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Training the Next Generation of Law Librarians

A good library science education isn't hard to find. There are a large number of library science programs and iSchools throughout the U.S. that offer a quality curriculum to future librarians. However, opportunities for those aspiring to an education in a specialized field such as law librarianship are much more difficult to uncover. I come from a family of librarians, in fact, my father is a law school library director. Therefore, I knew what the field was like and made the decision early to become a law librarian. Wanting a career in academic law libraries, I went to law school and obtained my JD. The next step was earning a graduate degree in library science. However, when I was an iSchool student, I often struggled to connect my coursework to the actual work I would be performing in the law library.

Fortunately, for me, I was a student in the Law Library Fellowship program at The University of Arizona's Cracchiolo Law Library. My most practical and valuable learning experiences in library school took place in the law library--either behind the reference desk or in the chilly meeting room where our specialized courses took place. My classmates and I learned about law library practice and administration, developing research courses, managing library projects, and day-to-day reference activities from actual law librarians. This was truly hands-on, practical learning for future professional law librarians.

Students in a program such as Arizona's are incredibly fortunate; at nearly all library schools or iSchools, a prospective law librarian is hard-pressed to find any offerings that cater directly to the specific skills needed to succeed in the legal information field. While there are some limited relevant course offerings at select schools, and some wonderful assistantship programs at institutions such as The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and The University of Texas at

Austin, there are only two programs (that I know of) that are dedicated wholly to training law librarians: the University of Washington's Law Librarianship Cohort, and The University of Arizona's Cracchiolo Library Fellowship.

As regular iSchool offerings gravitate more toward the cutting-edge areas of informatics, database creation and management, blockchain, etc., students on the traditional library tract may find themselves lost in the crowd. This is why practical experience and specialized programs are so important--now more than ever before. My advice for future law librarians when deciding where to pursue your library education, remember that practice and the opportunity to have coursework and real-world experience in law librarianship makes perfect.

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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.