Not unlike many of her peers, Liz Graham’s journey into law librarianship happened by accident. Graham began her collegiate journey at a community college, while working at a Blockbuster. “When I was transitioning to a four-year university, I was going to transfer to the Los Angeles Blockbuster while I attended the University of California, Los Angeles,” recalls Graham. “When I went to visit the campus and realized how far the Blockbuster was, I knew I could not work there, so I started looking for campus jobs.” As luck would have it, the library was hiring, so she took a job as a student worker in the business library. After a year in her student position, a full-time position opened at the law library. This decision put the library on her radar and opened up a career path in the profession for her.
“Law was always on my mind, I knew I wanted to go to law school,” said Graham. “I figured I could work at the law library while I finished my undergrad. I had no idea this would be the beginning of over two decades working in libraries.” Realizing law librarianship was another option she could pursue in the field, she decided to follow this career path while still attending law school.

Since earning her MLIS in 2011 from San Jose State University, Graham has worked at large research institutions in California, DC, and the Middle East. She has served as an access services librarian at UCLA and the Georgetown University School of Foreign Services in Qatar, as international and foreign reference and access librarian at Georgetown University Law Center, and as head of technical services at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law, which she joined in 2019. In 2022, she was promoted to executive director of the Thurgood Marshall Law Library. She is currently pursuing her JD part-time at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law while working full-time and is more than halfway through the program.

She first joined the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) in March 2012. She has served on several committees since joining, including the Annual Meeting Program Committee and the Appointments Committee, in addition to being appointed to the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Awareness Special Committee from 2020-2022. She served as president of the Law Library Association of Maryland (LLAM) from 2022-2023 and is also a member of several special interest sections (SIS), including the Academic Law Libraries SIS, Black Law Librarians SIS, Legal Innovation & Technology SIS, and Research Instruction & Patron Services SIS, to name a few. She became a Fellow of the AALL Leadership Academy in 2018 and was a recipient of the 2021 AALL Emerging Leader Award. In 2022, she won the AALL Community Engagement Award on behalf of LLAM (along with the Greater Philadelphia Law Library Association (GPLLA) and the Law Librarians Society of Washington, DC (LLSDC)) for her work launching and producing Project 20/20: From Transition to Transformation, a webinar series.

Here, Graham shares lessons learned, the benefits of the AALL Leadership Academy, and offers advice to those just starting out.

What inspired you to pursue a career in higher education?

For as long as I can remember, I had customer service jobs. It started when I was super young. My parents owned a gifts and collectibles shop, and I worked there as a kid before moving on to Blockbuster. These were both heavy-duty retail customer service positions, where I learned to develop and enjoy frontline service skills in fast-paced environments. Higher education provided me with a different clientele—students and faculty. Working in access services was also frontline, which was second nature to me by that time.

What lessons have you learned through the leadership roles you have held?

The most important lesson, which takes years of leadership to really understand and appreciate, is the value of having a team, colleagues, and employees who are different from you. People who think differently than you. In my younger years, I wanted to work with people who thought the same way I did or understood processes in the same way. But what has become increasingly clear to me, especially now that I am responsible for helping to build and manage entire teams, is the importance of diversity of perspective, thought, and skill. I am fortunate to be a part of a leadership team that values and actively promotes this approach to team building and coaching.

Have you noticed any educational trends in recent years?

In recent years, we have been hearing a lot about the pipeline to the profession from a hiring perspective with more positions now open than ever before. We just filled our last vacancy in January but are anticipating a retirement at the end of the semester. These transitions are natural, but the volume we are seeing in job postings right now is unprecedented, which makes for an exceptionally competitive market. One aspect of the pipeline that I think risks getting lost in the shuffle is how we nurture and cultivate talent that already exists in our libraries. Our allied professional colleagues and peers have been working with us elbow to elbow. I was one of them until I got my MLIS at San Jose! Unfortunately, what I have been seeing is that White presenting allied professionals are disproportionately the ones securing advanced degrees and the promotions that usually follow. We cannot afford to leave talented people behind. I
do not mean to suggest that everyone wants the same thing or that everyone should get a library science degree. What I am suggesting is that we should be doing more to encourage, support, and champion the talent within our ranks so that systemic issues are not creating artificial barriers that undermine growth for individuals, libraries, and the profession as a whole.

**How do you anticipate legal education will change in the next few years?**
The NextGen bar is obviously huge. We are excited about reassessing our legal research instruction in light of the upcoming changes under new leadership. The SCOTUS affirmative action decision is another area where we will continue to deal with ramifications. Progress is fragile. How do we ensure we do not go back 15 steps when it comes to diversity? How do we follow the ruling while still practicing our values? I think our institutional strategies are necessarily evolving to address these pain points.

