2014.

Sánchez has been a member of AALL since 2012, serving on both the Government Law Libraries Special Interest Section (SIS) and the Government Documents SIS. Here, she shares her professional journey and career insights, and offers advice to those just entering the field.

### Describe a typical day.

The Law Library must remain flexible to respond to the needs of Congress on a daily basis, so no two days are ever alike! Thomas Jefferson noted, “There is in fact no subject to which a member of Congress may not have occasion to refer.” We must be responsive to our Congressional colleagues’ needs—whatever the subject may be. One day, a Member of Congress could ask our foreign law specialists about fees charged for asylum applications. The next day, we could receive a request to use a rare book for a swearing-in ceremony. Recently, I donned a hard hat to tour the active construction site of the Law Library’s new secure storage facility—a second, much-needed space to hold our precious rare book collection. Another day, I looked over the blueprints for a law stacks replacement shelving project. On another day, I had the pleasure of poring over one of the many research reports produced by our foreign legal specialists, including: Miranda warning equivalents abroad and the regulation of drones around the world. Finally, the Law Library is digitizing a number of primary legal documents to make them freely available (at no cost) to the world.

### What have the positions you’ve held taught you about the Law Library of Congress and the role it plays in society as the world’s largest law library?

When I worked at the Department of Justice (DOJ) library, I was an external customer of the legal research done by the Law Library of Congress. At a time when the National Security

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the source material management system,” says Sánchez. “This system would be a repository for all primary legal documents coming into the company, including court slip opinions, state Attorney General opinions, state laws, state regulations, etc.” In fact, the system has only recently been retired, some 20-plus years later.

She received her JD from American University’s Washington College of Law and her MLS from Simmons College in Boston. Following her time at BNA, Inc., she also

#### JANE SÁNCHEZ

- LAW LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS
- LAW LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- WASHINGTON, DC

## QUICK HITS WITH JANE SÁNCHEZ



### ebooks or print?

Both! I still love to hold a book in my hand, and I love the smell of paper. But I have my e-reader filled with books to read, too.

### iPhone or Android?

iPhone

### Last book you had the pleasure of reading?

*The Marsh King's Daughter* by Karen Dionne.

### Words to live by?

The "Golden Rule" has always served me well, and I try very hard not to "judge." Keep an open mind until you have all the facts.

### Favorite TV show to binge watch?

*Tin Star*, *Endeavour*, and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

### Favorite travel destination?

Anywhere I haven't traveled already! I love discovering new places.

### Favorite book/or non-book items in the Library of Congress?

I never tire walking past Thomas Jefferson's Library in the Jefferson Building. There's also the wonder of the Main Reading Room, or the entire Jefferson Building, at that! What treasures!

### Most unusual item in the Library of Congress?

For me, it would have to be Abraham Lincoln's Bible, and Mrs. Lincoln's pearl bracelet and necklace. She wore them to Abe's inauguration.

Division was being stood up, we were receiving more questions that required foreign legal expertise. I triaged foreign law reference questions from DOJ attorneys and referred them to the Law Library. Also, on one occasion, the Law Library found an expert witness for us.

Now that I'm at the Law Library, I see how crucial it is for the library to continue safeguarding the world's historical and current legal materials. We must remain as a leader in foreign, comparative, and international law research. The Law Library's collection is approximately 60 percent foreign legal materials, and the foreign law specialists have unique expertise to answer the toughest questions for some 240 jurisdictions. Also, we've had a number of foreign visitors remark that our collection exceeds what they have back home.

### How does your background working in different types of libraries—both law and non-law—benefit you in your current position?

When you have a specialized library such as the Law Library of Congress, most of the time, patrons need help finding what's in the law collection. However, the rest of the time, we'll get a "curveball" question that requires us to marshal our knowledge about the entire Library of Congress collection. I came from the Humanities and Social Sciences Division of the Library of Congress. Being familiar with that collection allows me to connect patrons with the subject specialists who can answer their questions on religion, political science, history, medicine, and other topics outside of law.

### What's the biggest challenge you face as Law Librarian of Congress?

Our biggest challenge is trying to keep up with and anticipate future resource needs. While we are fortunate to have 30 bright and talented foreign legal specialists and American lawyers/librarians, we must constantly evaluate our human resources in support of Congress. Because legislative agendas change with the times, the Law Library must adapt our expertise to best serve Congress. Sometimes, that requires reaching outside the Law Library to get assistance for countries and jurisdictions we don't currently support.

### What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the profession?

The law librarian community's biggest challenge is demonstrating value when many are satisfied with a "quick search." That is, working with patrons who conduct quick online searches that yield an answer—not necessarily the best answer—that bubbles up to the top of the results list. The need to provide results that satisfy patrons' desire for immediate gratification is competing with our desire to demonstrate the greater value that comes from producing results that are authoritative, authentic, accurate, and objective.

### What advice would you give to those looking to advocate for themselves or their libraries?

As a law librarian, you should always be marketing your library's services to users in your immediate organization (if you are part of a

large institution) or determining others who could benefit from your collections and services. Get involved in your organization's activities (e.g., helping develop a strategic plan) so you can continue to shape expectations, and remain relevant as things change.

#### What role has AALL played in your career?

AALL was instrumental early in my career when I was at BNA, Inc., a respected legal publisher. To be able to meet our subscribers face-to-face at annual conferences was extremely important for me in understanding the needs and wants of our customers. I learned what they wanted from BNA as a provider of legal information. Now, in my current role, I appreciate AALL's advocacy on behalf of law librarians and the legal information profession.

#### What lessons have you gained through the leadership roles you've held?

When I first became a manager in the 1980s, a colleague passed along some advice (from her father, actually!) that I try to live by every day. That advice was to treat everyone fairly. Being fair means applying policies and practices uniformly across the organization, and being open to listening to all sides before making decisions.

#### What career advice would you give to newer law librarians?

I would encourage newer law librarians to take a chance and try different roles (either functional ones within their library, or leadership roles within an association). In my own career, I've been a cataloger, created back-of-the-book indexes, developed and assigned metadata for databases, been a reference librarian, and I've worked for a legal publisher and many different types of libraries, both inside and outside the federal government. Build a support network early on; you never know who may assist you later in your career. Consider public service! Public service offers opportunities to apply your knowledge in ways that may surprise you, allowing you to stretch beyond single areas of law.

#### What's something most people don't know about you?

I have a twin brother—I come from a family of nine children, with three sets of twins! ■



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