LEADER PROFILE

THE ACCIDENTAL LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST
Carol A. Watson was always interested in obtaining a library science degree, and after completing her undergraduate in comparative literature in 1981, she began looking to earn it. “Someone said to me that computers were the latest thing taking over the library and that I would have to learn a lot about computers,” recalls Watson. “I liked literature and had no interest in computers, so I skipped that option.” After earning her JD from the University of Georgia (UGA), she learned of a job opening in the library. She met with the library director at the time, Erwin Surrency (who was president of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) from 1973-1974), who decided to give her a shot. Watson and soon-to-be fellow law librarian Sally AsKew began commuting to Clark Atlanta University (where she was fortunate to be mentored by Yvonne Chandler and to have Yolanda Jones as a classmate) to work toward a master’s in library science so they could officially become law librarians. “I find it so humorous that after all that time, I actually did have to learn about computers, and grew to love them,” said Watson.

Watson received her MLIS from Clark Atlanta. “I’m what’s known as a ‘triple dawg,’ because I have my undergraduate, masters, and law degrees from UGA, and then I wound up working there for 33 years,” said Watson.

In 1987, Watson began her professional career at the university’s law library. Twenty-three years later, she was named its director. “Eventually, we (librarians) all were given specialties. And guess what? Surprise! My specialty was IT,” Watson recalls. Her title then shifted to director of information technology, supervising the law school’s IT team and providing legal reference services. Having risen through the ranks of IT, Watson reflects “I am absolutely the epitome of the accidental library technology specialist, hands down.”

Watson retired from the University of Georgia Alexander Campbell King Law Library as its director on January 1, 2021. In her position, she was responsible for the vision, leadership, and management of all aspects of the law library including strategic planning, budgeting, collection development, technology, and personnel.

Watson became an active AALL member in 1989 and is a member of the Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries (SEAALL). In addition, she is a member of the Georgia Bar Association and American Bar Association. Watson is the past chair of the AALL Continuing Professional Education Committee and the past chair of the AALL Annual Meeting Program Committee. In 2020, she was inducted into the AALL Hall of Fame, and she received the AALL Volunteer Service Award in 2016. Watson is also past president of SEAALL and the 2014...
Favorite quote?
“We don’t have to be here; we get to be here.” - Peloton

Best book you recently read?
I just finished Jonathan Franzen’s Crossroads, which was excellent. And I also just finished Anthony Doerr’s Cloud Cuckoo Land, and that one is really good. This is not a spoiler, but this book is particularly relevant for libraries.

Guilty pleasure?
I was going to say binging on streaming TV, like everybody else in the universe. Right now, I’m watching an old 2005 HBO series called Rome, about the life of Julius Caesar. It’s very historically accurate, but also full of lot of intrigue and drama. But truthfully, I have a serious addiction to jigsaw puzzles, and I’m not ashamed to admit it.

Favorite weekend activity?
Now that I’m retired, there is no weekend, but I am an avid gardener, I love my Peloton, and of course, I am really enjoying having the extra time to do more reading.

Song or musician that always lifts your spirits?
Well, anybody who knows me well knows that’s Bob Dylan. But I have recently discovered that I have a penchant for the Sirius XM Real Jazz Channel. That always puts me in a better mood, as well.

What’s your favorite vacation spot or dream destination?
My favorite spot is always the last place I visited, which was Glacier National Park, with Kris Niedringhaus from Georgia State. It was fantastic. My dream destination or dream vacation would be an expedition to Antarctica.

As the former director of your law school library, what changes did you make in response to the pandemic and how do you see law schools evolving in a post-pandemic environment?
I cannot take credit for any solo decisions. My institution pulled together as a team, and we turned our big ship around on a dime. We met spread out in the library the day they sent us home. We were each at individual tables in the library; some people were even on the balcony, while we did our response planning. We decided we were going to use Trello to keep track of all of our projects, and Slack to manage our communications and team building. Once we decided to use these two tools, we came up with a plan to convert as much of our programming as we could to online and remote. We had to change all our strategies of engagement because everything was going online. For example, we used to do stressbusters in the library, where we would have a masseuse come in and give law students massages during finals. Obviously, these types of face-to-face activities were out the window. So, we all jumped on the management train, came up with our projects, and the whole team did a miraculous job of shifting everything to a virtual space.

