

## LEADER PROFILE

# CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

Femi Cadmus stumbled into a career in law librarianship as most people do, purely by accident. But after working in her first role as a law library research assistant, she was hooked. Her growth in the profession has been natural, as she has transitioned over time from one leadership position to the next, always with an end goal in sight. Throughout her journey she has remained flexible, adaptable, and always ready to evolve with the ever-changing demands of technology. We are in a time of constant disruption; you must upgrade your skills and learn how to use new technologies in order to stay relevant and avoid becoming obsolete.



Cadmus was born in Manhattan, New York, and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. Her first degree was an LLB (bachelor's in law) from the University of Jos in Nigeria. Nigeria, a former British Colony, still retains many of the legal traditions of England, where the LLB is an undergraduate degree. After Cadmus received her law degree in 1984, she received a BL from the Nigerian Law School in Lagos and was admitted to practice in Nigeria. Following graduation, she worked as an attorney for two years but didn't particularly enjoy the practice of law. Not knowing what she wanted to do, she decided she would figure it out

**"I'm not a status quo person, in the sense that I feel things can always be done better or done differently. I like to tackle problems and challenges." Femi Cadmus**

while obtaining a graduate degree. She earned her LLM at the University of Warwick in Coventry, England, in 1988, specializing in Law in Development. After returning to the U.S., she decided to seek work as a researcher. She began her career at the University of Oklahoma as a law research/reference assistant while she obtained her MLIS from the University. She was subsequently admitted to practice in New York.

"After obtaining a graduate degree in law, the only opportunity that opened up to me was as a research assistant in a law library," recalls Cadmus. "The director at the time (Maria Protti) really took a chance on me in the sense that I didn't have the context for researching the American legal system." After getting her feet wet in library work, Cadmus was hooked, and

#### FEMI CADMUS

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found herself fascinated by the variety of questions she received at the reference desk.

In this role, she did everything from cataloging and loose-leaf filing, to maintaining the collection and shelving books. "I did everything from the ground level, for which I'm grateful for," said Cadmus. "It's helped me in my career to have a broad perspective and balance as to library operations, and has helped me relate to everyone in the organization." Her first full-time professional position was at the George Mason University Law Library (now Scalia Law). She started out as an assistant law librarian for circulation and reference, before moving to head of collection development and access services and finally associate law librarian. She stayed at George Mason for 13 years before working as an associate law librarian for administration and lecturer in legal research at the Lilian Goldman Law Library at Yale Law School. She was the Edward Cornell Law Librarian and associate dean for library services and professor of practice at Cornell Law School from 2011 to 2018. She began her new position as the Archibald C. and Frances Fulk Rufty Research Professor of Law and associate dean of information services and technology at Duke Law School in November.

An American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) member for 22 years, Cadmus has served in a number of roles, including vice-president and as a member of the Executive Board, as well as a member of the Strategic Directions Committee, the Finance & Budget Committee, the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, and the Economic Status of Law Librarians Committee, to name a few. She is also a member of the Academic Law Libraries Special Interest Section (SIS), the Government Law Libraries SIS, Private Law Librarians & Information Professionals SIS, Research Instruction & Patron Services SIS, and the Technical Services SIS. Here, she discusses hot-button issues for the Association, what's next, and how AALL has impacted her career.

#### **Are there any hot-button issues at the top of the Executive Board's agenda?**

As of this writing, the Executive Board has been addressing, head-on, vendor practices deemed as unfair to our members. It's the way vendors are now bundling their products and compelling users to purchase their platforms in order to

## QUICK HITS WITH FEMI CADMUS



proven to be invaluable. When my major bank decided to leave my small college town at the time, I was able to continue conducting transactions without missing a beat.

**ebooks or print?**

Probably ebooks, mainly because they are portable, and they also allow me to easily increase the font and use a backlight.

**Favorite takeout?**

Thai

**Favorite quote?**

"To everything there is a season ..."

**Favorite book?** *Book of Proverbs*

**Favorite app?**

A very practical one, my banking app! The app has

**Favorite way to unwind after a long day?**

I like to indulge in a refreshing nap.

**Favorite travel destination?**

Hawaii

have access to essential legal titles. We are calling them out on it. We had our lawyer write a letter (sort of a cease-and-desist) to Lexis in June to end this practice. We strongly feel that the current approach is anti-competitive.

### What goals has the AALL Executive Board set for the coming year? What will be their areas of focus?

We will continue to strengthen the position of our members and the Association through advocacy and relevant professional programming. We will also continue to maintain our strong financial position by exploring opportunities for generating additional revenue streams. We are coming to the end of our current Strategic Plan, so we are laying the groundwork for a new strategic plan this fall. We will also be addressing any outstanding items from the current Strategic Directions, such as trying to measure/determine which entities we should be partnering with and what the impact of collaborating with other groups, such as Legal Marketing Association, American Library Association, and International Legal Technology Association, to name a few, would look like. We currently don't have any guidelines or metrics in place to measure the impact of these collaborations.

