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Closing the Gap: A Unique Perspective Into the Importance of Legal Research Skills

With more than 10 years of experience as an educator in legal academia and now, as a law firm librarian, I find myself drawn to the topic of *bridging the gap*. Law librarians from academia and firms discuss various ways to ensure recent graduates are prepared to research as new associates. In my role as a law firm librarian, one of my duties is to train new associates on cost-effective strategies and research techniques. Further, I recently created a program working with summer associates to enhance their legal research skills. Concurrently, I am an adjunct law professor instructing law students in Advanced Legal Research (ALR). You can say I am on both sides of the *gap*.

As an educator in academia, I assisted law school professors and law students with legal research. I worked closely with the curriculum and needs of the law school community. Given my unique perspective, I approach my new associates, summer associates, and law students from a practical viewpoint. My syllabus encompasses more than your traditional legal research questions. We discuss competitive intelligence, verdict and settlement searching, union research, and legal analytics. I provide cost-effective strategies and law firm guest lectures. Throughout the coursework, I provide in-class problems to discuss and work on within groups. A majority of the time these problems are based on research questions I have received on the topic. I provide many examples of my daily research questions and projects.

In addition, I started a South Florida Law Librarians group that includes both law firm and law school librarians. This group has opened the dialogue to collaborate and discuss legal research trends in law schools and law firms. Law firm librarians learn the focus of current legal research classes and new legal

research platforms. Law school librarians get the inside scoop regarding the type of research being conducted and the needs of the law firm. We share ideas and perspectives on legal research techniques to prepare law students to better understand first-year associates.

Although my role in this larger topic of *bridging the gap* is small, my ALR law students discuss how they are able to quickly implement the skills and resources into their internships and clerkships. My ultimate goal is to provide practical skills that make my law students effective, efficient, and valuable new associates within their first year by *closing the gap*.

Ana Ramirez Toft-Nielsen; Research Attorney at Littler Mendelson.

About AALL New Voices: AALL welcomes members to share their reflections on any component of law librarianship!

If you would like to participate, please send your submission of about 100-600 words to Megan Mall, AALL's director of content strategy, with "AALL New Voices" in the subject line.