I think to take it to the next step, as you said, post-pandemic, we learned that there were some services that were best suited to online, and so, I do believe that post-pandemic, we will still be offering some services online. I think law schools are going to be slower than the rest of the world in adopting flexible work schedules. The university as a whole—academia—has trouble with that concept for staff, but I do see it making inroads in that area.

How are law librarians uniquely positioned to make a difference in their law schools?
Information is power, and everything legal comes back to having the right information and research. It’s not just law students who need to know how to do this research for their careers, but the law school administration needs information, as well, whether it be career services or alumni development. There are so many information needs in all departments of the law school. We are naturally intellectually curious and able to expand beyond just legal research. So, I think with our information skills, we are perfectly situated to take our institutions to the next level.

What is the best career advice you have received during your time as a law librarian?
My best career advice is to become proficient with our information skills, we are perfectly situated to take our institutions to the next level.

recipient of the Service to SEAALL Award. Additionally, she is past chair of the American Association of Law Schools (AALS) Section on Law Libraries and Legal Information, and, in 2022, received its Outstanding Service and Contributions to the Profession award.

Watson has authored many articles in Law Library Journal, AALL Spectrum, and other publications. She has made numerous presentations at the AALL Annual Meeting, SEAALL, and has led AALL Webinars.

Here, Watson shares lessons she has learned through the leadership positions she had held and offers her thoughts on what the future of legal education might look like.
technology. I think it made a huge difference in my career options.

**What professional development opportunities would you suggest to students and law librarians just starting out in their careers?**

I have two points. The first one is easy: volunteer, volunteer, volunteer. There are so many needs in our organizations that there’s bound to be a place for you, so, 100 percent, jump in there. Jump in at the deep end of the pool. Don’t be afraid.

The second thing I would remind people about is networking, which is obviously a key to professional development, but it’s a learned skill. There are all kinds of techniques that you can use. If you are timid, and a lot of people self-identify as introverts, you can learn to network and it’s not so painful.

**What role has AALL played in your career?**

Oh, it has been an amazing support system for me. I have had the opportunity to observe and learn from some great leaders, and what I really appreciated was all the different types of librarians and the different types of institutions I have had the chance to collaborate with, whether they were in a government library or law firm. They all brought something to the table, and they all had different techniques and ideas. So, AALL is such a lifeline for me, and such an inspiration—because of all the amazing people that make up the organization.

**What lessons have you learned from the leadership roles you’ve held in AALL?**

I’m not sure I always did it well, but learning to delegate and trust. I think another big takeaway is you have to plan for details, but you can’t cover everything. There are just some things—for example, the pandemic—that you cannot see coming. So, sometimes, you just need to roll with the punches and be flexible.

**What advice would you give to someone who recently took on a leadership role?**

Absolutely consult and work closely with the person who was in your role previously. Do not reinvent the wheel. You don’t have to do everything they did, but your predecessor has a lot of knowledge, so don’t ignore that. I think that is probably what was most helpful to me.

**How do you define success as a leader?**

I define success as a leader as someone who has a strong team. If their team is strong across the board, then I know they are a successful leader, or that I have been a successful leader. It’s key to develop others in your group and let the individual members of your group shine. You are there as a support system and an encouraging system, keeping all the plates spinning. But a strong team, I believe, signifies the leader is indeed a strong leader.

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

Law school made a lot of changes during the pandemic. We went to pass/fail grades; career services shifted to online employment interviews; we started offering many more resources for the mental health of our students; and then there was an even broader movement to rethink the bar exam. So, I think a lot of those changes are here to stay. I think there’s more accountability for the debt that students are incurring, so, law schools need to be more practical and engaging. We need to showcase what a student can get for their money.

I know one thing that we talked about a fair amount at my school was the need to diversify our revenue stream—and whether that might look like an undergraduate degree, or maybe an emphasis in legal studies as an undergraduate, or an emphasis on a graduate degree that combines legal studies, as well. I think we are going to see more and more law-adjacent degrees, where we in the law school will be supporting other types of students in addition to the traditional full-time JD student.

**You have served on several AALL committees and were chair of SEAALL. From your experience, what traits make up a strong leader?**

Regular, clear communication. And staying well organized with a game plan that everybody knows about. It sounds easy, but it’s a lot harder to do in reality.

**What is your favorite thing about the AALL Annual Meeting?**

I miss the people so much. We are such a smart, engaged group of people. I love reconnecting with old friends. I cannot overemphasize enough the value of the human element that you gain by attending the Annual Meeting.