Peter Hook discovered law librarianship in the same way as many in the profession: by chance. Disenchanted with billing time in six-minute increments, he knew there had to be something better out there that would be more fulfilling. Having shelved books for three and half years as an undergraduate at the University of Kansas, and then working in the law library as a Lexis student associate, he had been exposed to mentors inside the world of librarianship. While working in Chicago, two hours from the University of Illinois’s renowned library science school, he seized a sudden opportunity due to staffing shortages. A graduate assistantship opened just a month before classes began, fortuitously launching his law librarianship career.

Hook received his JD from the University of Kansas and his MSLIS from the University of Illinois. He also holds a PhD from Indiana University Bloomington in Information Visualization. After practicing law for two years in Kansas City and Chicago, Hook became an academic law librarian—first at the University of Illinois (2000-2001), and then at Indiana University—Bloomington (2001-2004, 2006-2012). After spending three years teaching library and information science at Wayne State University, he returned to academic law librarianship as the head of digital and scholarly services at Cornell. In 2020, he became
director for faculty services, instruction, and outreach at the University of Notre Dame Law School before moving into his current role as director and associate dean of the law library at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

He has been a member of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) since September 1999, and been active on several committees, including serving as a member of the Law Library Journal Editorial Board (2021-2023), as a member of the Indexing of Periodical Literature Committee (2021-2023), and as a member of the Council of Chapter Presidents.

Here, he discusses how he navigates the challenges and opportunities in academic law librarianship—from managing teams and staying current with trends to promoting professional development and embracing technological advancements.

**What motivated you to pursue a career in academic law librarianship?**

Most prosaically, quality of life. But I would say, more expansively, the ability to be a generalist in the law and not get pigeonholed into certain areas. I enjoy being a teacher, both formally in the classroom and ad hoc at the reference desk. That’s been something I have enjoyed the most. I think the profession really rewards people who develop rich conceptual organizational schemas of how the parts come together and can convey those schemas effectively to others so they can become better researchers.

**How do you approach leading and managing a team of librarians and staff members in an academic setting? Do you have any remote/hybrid staff?**

I think it’s important to communicate as best and as often as possible, being transparent, and making yourself available to the greatest extent possible. I think it’s important to establish priorities and expectations from the outset and to communicate them to avoid underperformance or disappointment, as well as to prevent people from doing more work than necessary. It’s also important to admit when you are wrong. One way to validate others is to say, “Yes, you were right about that.” Acknowledging hard work is another part of validating others. I think it is important to address personnel and other problems early before they get bigger, which can be difficult as no one likes to have tough conversations. But avoiding those tough conversations creates bigger problems down the road, so it’s best to just bite the bullet and address things early.

**How do you stay informed about developments and trends in law and technology, and how do you ensure that your library and its staff stay up to date?**

I highly value SIS listservs as my go-to source for alerting me to new topics and issues. When I encounter something new to me there, I proactively explore it further. The AALL Annual Meeting and regional conferences are also invaluable for staying informed. I frequently utilize AALL eLearning opportunities and webinars, and I keep up with the latest trends by reading Law Library Journal and AALL Spectrum articles. Additionally, I subscribe to several SSRN topical eJournals beyond librarianship to monitor and understand the broader scope of legal academia, which is crucial for supporting faculty.

**How do you prioritize professional development opportunities for library staff members, and how do you support their growth and advancement?**

I negotiated a larger professional development budget for the library staff as part of my employment contract. Unfortunately, however, I did not specify that it should come from a source other than the collections budget. It’s crucial to emphasize that money spent on professional development is not just a perk for employees; it enhances the library’s functionality. When librarians make connections and grow in their roles, the organization benefits. A significant part of my value comes from having a network of colleagues to consult with for information or strategies in novel situations. I deeply appreciate the opportunities professional development has provided me, and it would be unwise not to extend those opportunities to my colleagues.
What has been your approach to recruiting and retaining a diverse team of library professionals?
To foster inclusion and celebrate diverse viewpoints, it is crucial to strive for gender and racial balance in hiring. Librarianship is generally a liberal profession, and while I share this perspective, I have also worked at conservative institutions. Supporting colleagues with differing views is important. We should do everything possible to encourage diversity in job applications and law library students to attract a broader cross-section into academic law librarianship. I commend libraries that offer academic and minority fellow positions and believe it’s vital to promote librarianship as a career option to students. When possible, consider hiring minority library RAs, which we did at one of my past institutions. Supporting the NextGen Caucus and their initiatives is also essential. (I learned this from Thomas Mills.) While I value the Master of Library and Information Science degree, we should be open to hiring individuals who can pursue this qualification while working.

How do you envision the role of technology evolving within the academic law library, and what innovative approaches should be explored to enhance services and resources?
AI is the latest example of technological change and disruption, which is now our constant reality. Law librarians must stay
relevant by leading the way in mastering new technologies and guiding faculty and students through these changes. Most innovations have precedents, offering analogs in past technologies that can be leveraged to explain and understand the new applications. In my “Analytics for Lawyers” class, I emphasize that once you have mastered one technology or data analytic approach, it’s easier to adapt to new ones. Starting somewhere is essential, whether through self-study, classes, or webinars. This requires time and energy, and it should be prioritized and supported by your administration. Library science students should also acquire as many technology skills as possible, as both tech services and public services are increasingly technology oriented. Embracing this trend is crucial for the future success of the profession.

**What professional development opportunities would you encourage newer law librarians to take advantage of?**

I would suggest they attend the Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL) at the AALL Annual Meeting, to learn about how to grow in their careers and what opportunities are available at the local, regional, and national level. You can learn a lot from reading *AALL Spectrum*, as well as *Law Library Journal* and publications like *Legal Services Quarterly*. I am also a huge proponent of the Boulder Conference. For those wanting to get their feet wet with scholarship in a very supporting and nurturing environment, this event provides great feedback and encouragement for newer librarians to start writing. Kudos to Barbara Bintliff and Susan Nevelow Mart for establishing this very important writers’ workshop. There are also some great mentoring and writing accountability opportunities in the Professional Engagement, Growth & Advancement SIS (PEGA-SIS), that provide additional support as you start your scholarly writing journey.

**What makes Law Library Journal a significant publication for the profession?**

I would say it’s the gold standard for the best scholarship in our profession. I think it attracts the best authors and the best readers. I think it is expertly edited and peer reviewed and has the widest distribution. If you want to have a robust profession, you need a robust literature. Historically, the focus for literature about and for our profession has been *LLJ*.

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

Teaching, mentoring, and helping people find that crucial piece of information to solve their problems or connect the dots in new ways are incredibly rewarding aspects of my job. Producing scholarship, deriving new insights, and making unprecedented connections are also fulfilling. On the flip side, what I least enjoy—and what has surprised me most as a new director—are the number of unexpected issues that arise and demand significant chunks of my time. These interruptions can derail plans and make it challenging to leave work at a reasonable hour. It’s important to plan for the unexpected and accept that unforeseen priorities can emerge at any moment, requiring immediate attention.

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