Like many law librarians who have come before her, Ariel Scotese’s journey into librarianship was anything but average. Not finding the community she was hoping for through the practice of law, she took a recommendation from a reference librarian to consider law librarianship, and the rest, as they say, is history. Now working in her dream job, Scotese enjoys working with students and her colleagues, and she is always up for new challenges.
Ariel Scotese began practicing law shortly after graduating with her JD from IIT-Chicago Kent College of Law in 2012. She served as general counsel for a Class III short line railroad. She represented her client in various matters, including federal and state regulatory compliance, tax planning, civil litigation in the Northern District Court of Illinois and before the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. After struggling to find community and feeling burnt out by the practice of law, she started volunteering at the Evanston (Illinois) Public Library, where she found her passion for librarianship. She shortly began working at the library part-time as a circulation clerk in addition to her legal practice.

“While working at the library, I met a reference librarian who had also been an attorney and left the practice. She introduced me to law librarianship,” recalls Scotese. “She recommended that I contact Jamie Sommer at the Pritzker Legal Research Center at Northwestern University to learn about academic law librarianship. It never occurred to me to consider academic law librarianship as a career option.”

After a great conversation with Sommer, Scotese enrolled in the MLIS program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Information School.

After earning her MLIS in 2017, Scotese began her academic law librarianship career at Cornell University as the research services librarian and diversity fellow. This two-year fellowship was designed to introduce new librarians from underrepresented groups to academic law librarianship by providing experience and mentorship. Not long after beginning the fellowship, the access services librarian position at Cornell opened, which she was encouraged to take by her soon-to-be supervisor Amy Emerson and Femi Cadmus, the Edward Cornell law librarian and professor of the practice at Cornell University at the time. Despite being relatively new to the profession, Scotese took the plunge and became Cornell’s access services and outreach librarian. “I really have to thank Femi and Amy for having that faith in me that I could do that job because I was so new,” said Scotese. “I was in the diversity fellowship program for literally two months when they said, ‘We are so impressed with your work. Why don’t you try this?’ But they also knew about my background and that I wasn’t a brand-new professional.”

In this role, Scotese supervised a large department that provided many of Cornell’s public-facing services, including interlibrary loan operations, course reserves, and of course, the circulation desk. When Emerson departed Cornell to become the law library director at Villanova University, Scotese became the assistant director of the Cornell Legal Research Clinic and adjunct professor of law.

Scotese was named the 2017 Judith M. Wright Fellow at D’Angelo Law Library, which she completed prior to starting her job at Cornell. Scotese returned home to Chicago to take on her current role as the associate director for user services at the University of Chicago D’Angelo Law Library in 2020. “Returning to the University of Chicago felt like coming home,” Scotese recalled.

Scotese joined the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) in 2017, and has been active on several committees ever since. She is a member of the Chicago Association of Law Libraries and served as past president of the Association of Law Libraries of Upstate New York (ALLUNY). She served as vice chair and chair of the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL), is a current member of the Leadership Development Committee, and is a 2018 Leadership Academy fellow. She is also a member of the Illinois bar and New York bar.

Here, Scotese discusses the lasting effect the pandemic will have on the profession, the importance of attending the AALL Annual Meeting, and what she enjoys most about her job.

How has your law school adapted since returning to in-person learning? What challenges have you faced?

It was extremely challenging moving our library to a fully remote operation, but in some ways, it was even harder moving back to hybrid operations and then fully in-person. One significant change is that we adopted more tools to communicate virtually. One example is Microsoft Teams. We never used it before the pandemic. We were fortunate that the reference librarians started a pilot using a similar product, Slack, a few weeks before we had to shut down in March 2020. The timing of this project meant that we were in a good position to adapt to a completely remote operation. Now we heavily rely on Microsoft Teams to have shorter conversations without meeting in person or relying on email.

Another example is obviously video conferences. I didn’t have access to Zoom when I started at the university. Now, I have most of my research consultations over Zoom (or another video conferencing platform) because it is much easier to demonstrate how to do the research. Most of the meetings that I schedule have a

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**ARIEL SCOTESE**

- **ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR USER SERVICES**
- **UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**
- **D’ANGELO LAW LIBRARY**
- **CHICAGO, IL**

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“In my first year at Cornell, I attended CONELL, which was an excellent opportunity to network with my peers and learn about AALL and the profession.”

- ARIEL SCOTESE
Words to live by?
On my desk, I have a sticky note that says: “Dum spiro, spero,” which is Latin for “While I breathe, I hope.” My mom taught me that phrase a long time ago, and it stuck with me. Especially right now, it’s a great reminder that every day there is hope.

Best book you recently read?
I co-authored “Exemplary Writings for 2021: Five Titles” in the Green Bag Almanac and Reader. You should check out the article once it’s published to learn about the best books I have read recently.

Guilty pleasure?
Reality TV. The Amazing Race is my favorite television show because I love to travel, and I can live vicariously through the contestants.

Favorite way to unwind after a long day?
I have two small children—my daughter Wednesday, who is two, and my son Bernie, who turned one in March—so my favorite thing to do after a long day is play with them. We sing songs, read stories, make silly faces, and dance—they are a lot of fun.

Favorite movie?
I would have to say it’s between two movies: either Arsenic and Old Lace with Cary Grant, or Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid with Robert Redford and Paul Newman.

Song or musician that always lifts your spirits?
I love all kinds of music, but the song that always gives me a lift is “Solsbury Hill” by Peter Gabriel. Whenever I hear that song, I feel triumphant and ready to take on the world.

