

LEADER PROFILE

# LEADING WITH OPTIMISM



**Holly M. Riccio** is the daughter of two librarians—her dad was a high school librarian and her mom worked at the Hastings College of the Law Library for many years, so her path to law librarianship seemed likely. “I used to visit my mom at work, so perhaps putting cards and pockets in books as a teenager—and thinking it was fun—had a subliminal effect,” said Riccio. She worked as a law library filer during her summers home from college and also at the NYU Law Library her last few years of undergrad, both of which introduced her to law librarianship. “The head of circulation knew I had an interest in law librarianship and gave me projects that introduced me to basic law library concepts whenever possible,” recalls Riccio. “From there I decided that I wanted to go to library school and choose law librarianship as my career.” A member of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) for 28 years, Riccio is a leader in technology, leadership, and innovation.

While working toward her MILS at the University of Michigan, Riccio applied for—and was accepted as—head librarian in the campus Housing Division Residence Hall Libraries program. The program served to provide library school students with a robust practicum opportunity of running a library in an undergraduate dorm in exchange for room, board, and a small stipend. “The real-world experience of doing everything it takes to run a library—hiring, budgeting, acquisitions, cataloging, collection development, outreach, training—in the program’s safe, supportive environment was invaluable,” notes Riccio.

Her first job was as a reference librarian at the New York County Lawyers’ Association, a membership library in downtown Manhattan. The job served as a formidable

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training ground, due to its vast print collection, as well as the wide variety of patrons’ questions—no two research requests were ever the same. She then went onto a law firm (Hughes Hubbard & Reed LLP) to gain experience performing corporate/transactional research. Then, the historic blizzard of 1996 happened, and the Northern California native decided to return home to San Francisco. She served as librarian at Long & Levit LLP for two years before serving as a librarian/marketing research specialist at Davis Wright Tremaine LLP for four years. She then spent almost 12 years at O’Melveny & Myers LLP, serving as director of library innovation and library manager. She then took on the role of director of knowledge management at Nossaman LLP for two years before shifting gears to working as a senior manager for

#### **HOLLY M. RICCIO**

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HBR Consulting. Riccio is now director of the California Judicial Center Library, a position she has held since January 2020.

A member of AALL since 1992, Riccio has been incredibly active, including serving as President from 2014-2015, Chair of the Appointments Committee, Executive Board Strategic Directions Committee, and Chapter Summit Planning Committee. Riccio has also been active within her local AALL chapter, the Northern California Association of Law Libraries (NOCALL), serving as its president in 2011-2012. She is a member of several special interest sections, including the Government Law Libraries Special Interest Section (GLL-SIS) and Private Law Librarians & Information Professionals Special Interest Section (PLLIP-SIS), to name a few. She became an AALL Leadership Academy fellow in 2009, serving as a mentor in subsequent years. In addition to her Association activity, she is also an active member of the International Legal Technology Association (ILTA). She is a frequent speaker and writer, and most recently spearheaded and co-edited AALL’s 2016 digital white paper “Defining ROI: Law Library Best Practices.” She is currently co-authoring a professional development chapter for the upcoming book *Introduction to Law Librarianship*.

Here, Riccio discusses the role the COVID-19 pandemic has had on her institution, the importance of libraries demonstrating their value, and how being involved in AALL has helped her career and leadership development.

#### **What are some of the major differences in going from a law firm to a government law library?**

I keep coming back to the French saying “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose,” meaning the more things change, the more they stay the same. While there are distinct differences between law firm and government law libraries, there are so many core skills of law librarianship that are transferable and universal—budgeting, talent development, collection management, communication, and leadership skills, just to name a few. The differences are often in the nuances, such as superseded and historical materials being a collection development priority here, given the timeline of cases often coming before the court, which differs from most of my previous law firm experience of constantly shrinking linear feet and physical library real estate.

## QUICK HITS WITH HOLLY M. RICCIO

**Words to live by?**

Emily Post said, “Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use.” The world needs less judgment, and more kindness.

**Best book you recently read?**

In anticipation of the publication of Monique Truong’s latest novel, *The*

*Sweetest Fruits*, I decided to re-read her first book, *The Book of Salt*.

**Guilty pleasure?**

Makeup and skin care products, as well as Caffeine-Free Diet Coke.

**Favorite quarantine activity?**

Definitely cooking and baking—and, as a side benefit, I’ve finally overcome my fear of my Instant Pot.

**Favorite movie?**

Alfred Hitchcock’s murder-swap thriller *Strangers on a Train*. Everything about it is just perfection—the cast, the music/score, the operatic nature of the cinematography, Hitchcock’s amazing attention to detail—this movie has it all! “Crisscross.”

**Song or musician that always lifts your spirits?**

Anyone who knows me well has already answered this question: Tori Amos. Her talent as a pianist and songwriter is undeniable and her songs serve as a personalized life soundtrack.

### You have held a number of leadership positions in different settings. What’s your leadership philosophy?

I would say that I lead with optimism. What I mean by that is that I believe in everyone’s potential to do great work and succeed in their role, whether that is in their job or volunteer position. In the volunteer context, I always trust that people want to contribute and will do so when and how they can. When I was president of AALL, I would often be calling people to ask them to run for office or serve in a particular volunteer role, and most of the time, people would say yes, but sometimes they wouldn’t. While I hated to hear someone say they couldn’t take on a certain role or agree to run for a specific position, I always knew they were doing what was right for them and, consequently, right for the Association. Our Association is comprised of passionate individuals who give so much, but who also know their own boundaries and limitations, and I’ve always respected and appreciated that.

