Zanada Joyner comes from a family of higher education professionals, so one could say education is in her blood. Her passion lies in helping Black students and other minorities become lawyers. “Lawyers are the backbone of our country, they fight for justice and equality and play a crucial role within society at large,” said Joyner. She became a member of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) in March of 2013, and has been active on committees, special interest sections, and within her local chapter. Diversity within the profession plays a key role in making the profession more inclusive, but there is a lot more work to be done. And, according to Joyner, the profession is not yet fully inclusive; but the conversations that have come about since 2020 give her hope that we are moving in a direction that will open up more opportunities for minorities within the legal information profession.

“My goal in life is to impact people in a way that makes their lives better. Not necessarily to give them something, but to provide people with tools.”

– Zanada Joyner
Joyner received her BA from Loyola University New Orleans in 2000 and her JD in 2007. She earned her master of library and information science (MLIS) degree from Rutgers University in 2015. She currently serves as the senior reference librarian at the North Carolina Central University (NCCU) School of Law in Durham, North Carolina. In her role, she teaches first year Legal Research and Advanced Legal Research. Prior to this position, she served as the digital services and faculty services librarian at NCCU. Before joining NCCU, she was the research and instructional services librarian at the Alexander Campbell King Law Library at the University of Georgia School of Law. While completing her MLIS, she worked as a reference associate at Loyola University New Orleans College of Law Library. Additionally, she served as a judicial law clerk for New Jersey Superior Court Judge Thomas S. Smith Jr., who is now retired.

Since becoming a member, Joyner has served as a member of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, the Emerging Leader Award Jury, the Annual Meeting Poster Session Award Jury, and as a team leader for the Annual Meeting Program Committee (AMPC). She is also a member of the Academic Law Libraries Special Interest Section (SIS), the Black Law Librarians SIS, Legal Information Services to the Public SIS, and Research Instruction & Patron Services SIS. She is also a member of local Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries. She has presented at national and regional conferences and co-edited a recent textbook, *Introduction to Law Librarianship*, with fellow AALL member, Casandra Laskowski.

Here, she discusses what makes a strong Annual Meeting program proposal, the positive changes she has seen regarding diversity and inclusion, and what law librarians can do to showcase their accomplishments.

**You have an interesting educational background—a JD, MLIS, and a master’s degree in education. Can you touch on your educational journey and how it has shaped your approach to your career?**

My goal in life is to impact people in a way that makes their lives better. Not necessarily to give them some information for themselves and to use it to advocate to make their lives better. I taught K-12, and then I went to law school. That’s the journey, but what has informed me as a librarian, especially now that we do so much more instruction in both academic and law firm settings, is understanding that learners don’t learn because of us; they learn in spite of us. Law librarians empower people to find information for themselves and to use it to advocate to make their lives better.

**You were an AMPC team leader from 2020-2021. What makes a strong Annual Meeting program proposal?**

I think you need a clear vision, that’s what makes a proposal strong. The second thing is, what can the user do with this knowledge? We call it takeaways in the forum. I don’t think that’s the best name for it, because it really is the objectives, such as, how is this useful? How is this relevant? How is this important—to the world, to the profession, to your personal growth? If you can articulate that, then you have the makings for a strong proposal. For too long we have relied on the submitter based on their reputation, credentials, rank, and status, to carry the programs, and that defeats the purpose of inclusion. It also defeats this idea that knowledge can be shared by people at all levels. So, a strong program proposal is about the quality of the idea and how the attendee can use this knowledge to further their professional growth, their organization, etc., rather than just the reputation or the status of the presenter.