Another item on my agenda will be setting up a special committee or task force to look at

our archives policy. Our archives agreement with the University of Illinois is expiring in 2019, so we need to review how we are managing our archives. There is a possibility of collaborating with LLMC Digital, who has actually approached us and said they would digitize the materials we have left to archive at no charge.

We have also recently completed the process of recruiting a new Executive Director after a successful 11-year tenure by Kate Hagan. This very important position is responsible for executing the strategic goals of the Association, managing the day-to-day operations of Headquarters, and overseeing the work of our dedicated staff. Another initiative will be to create an executive leadership institute for directors across all segments: academic, corporate, firm, and government.

Lastly, we will be incorporating the Body of Knowledge (BoK) into all content areas. Designed as a blueprint for career development, the BoK sets forth core domains, competencies, and skills needed by today's information professionals. The domains include: Professionalism & Leadership at Every Level, Research & Analysis, Information Management, Teaching & Training, Marketing & Outreach, and Management & Business Acumen.

We are also in the process of working on a State of the Profession Survey.

### What do you think the biggest challenges in law librarianship are?

I like to view challenges as opportunities to develop creative solutions. Technology undoubtedly continues to disrupt every industry, the legal services industry and law librarianship not excluded. Technological disruption is often described as a two-edged sword presenting the opportunity for legal information professionals to update and upgrade traditional skills and expertise or risk becoming obsolete and irrelevant. Stay relevant, be willing to be flexible, responsive, and update your skills. Law librarians are here to advocate for the profession, to give stakeholders the tools that they need to advocate for themselves, and to respond to their needs. Technology has been a major disruptor, not just in legal information and librarianship, but in every industry. Technology is changing the way we teach, it's changing the way lawyers practice, and it's changing the way we respond as law librarians.

## How do you stay engaged and passionate about your work?

I like to shake things up and have never been afraid to try new things or step into new territory. Networking and professional development opportunities provided by AALL have also helped stoke my passion for work. I'm not a status quo person, in the sense that I feel things can always be done better or done differently. I like to tackle problems and challenges. I'm always exploring, I'm always looking to make sure the library is staying relevant, and sometimes that means collaborating. Doing all this keeps me passionate. Staying in the status quo is the most boring thing to me. If I had to do the same thing the same way every day, I could not stay passionate. Being embedded in the law school, I understand what our stakeholders' needs are and how to respond to those needs.

I also like to call myself an organic mentor; I have a few people that I regularly meet up with to discuss things, for example, what's going on with work and what challenges have come up. I find working with up-and-coming librarians or those new to the profession to be very fulfilling and rewarding.

## What is one of the most valuable lessons you've learned in the professional leadership positions you've held?

Develop a vision early and stay on course. If you don't have a vision or something you are working toward, you're not focused, you don't have a goal, and you are unlikely to achieve the desired result. You end up just kind of moving along aimlessly. What I learned very early as a leader is that it is essential to have a vision and know where you are going and what you hope to accomplish. Once you develop that vision, stay focused.

## How do you think legal education will change moving forward?

Recognizing that technology has been disruptive to how lawyers practice, the educational focus will continue to be increasingly experiential as law students continue to develop broader skills and expertise in the intersection of law and technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation. For most of us who work in law schools, we are preparing students to be practice-ready. As much as law is very traditional, it has deep wellsprings of change and it will continue to see change. The legal profession is changing, and when students hit law firms, or wherever they

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end up practicing, they are expected to know how technology works and that it is essential to the practice of law.

## What's the value in being a member of AALL?

There is tremendous value in being a member of AALL, but I cherish the connections and the deep professional network that I have cultivated the most. I joined AALL in 1996, and I find the strong professional network and solid immersion on professional education to be so incredibly valuable. Our members are very knowledgeable, skilled, and above all, very willing to assist. This has been so important for me in my career advancement. I can call any librarian up and say, "Hey, I have this issue, I don't understand this one thing," or "I need this book," or "I can't find this article." Everyone is always so generous to help with whatever issue you are having. That network couldn't exist if we didn't have this Association. I also enjoy the professional programming from the AALL Annual Meeting and programs from chapters—you can't put a price tag on all these benefits, they are priceless.

## What is the best career advice that you have been given?

To always have a balanced perspective—keep the big picture in mind and do not engage in distractions by sweating the small and inconsequential stuff.

## What do you find most rewarding about your job?

Helping people succeed and meet their goals. This could include helping faculty and students with their research, or it could be helping a researcher from a developing country who doesn't have access to legal information. It could also mean mentoring a newer librarian. The human element is what matters most. ■