Clarence Robertson II started his legal career as a temporary case clerk for a small firm in Dallas. It was supposed to be a two-week gig, but after being released from the position he received a phone call later that evening letting him know another position had opened that they thought would be a good fit for him. “It turned out the law librarian at the firm (Hughes & Luce, LLP) needed help, so they hired me as the library assistant,” said Robertson. “That’s how my career got started, and I have been in the library ever since.”
Roberson received his BA in Criminal Justice in 1995 and his MLS in 2011 from the University of North Texas. After serving as a library assistant for two years, his career took a detour when he became a junior paralegal for a group of attorneys who started their own firm. A year later he received a call from his previous firm that they needed help, and he went back to work for them as a library clerk. He stayed in this position from 1997-2001. Eventually he was offered a job at Jackson Walker as a library assistant in 2004. From there he worked his way up from library assistant to serials librarian, to electronic services manager, to his current role as library & conflicts manager.

During his early years at Jackson Walker, he met his mentor, Dr. Yvonne Chandler. “At the time, she was a professor at the University of North Texas,” recalls Robertson. “She knew my boss, Ann Jeter, and had come by to chat. We met and her question to me was, ‘When are you starting library school?’ We talked and she said, ‘I’m going to give you my number and we are going to talk through what it’s going to take for you to get where you need to be.’ I said it sounded like a plan.”

Dr. Chandler also inspired Robertson to get involved with the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) in 2006. Since becoming a member, Robertson has been active in the Private Law Librarians & Legal Information Professionals (PLLIP) Special Interest Section (SIS), serving as treasurer since 2021. He was also a member of the Dallas Association of Law Librarians, serving as secretary from 2012-2013.

Here, he discusses his experience serving on the board of an SIS, the positive changes he has seen related to DEI within the profession, and he offers advice to newer law librarians just starting out.

You are currently serving as PLLIP Treasurer. What is the value of getting involved in special interest sections, chapters, and caucuses? How has this position benefited you in your career?

Becoming treasurer was kind of a shock. I thought it would be cool to serve on a board and see how things work; get to know the inner workings of the SISs and the chapters and be able to work with one particular group and see how they manage something for an entire group of members. It’s important work because anything you do will affect...
everyone within that group. It’s an exciting role where we can give people a chance to grow their careers and expand their own skills.

I have enjoyed being treasurer. I like meeting people and being part of the conversations we have when we meet. I’m going to miss it once my time is up. I think everyone should have the opportunity to serve on a board because it gives you the inside perspective of being a part of a professional group where you can see where you actually fit in and what you have to give—what value you can offer.

How has your past work experience benefited you in your current position?
It’s been a stepping-stone each time, and each library manager has given me pearls of wisdom. My past managers have helped me get to this point in my career where I now oversee two different departments. One team may be frustrated about how work is going, and I am able to use the skills I have learned to help mediate any issues that arise.

But as with any job, there are challenges. My library team are rock stars to me because they help take care of the things that I really can’t handle when I’m working through other issues. They handle it for me, and I always want to give them my kudos every time I get a chance to talk about them.

Diversity and inclusion continue to be important topics in law librarianship. What positive changes have you seen within the profession and in your own firm toward diversity and inclusion?
Recently our firm has had this big push to do more for diversity and inclusion, and I have seen a lot more African Americans in law librarianship than I ever have before. When I first started out, I could probably count on one hand how many Black students were working toward this profession.

It’s great for minorities to see something outside of their box that they may not have even thought about. There are opportunities out there for minorities in terms of scholarships and grants, and we need to encourage these students to take advantage of them.

At my firm, we have had many luncheons where we have speakers come in and talk about diversity within the work environment, and how to be inclusive with your teams, with clients, and with people you meet.

Do you have any suggestions for how diversity and inclusion efforts could be improved in law librarianship?
If we were able to recruit at universities to talk about this profession, I think that would be a good place to start. Law schools go to career fairs and hold recruiting sessions, so law librarians should be able to do this as well and highlight the benefits of this profession. If we had an opportunity to create that environment for minorities or just in general, it could make a huge difference.