**As a AALL Leadership Academy fellow, how did participation benefit you in your career?**
For me, that was almost five years ago. The people I met and the connections I made were the biggest resource. And two of those people now work with me at my current institution (shoutout to Zanada Joyner and Shira Megerman!). Beyond attending the Leadership Academy, AALL provides so many resources for professionals to grow in their careers. One of the greatest benefits is gaining access to all its members.

**What professional development opportunities would you encourage newer law librarians take advantage of?**
Take part in your local chapters. They provide an opportunity for you to get to know your local law librarian colleagues. That was my inspiration for joining LLAM. But the resources available at the chapter level are also important—like funding. Every year, most chapters do not end up giving out all their grants or scholarships, so take advantage of these opportunities by becoming a chapter member!

**You served as the Law Library Association of Maryland Vice President and President from 2020-2022. What made you decide to serve in a leadership position?**
When I first joined LLAM, I ended up playing a significant role in helping to organize the Legal Research Institute hosted at the University of Maryland. It was a phenomenal experience that allowed me to leverage networking, relationship building, and problem solving. Likely due to this work, I was recruited to run for office. My primary motivation in agreeing to run was

---

**QUICK HITS WITH ELIZABETH GRAHAM**

**If you could meet anyone in the world today, who would you meet?**
My paternal grandfather. Unfortunately, he passed before I was born. He worked as a union leader from the 1950s through the 1970s.

**Best book you recently read?**
*Legends & Lattes*. It’s a fantasy book where an orc retires from being a warrior and opens a coffee shop. That is the spoiler-free version! I am excited to read the sequel, *Bookshops & Bonedust*.

**What period would you travel to if you were given a time machine?**
I would probably go a couple hundred years into the future to see how everything turned out.

**Favorite movie?**
*Jurassic Park*.

**If you could go anywhere in the world for vacation (all expenses paid), where would you go?**
I feel so privileged to have been able to travel during my time in Qatar. But if all expenses are being paid, I am heading to Antarctica.
the opportunity to get to know my colleagues. I obviously knew everybody who worked at my institution; however, there were many firm librarians and court librarians to whom I was never really exposed. During my time with LLAM, COVID hit, but it gave us an opportunity to really focus on online programming. In partnership with two other chapters, including GPLLA and LLSDC, we put together almost a year’s worth of programming for Project 20/20; each month we offered three tracks of programming: social networking to help us experiment with connecting virtually during a time when many of us felt isolated, professional development to help attendees learn strategies and skills to help their professional growth, and substantive programs that offered the opportunity to learn more about an unfamiliar area (e.g., drug law). Due to generous chapter funding and securing the AALL/Bloomberg Law Continuing Education Grant, we were able to bring in phenomenal New York Times bestselling authors for our keynote and closing program: Ijeoma Oluo and Ashley C. Ford.

As a current AMPC team member, what topics are affecting the legal industry today?
Having already finished going through all the programs, artificial intelligence (AI) is obviously a big one. We sometimes worry about how AI will impact legal instruction. What I was really happy to see were programs that looked at how we can leverage AI in a project management capacity. I appreciated that our profession seems eager to integrate and embrace developments in technology.

What advice would you give to law librarians in the first 10 years of their careers who are looking to move into a leadership role?
When we think of traditional leadership opportunities, we tend to think of traditional leadership journeys. In academic law libraries, there has historically been this idea that leadership only exists in title and the path is narrow. It looks something like starting out as a reference librarian, becoming head of reference, and then director. What I have observed in the past five years, which is also reflected in my own journey, is that leadership exists at every level and there is no singular path that everyone needs to take to reach their professional goals. Prioritize what you enjoy, whether it is project management and data curation or mentoring and outreach. There are a lot of different ways to flex your leadership skills and to further develop those skills. Plus, serving in a leadership role at the chapter or SIS level is a great way to build out your resume.

What do you enjoy most about your job?
In my current role, what I have enjoyed most is partnering with Kristina Alayan (Associate Dean for Library & Technology) to build what has become one of the most dynamic, talented, high performing teams that I have ever been on. It is one thing to imagine what that looks like and another to see it come together through deeply intentional, aspirational, and strategic work. What we have collectively accomplished as a team is astonishing and I am so proud to be a member of this library’s leadership and at an institution that values the work we do every day.

What’s the greatest risk you have ever taken?
I was working in the law library while completing my MLIS, and I found myself in a unique position. At the time, I was not sure what my next step was going to be. And then, an opportunity popped into my inbox: a position for an access services librarian in the Middle East. The position was a one-year contract. I had a great job in Los Angeles at a law library I loved. Do I pack up and leave everything I have known and travel 8,000 miles? After getting the job and moving to Qatar, a one-year contract turned into three years. The library where I worked during my time in Qatar was primarily associated with an undergrad institution that focused on foreign services, covering areas like international law, political science, and international economics. From this experience, I made amazing connections and met students from all over the world.