Throughout her time in law librarianship, Adeen Postar, current chair of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Continuing Professional Education Committee, has gained extensive experience in law firm, academic, and government libraries. Her desire to help students become the best lawyers they can be, coupled with her passion to support faculty scholarship, has led to a challenging and fulfilling career.

Law students do not often identify becoming the director of a law school library as their career goal. Adeen Postar was no different. After earning her JD from Washington University, she wanted to practice law. After a year in general practice in Rhode Island and a move to Virginia that necessitated her taking, and passing, her third bar exam, she decided to pursue her interest in family law. Securing an associate position at a prominent Northern Virginia family law firm would seem to have put her on the course she had aimed for, only she realized that it was
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Adeen Postar

"I reassessed what I really liked about law school and the practice of law, and thought more about my own personality," said Postar. "I realized I loved research and sharing knowledge. I had done the courtroom thing and would happily leave that to others."

Several prominent DC-area law librarians, including the late Bob Oakley (Georgetown), Anita Head (George Washington), and Marlene McGuirl (the former head of the American Law Division at the Law Library of Congress) encouraged Postar to pursue a career in law librarianship, which led her to enroll at Catholic University Library School.

While in library school, she started her first library position at a small DC tax firm, Tucker Sanger & Lewis, where she worked as their first part-time librarian. "I learned how to file loose-leaves and learned about copyright law, met the vendors, and really came to understand how research in law firms was conducted," said Postar. Her next job was as a reference librarian at the Law Library of Congress. Then, in 1985 she accepted a reference position at Georgetown University’s law library with responsibilities that progressed from reference librarian to creating and administering Georgetown’s Public Patron Program.

After more than a decade at Georgetown, she accepted the position of law library manager of the DC office of Blank Rome. "I was the only law librarian, in fact the only law librarian they ever had," said Postar. "I organized their collections as well as the teaching and training of associates, paralegals, and staff." When she started, the firm was using the DOS version of Lexis, as well as some truly antiquated resources and sources that she was able to modernize.

"I enjoyed my interaction with the attorneys, but I came to miss teaching and working directly with law students and faculty.” So, in 2004, she returned to academic libraries as deputy director at the Pence Law Library at American University, Washington College of Law. In 2014, she fulfilled her ambition to become director of a law school law library by joining the University of Baltimore (UB). At UB, Postar directs the administration of the library and has continued her decades-long experience teaching legal research. Her scholarship includes continuing work as associate editor of the State Practice Materials: Annotated Bibliographies, published by Hein.

After joining AALL in 1984, Postar has been active on several committees and special interest sections. She is the current chair of the Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Committee and has served on several other committees. She is also a member of the Academic Law Libraries Special Interest Section (ALL-SIS), Legal History & Rare Books SIS, and Research Instruction & Patron Services SIS, and is a member of the American Bar Association, American Association of Law Schools, and the Law Librarians’ Society of Washington, DC, where she has served in various leadership positions. She is also a member of the Law Library Association of Maryland.

Here, she discusses her path to becoming a director, current trends within the field, and skills attorneys need to possess in order to succeed.

**From your experience in government, the private sector, and academia, what makes academic law librarianship attractive?**

Working at the Law Library of Congress was an amazing experience. Responding to inquiries from federal prisoners, a foreign attorney, and a member of Congress would be a routine shift at the reference desk. The private sector let me experience the importance of efficiency, organization, and responding effectively to attorneys under immense pressure. The different types of library experiences allowed me to succeed at increasingly challenging positions, but nothing can compare with my interactions with students and faculty. My experience at Georgetown
motivated me to return to the academic world and my experience at American provided me with the skills to be the director of an academic law library. The opportunity to engage in and to support academic teaching and scholarship gives me purpose.

What do you enjoy most about your job?
No day is ever the same! While I start each day with my “to-do” list, it usually vanishes, often before I even walk in the door. But I like that challenge. I enjoy prioritizing and responding to the needs of students, faculty, and administrators. My passion is working with students and helping them succeed. The opportunity to assist faculty in solving difficult research questions or finding resources they did not even know existed keeps me fully engaged with some of the brightest minds in legal education. Here at UB, like many academic law libraries, resources are very tight—but I have learned how to meet challenging needs on a short shoestring.

How do you stay abreast of changes in the field?
I choose the all-of-the-above option! Several of my faculty members write on cutting-edge, nontraditional legal issues that I am able (and need) to follow closely. I subscribe to many blogs, including Dewey B Strategic, BeSpacific, the Law Librarian Blog, Scholarly Kitchen, and the Legal Skills blog. I also read about legal education and review statistics and new data that are available to help sort out trends.