We need to put ourselves out there in the students’ environment and show them who we are and what the advantages are to becoming a law librarian. I had no knowledge of law librarianship until I was 28. If I had known this was a career option, I think that could have made a big difference when I was just starting out.

One of the goals of the 2022-2025 AALL strategic plan is Pipeline to the Profession. Do you have any suggestions or thoughts on how law librarians can continue to recruit the next generation of law librarians into the profession?
We must stay on top of social media because that’s where the next generation is; they are online and connected. We need to find ways to present and promote the profession through these avenues. We need to
be better at connecting with students in law schools, library schools, grad schools, and even high schools, especially when students show an interest in librarianship. We need to show these students the value of law librarianship and that this is a viable profession they can enter if they have an interest in the law or enjoy research.

Within the legal information profession, who do you admire most?
I have about two or three people that I admire and a couple of them have passed away, but their advice has stayed with me all these years.

The first was my professor, the late Dr. Yvonne Chandler. She’s the person who showed me the path toward librarianship and encouraged and challenged me. I can still hear her voice asking me, “What are you doing now?” She is the person that I admire the most.

The other person who gave me my first opportunity was Tom Austin, who passed away a while back. He also encouraged me and told me I should consider this profession. He was always able to guide me when I didn’t feel sure about whether I should take that step or this other step; he was always there.

The most recent one is my current supervisor, Greg Lambert. He’s just awesome because he supports ideas and offers suggestions to help grow them. For example, he will say “I like the idea, but have you thought about this?” He has been the best supporter for library professionals that I have ever been around.

How has membership in AALL helped shape your career?
It’s helped me a lot. I have been able connect with people that I never thought I would have had the chance to meet. Through my involvement in SIS’s, I have been able to learn more and challenge myself and work with different librarians from across the country. You don’t always have to have all the answers, and participating in AALL’s PLLIP-SIS has helped me develop skills that have aided me in my professional positions.

It’s also nice to know that I can reach out to any AALL member whenever I have a question or want to bounce an idea around and know they will help me find the answer. If something didn’t work at my firm, I can reach out to someone else and ask what they did and how they achieved success.

AALL is an organization that supports their people, and I appreciate that.

What is the value of attending the AALL Annual Meeting?
Being able to learn more skills (professional development) and find your way in this career. If you’re thinking about moving between library types or aspiring to take on a leadership position, the education programs at the Annual Meeting along with the networking can help direct your path. Even if you aren’t looking for a job change, the educational programming is spot on, and it’s great to catch up with the vendors and see what new products are coming to market. I always learn new skills every year when I attend.

How do you stay engaged and passionate about your work?
I like to help find the answer. For me, it’s easy. I want to satisfy the patron and make sure they come back. I enjoy the hunt for information.

What advice would you give to newer law librarians just entering the profession?
AALL will provide every opportunity to educate library professionals and it’s up to us to take advantage of each learning opportunity. If you can connect with someone when you’re starting out who can help guide you, that will help you grow in this profession. AALL’s Mentor Program is a great place to start for new librarians to get connected with a mentor who can offer career advice and act as a sounding board. This is also a fantastic way to start forming your network.

I had two or three people who were able to connect with me, and I had the opportunity to mentor someone else when they first started out. The value in making connections and allowing a more seasoned professional to guide you through those first couple years can be extremely important.

What can law librarians do to showcase their contributions and accomplishments?
Get involved, whether it’s with your chapters or attending the AALL Annual Meeting, or other professional development programs. Additionally, use social media to promote what you are attending or what you have accomplished. There is no shame in promoting yourself. Start by attending events or programs that have potential value for your library. For example, try and get a seat in IT meetings or marketing meetings so you can share your ideas and offer the libraries assistance on projects. Let other departments in your organization know what the library does; show them the value of your services.

What do you enjoy most about your job?
I enjoy being around people and finding information when it’s needed. I enjoy the feeling of accomplishment when I find an answer to a question or can help someone with their research.