**The COVID-19 pandemic forced law libraries to make changes. Going into this new year facing the Delta variant, how is your law school adapting?**

It’s not easy. There is a strong desire to be in person, and because of that, there must be physical changes to the space and considerations that must be followed to allow for this. But the pandemic has taken an emotional and psychological toll on everyone. It’s more of a struggle now to have to get in your car or take public transportation to get to your physical place of work. And once you get to work, you have to deal with social distancing, disinfecting your workspace, and making sure students are wearing their masks, and then you have to actually get your own work done. These COVID outbreaks are real. My law school is making these concessions because we want to be in person. But the result of being in person creates a lot of tension and stress, so there’s a wellness person on staff who is trying to help bridge those gaps. It’s scary, and you just don’t know if what you are doing is enough. Right now, my law school has not mandated vaccinations, but they have mandated weekly surveillance testing for unvaccinated students, faculty, and staff who have not submitted evidence of vaccination. Surveillance testing...
Words to live by? "I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

Guilty pleasure? I like watching home renovation shows such as Beachfront Bargain Hunt: Renovation.

Favorite way to unwind after a long day? I like to walk my dog, but I don’t get to as much because my dad is here, and he has taken over, but I do like to walk and be outside. I have a grill and smoker, so I like to smoke meat and barbeque as well.

Favorite quarantine activity that you still do? All my house projects. Once I finish one project, I have to do four more.


Song or musician that always lifts your spirits? I’m a huge Jill Scott fan. I really like her. And now she’s on those Nationwide Insurance commercials.

TV show you like to binge watch? The Big Bang Theory.

QUICK HITS WITH ZANADA JOYNER

is required for all students, including fully vaccinated students. Fully vaccinated students will be subject to testing two times during the academic semester. Unvaccinated students will be subject to increased surveillance testing based on campus positivity rate, but not less than one time per week.

COVID has made us reassess the quality of our materials, such as the digital ones that we self-produce, and helped us strengthen them for our students. The quality of our materials has also improved. In the past, I could just walk you around and show you stuff in the classroom or in the library. But last year, I had to have the digital materials to do that virtually. The quality of my teaching is better, because with Zoom, I can do shared screens, I can walk students through the lessons easier, and share projects with my colleagues. Working remote aided in making me more precise with my directions and instructions, expectations, and objectives. So, when it comes to teaching, for some of us, our instruction has become clearer, which helps as we continue to deal with the pandemic. I only live 15 minutes from work, but I still get rattled when I’m in the physical library. I didn’t realize how much the circumstances were impacting me until this past July when I started going back into the physical space. At home, I am much more productive as I am more relaxed, I can control my space, and just focus on my work.

Diversity and inclusion continue to be important topics in law librarianship. What positive changes have you seen within the profession and in your own law school toward diversity and inclusion? Within the profession, there’s at least an acknowledgement that law librarianship is not inclusive. It is not diverse, and it has not been working hard enough toward addressing this issue. Recognizing this statement as the truth is part of the battle. You can’t address the issue at large until you at least can call it out for what it is. I joke with law students that it’s called the bar for a reason—so that you can’t get over it. Women, people of color, the disabled, and the poor, for sure—any marginalized population—are all constantly struggling for equality. How do we make space in our community for these marginalized groups of people? For me, I find this pandemic opened a lot of opportunities for my students. In the past, I have had students who have had to bring their child to class because their sitter fell through, or they’ll miss class because they don’t have transportation. Remote access has created more opportunities for people to learn in a way that works for them, creating more opportunities for inclusivity.

In your opinion, what challenges do people typically encounter when implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts? How do you recommend working through those challenges? The challenge for all of us is the assumption that everyone experiences the world the same. If you start from that premise, it’s very difficult to change, because your way is the only way. I remember being among colleagues, and they were talking about The Andy Griffith Show. I remember saying “what’s that?” They were so shocked I had never seen it. But I’m Black and was much younger, so it wasn’t a culture reference I would have been familiar with. The idea that everyone would know this show is a small example of how an assumption of everyone having the same background of reference can be mistaken. I think it’s important to acknowledge that the way you come at the world is not going to be the same for anyone else. We as a profession are problem solvers, so it’s hard for
us not to have an answer. We are information seekers, and we are also information organizers. So, you give us a question: How many gray whales are there in the Atlantic Ocean? We give you an answer. We don’t say, well, according to this, and according to that . . . We don’t do that. We tell you this is the number. So, when it comes to implementing diversity and inclusion, we assume we have the tools to fix it, and we don’t. So, that’s a challenge.