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What lasting effect do you think the pandemic will have on the legal profession?
I hope it will be flexibility. We have seen now that we can be very productive working from home. We have seen that with technology and infrastructure in place to provide adequate support, we can still effectively communicate and work together to get things done, regardless of who is on-site. In my department, this was surprising because many of the positions are traditionally tied to the space and the physical collection, but we learned during the pandemic that there were opportunities to be flexible in terms of where the work is done and how it is done.

With a more flexible approach to work, we can better promote wellness and a healthy work-life balance, which is a longstanding challenge in the legal profession. Ultimately, I hope that the entire legal profession takes this lesson of flexibility to heart.

What are you most proud of as a library leader?
During this pandemic, what I have been most proud of is just how much we have accomplished during this incredibly tough time. Every day, I am amazed by my team’s ability to provide a high level of service and be innovative, despite the hardship and fatigue caused by the pandemic. As a leader, one of my goals is to give the people in my department opportunities to shine, and to see that happen is elating.

How has participation in AALL impacted your career and/or leadership capabilities?
Profoundly. I served as vice president and president of ALLUNY and that was a wonderful learning experience. I had to learn how to work with a team to plan large events when I planned the ALLUNY annual meeting and the day-long spring institute. I also had to work with the executive board to think of new ways to engage with the membership. Ultimately, those roles required me to be forward-thinking and learn how to manage major projects. It was an excellent experience for developing some project management and leadership skills.

In my first year at Cornell, I attended CONELL, which was an excellent opportunity to network with my peers and learn about AALL and the profession. I also participated in AALL’s Leadership Academy in 2018, where I learned what leadership skills I need to work on and my strengths.

Has any AALL committee or special interest section had a significant impact on your leadership skills?
I was vice chair of CONELL the first year that the AALL Annual Meeting was remote and chair the second year. This experience profoundly affected my leadership skills because it required me to think creatively and collaboratively. During those two years, we could not fall back on how CONELL was run previously because the format was so different. The first year was particularly challenging because we had to change our approach in a very short window of time. I commend Sarah Jaramillo, who
was the chair of CONELL when I was vice chair, for the incredible job that she did. I learned a lot from working with her.

The committee approached this monumental task by carefully considering what we wanted to accomplish, given the limitations of the virtual format. What is the goal of CONELL, and what do we want to make sure participants get out of a virtual CONELL? It was hugely challenging, and we had to be creative and work closely as a committee to answer those questions. It was also an excellent opportunity to experiment, and I think some of the lessons we learned from that experience can be carried forward into future CONELL’s. Looking back, it was a great experience, and I am so happy I got to be a part of that moment.

**What is the value of attending the AALL Annual Meeting, especially as a newer law librarian?**

Even if you can’t attend CONELL, because it is an additional expense, just going to the Annual Meeting and learning about what your colleagues are doing and networking with new people will give you many ideas and new connections. I find it’s harder to network and connect during virtual meetings, in part because the temptation to check my email is always there, and it’s easy to get distracted. But physically attending an in-person meeting allows me to actively engage with people and presentations.

I really do think it’s helpful to hear from other people what they are doing and what’s going on. I would also recommend going and talking to the vendors—not just to get the swag! There’s an expectation that we are knowledgeable about these tools, and these tools don’t go away just because you don’t engage with the vendors. So, as much as you can, explore the exhibit hall, test out new products, talk to vendors, and learn about what’s going on and what’s new.

It’s costly to attend the Annual Meeting, so I would especially advise newer law librarians to apply for grants that cover at least part of the cost. Most organizations within AALL (including chapters) have grants to help defray the cost of attending the meeting.

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

Do not hesitate to talk to stakeholders about what’s going on in the library and what you are doing. I am terrible at this personally. For example, I co-authored “Exemplary Legal Writings for 2020: Five Titles,” in the 2021 *Green Bag Almanac and Reader* with Femi Cadmus last June. She recently posted about it on Twitter. She and I are currently working on the “Exemplary Writings for 2021” article for the 2022 *Green Bag Almanac and Reader*, which she mentioned in that Twitter post. It didn’t even occur to me to post any of that on social media, and I told very few people about the publication. This is an example of an opportunity to showcase my accomplishments that is relatively simple to do.

It is critical that you talk about the cool things you are working on and express your passions more openly. Nominate yourself for awards. Write the paper documenting your experience and submit it. Post on social media. Post your CV on the library website if possible. Tell your supervisor what you are doing. Any steps you take to talk about your accomplishments openly will go far.

**In your experience, what makes for a productive, happy staff?**

I think it’s two things: The first is recognizing that we are all human beings, which comes with a whole lot, right? We are all doing our best. If you go into management with that perspective of treating people like they are people and being as respectful and compassionate as possible, it will inspire your staff and speak volumes. A lack of respect and compassion creates a toxic work environment for everyone.

No one is perfect. I have made quite a few mistakes. However, I have found that if I tried to treat people with respect and meet them where they are, nine times out of ten, it works out OK.

The second thing, and this is something that Femi Cadmus told me a long time ago that stuck with me, is that when you are a leader, you are the thermometer of the room. That means that you are setting the tone for the work environment. It’s hard to be thoughtful about what state of mind you bring to work and how that can impact people around you. That said, it’s important to be mindful of that dynamic and to be as intentional and thoughtful as you can be.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

The people! I love working with students, working with faculty, and working with my colleagues here. My colleagues are so creative, and it’s a privilege to work with them. I love working together to develop exciting ideas and then watching those ideas come to life.

For example, one program that we started during the pandemic is our virtual escape rooms. And by we, I mean Scott Vanderlin, our student services librarian. The virtual escape rooms are amazing. We received positive responses from the students who participated in those virtual escape rooms, and the feedback we consistently get is that the escape rooms exposed them to a variety of resources that they didn’t know we had, so in that way, it has proved to be an excellent and fun learning tool. It’s fantastic to see this great idea come alive and go well.