What can you share about your path to becoming a director?
My path was unconventional. First off, I am geographically bound to the DC area as my husband’s law practice and our roots are here. While I am fortunate to have the breadth of law library opportunities available here, my job prospects were limited geographically. I am also very grateful that I was able to work in several part-time positions when my daughters were young. My experience over the years helped me in my journey to becoming a director. I created and administered Georgetown’s Public Patron Program, which charges attorneys, law firms, and nonprofits to use the library there. Of course, the internet has limited the need for this program today, but 25 years ago, research, particularly by practitioners in small firms, actually involved a trip to the library. Through this program, I acquired financial and administrative organizational skills that allowed me to succeed as an administrator. The opportunities to supervise law library staff, a role not everyone enjoys, is another cornerstone to my path to being a director. I am committed to providing librarians and staff with the tools they need to succeed at their positions, through support for their scholarship, conference attendance, and continuing education. Finally, the skills I developed at American University provided me with a unique perspective on what law students need from their libraries to ensure that they have good research and writing skills. It was a long journey, but when I began as director at UB, I was confident in my skills and ready for the challenge.

What educational trends are most relevant to law libraries?
One troubling development is that some students do not read carefully or research deeply, which impacts their ability to analyze fact patterns and apply them to the law. We teach students legal research skills, but their previous research experience leads them to believe that everything is on Google and the answer can be found in a sentence or two in a Wikipedia entry. Millennials’ online skills do not consistently translate into good legal research and analytical skills. All of us have been trying to bridge that gap for many years, by trying to teach students the skills they need to be good lawyers.
What skills are in high demand for legal information professionals?

Some things never seem to change; communication skills, both written and oral, remain essential. Legal information professionals must be willing to anticipate, seek out, and respond to information needs. This requires being willing and eager to interact with the student who does not know what to ask for or the faculty member who may not communicate clearly what he or she needs. They must be able to advocate for what patrons need to get resources that are necessary to make them successful. In an era where library budgets and space are being cut, students and faculty continue to need what libraries and librarians can provide. Today, libraries are not a passive repository for books (if they ever were), but an active, engaged community of professionals. You must speak up and be a voice for your students, patrons, attorneys, and clients.

How has participation in AALL impacted your career and/or leadership capabilities?

AALL provides access to stimulating ideas, innovative programs, and exceptional leaders who have been instrumental in my career. I am better prepared to anticipate and respond to student, faculty, and resource issues because of discussions with directors and senior staff from across the country through AALL. In this regard, the Law Library Director’s listserv is invaluable. The ALL-SIS also provides essential resources and support. I cannot say enough about the immensely valuable programs at the AALL Annual Meeting, as well as the many useful local programs.

What essential skills do attorneys require?

Effective legal research is the cornerstone of the profession. In this age of competitive legal research service offerings and new technologies, lawyers need to be able to research effectively and efficiently. Effective advocacy and successful transactional practice begins with identifying the applicable law or precedent, and to do so, attorneys need to be able to evaluate and use the best sources. New attorneys must have the ability to research and write in an organized and effective manner. A new attorney who incurs inordinate costs due to ineffective research will have to answer to partners or clients. Whether they are headed to a big or small firm, business or government, the research training we provide is a life-skill that is essential to their future success.

What career advice would you give to new law librarians just entering the profession?

They need to be engaged, not just in the profession, but also in their institution. I urge all new law librarians to think about the future needs of their institution. Don’t be of the mindset that “I am too inexperienced to contribute.” Your freshness gives you a perspective that should be shared. Get out of your office and meet students and faculty on their terms and in their space and become part of their agenda as you demonstrate all of the resources the law library provides.

What does the future of legal education look like from your perspective?

Legal education, as reflected in the ABA Standards, is implementing assessments and learning objectives. The challenge for academic law libraries is to support a successful outcome. In addition to helping our law schools create a successful assessment framework, law libraries need to develop a framework for self-assessment. How do we measure our contribution to the success of our law schools? Return on investment metrics for libraries are difficult to define and put into practice. From the students’ perspective, increased opportunities for online education will be matched with an emphasis on improving analytical skills. Equally important, we (as educators) need to identify new tools to help prepare students for bar examinations. As law schools are trying to find a winning formula, the law library is an essential resource that should be part of meeting that challenge.

What would you tell new members about getting involved in AALL?

Do it! Attend the AALL Annual meeting and be sure to view the AALL Annual Meeting archived program recordings. Participate through committees and be sure to access the educational webinars on the AALL2go website. Reach out to your colleagues when you have a question or a problem. We are such a collegial group; there is always someone who will be happy to assist you with whatever you need.