How do we solve this issue? The answer is humility. We need to humble ourselves to the fact that we don’t have all the answers. And we don’t know what someone else has experienced in life. We also need to be willing to listen. Listen, and just say, OK. And I think there’s a real resistance to this concept, sometimes. There’s listening with the intent to give an answer, as opposed to just listening for the sake of listening. We need to let people just say what they feel, and not retaliate against it in any way.

How has participation in AALL impacted your career and/or leadership capabilities?
It has impacted my career in lots of positive ways: the networking, the mentoring, and the educational programming have all helped me professionally. I was a participant in the Leadership Academy in 2018 and have held leadership positions in caucuses and SISs. Through this experience and my SIS and caucus memberships, I have had a chance to lead, even if my role did not specifically ask for me to take on these duties, because I thought it would be a good way for me to contribute to the work. My experience through AALL has also given me the opportunity to take chances and sometimes miss the mark as to what I wanted to accomplish. What’s important when that happens is how you rebound from that, and what you learn from the experience. Fellow AALL member Clanitra Nejdl has been a peer mentor to me. She is a person who calls me to account for things I do well, as well as areas that need improvement. As a leader, again, just seeking out people who will tell you the truth is so important. Other mentors include Carol Watson, who I used to work for, and Ronald Wheeler. As senior AALL members, both Carol and Ron offer a different perspective. AALL gives you the opportunity to try different leadership roles; you may not succeed in every role, and you may not love every committee or awards jury that you get assigned to, but these are all wonderful experiences that will help build your leadership skills—both professionally as well as personally.

How do you stay engaged in and passionate about your work?
I’m very passionate about students of color, especially Black students getting law degrees. I see Black lawyers as the architects of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Lawyers are at the backbone of all these things, but it’s not just the big things; it’s the little things, such as the evictions, the child support, and the speeding tickets, that are unjust. Lawyers in general are important. And so, I’m very passionate about students becoming lawyers.

Staying fully engaged at times is not easy. I have to step back and say, OK, I definitely feel like I’m struggling when the same document comes back to me five times with red marks, and I don’t love those days, but I know it all makes me get better at what I do, and the larger goal is what’s important, right? Maybe this specific item is not that important, but the work being done in the larger scope is, so that’s what I need to focus on. I’m a person of faith. I believe that God has put me in these spaces because I offer something that other people don’t. Sometimes I don’t know what the reason for that is, but the people I work around reinforce this idea that what I come to the table with is unique and special. So, that’s how you stay passionate. You can get somebody else to be a reference librarian, but you can’t get another Zanada.

What can law librarians do to showcase their contributions and accomplishments?
We have to be better at self-promotion. As a culture, especially as women in the profession, we are not good at promoting our skills and what we do. But I also don’t think it’s just about promoting ourselves. Even if we do something that isn’t so great, and we say, “OK, well, last time we tried that, but this semester, we try this,” that is how we have to approach things. I don’t think we have to see it as boastfulness. American culture is very suspicious of women who are too front and center. And as a Black woman, it’s even harder sometimes, because I’m supposed to feel like what I do isn’t good enough, even though I don’t feel that way. I should feel lucky to have landed professional positions, but I believe that my hard work has earned me a seat at the table. This feeling is referred to as imposter syndrome, but I don’t ever feel like an imposter of anything. We all are in our positions because we worked hard, and we earned our seat at the table. We need to start sharing our contributions with the larger legal community. Our stakeholders, universities, firm partners, and constituents need to know what we offer and what we bring to the table. Law librarians need to showcase the work they have done, the improvements they have made, the collaborations they have created, the experiences they have had, and the pitfalls, too. And we need to highlight how we contribute to the larger legal community.