In the work context, optimistic leadership manifests itself in two central ways. First, I empower my staff to do their jobs by trusting

in their expertise and knowledge—I don’t micro-manage or get involved in the details of their day-to-day work. They know what they are doing and, when we all do what we do best, the aggregate results are amazing. Second, I make sure my staff know I am there to support them and back them up. When someone knows you believe in them, trust in their abilities, and are there when they need you—that is truly a recipe for success.

### How has COVID-19 impacted your organization? What are the biggest challenges?

The pandemic impacted our organization early, as the Bay Area was one of the first to implement shelter-in-place orders. The court quickly responded with a broader telecommuting policy, allowing those that could work remotely to do so. The library staff moved to this remote work model, and some staff have gradually returned to the office to handle work and tasks that cannot be performed remotely—namely, print collection maintenance. I think the biggest challenge is really the people part. Unlike law firms where a library team is often geographically dispersed and sometimes serving users in other offices, we are all in one location together—library staff and our users, the judicial officers and court personnel. The close-knit nature of this type of environment is one that is challenging to replicate in a remote setting. We have leveraged technology to keep that connection alive, and created new ways to engage and communicate, but there’s nothing quite like that in-person interaction.

I started my position here at the very beginning of the year (literally, on January 2nd), so I had three and a half months in the office with my staff before we transitioned to remote work. Thank goodness I’m the “unapologetic connector” that I am, because I had no idea how important it would be to build trust so quickly, both with my staff as a whole and with each staff member individually. To keep connected during the pandemic, we started having weekly staff meetings and transitioned in-person conversations (and some email traffic as well) to Microsoft Teams. We even created a few social channels in Teams—one called Watercooler Chat, to replicate those hallway interactions, and another titled Watch, Read, Do, where we share the things that are keeping us entertained at home.

### Due to the pandemic, what new challenges are government law libraries facing?

I think the biggest immediate challenge is continuing to provide service to public patrons when either the library is still closed to the public or

partially re-opened. Our core purpose here is to serve the judiciary, so I have not had to contend with this, but I have observed how so many of my GLL-SIS colleagues have pivoted quickly to provide remote access to library resources, often working with information vendors to come up with innovative service models to meet this moment. And, of course, the ongoing challenge for so many government law libraries will be increased budgetary constraints, since the pandemic will likely have effects on our budgets for years to come. On the flip side of the challenges—again, to be the optimist that I am—the opportunity I see is for government law librarians to have the potential for increased visibility in their organizations and communities, and for a bigger spotlight to be shone on their creativity, innovative spirit, and passionate leadership and dedication to the public as well as access to justice. To quote Einstein, “In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity.”

**It's always important for law librarians to be able to demonstrate their value—particularly now. You served as co-editor of AALL's 2016 white paper on ROI. What tips can you share?**

The return on investment (ROI) white paper encouraged members to take on the “value challenge,” and also stated that it is a journey, not a destination. I think all law librarians have been on this journey, and our current situation is just another stop on the route, so to speak. I think that shifting to a remote work environment really plays to a lot of strengths that law librarians have, and it validates many continued efforts to do things such as shifting from print to digital and becoming involved with knowledge management and intranet content development. Over time, many law libraries have become less about place and more about service, and now entire workplaces and organizations are having parallel experiences. Who better than law librarians to step in—and up—to help lead the way to whatever the new normal of work will be, right?

**How do you stay on top of developments in legal technology?**

First, by being an active member of both AALL and ILTA. The formal communications and informal community discussions from both associations keep me updated and informed. I also get a vast amount of daily eNewsletters that I scan for interesting articles. I attend an eclectic mix of webinars and other virtual events and scan social media (particularly LinkedIn) for news on trends and developments. I try to stay

on top of things so that I know a little bit about a lot of different things, and then when I need to know more about something, I go back and take that deeper dive. I never know where great ideas or inspiration will come from, so I always keep my eyes—and mind—open.

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

It's been such a significant part of both my career development and my leadership development. I was encouraged to get involved in AALL at the outset of my career, and the opportunities I was afforded allowed me to take on incremental leadership positions over time and to develop and hone my leadership skills. At the beginning, it gave me a chance to do things I couldn't do as part of my jobs—public speaking, running meetings, managing teams, planning events, etc. Then, over time, demonstrating leadership in the volunteer environment allowed my employers to see me as a leader, and afforded me opportunities to take on new work roles and responsibilities.

Also, my AALL volunteerism has given me exposure to so many leaders in our profession. Getting to know past presidents and other leaders that I've admired, watched, and considered mentors in my career has been invaluable.

**What can law librarians do to showcase their contributions and accomplishments?**

We need to take steps to let those outside of the law library know about our accomplishments and promote ourselves as thought leaders. I recently participated in a webinar on building your professional brand, and I think taking all of the small steps that add up to one's brand accomplish this goal. Doing things like making sure your LinkedIn profile showcases all of your accomplishments or taking opportunities to share your expertise by writing a blog post or article are actions that start to establish you as an expert and thought leader.

One timeless resource I've turned to frequently is Peggy Klaus's book *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It*. Her book discusses the nuances of promoting yourself without over promoting yourself, and there's definitely an art to that. It's so important that we own our expertise and accomplishments in an authentic way that allows us to get comfortable in our own success.