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Library Director as Opportunity Identifier

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Academic Law Library Director Perspectives: Case Studies and Insights

Edited by
Michelle M. Wu

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Summary: The book serves as a supplemental guide to educating new law
library directors. Practical in nature, it focuses on the pieces of directors' jobs
that are not explicit in any written description of the job. Most chapters focus
on one of the director's roles (e.g., mentor, mediator, fundraiser, opportunity
seeker, politician, or committee member). Each starts with a case study to
provide a realistic context in which to examine the subject, followed by
analysis and commentary by successful, sitting directors. When possible,
more than one commenter on a fact pattern was provided, to allow for a
diversity of opinions and to highlight idea-generation over any specific
solution. Other chapters cover basic issues such privacy, finances, data, and
when (and how) to say no.--Publisher.

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Library Director as Opportunity Identifier

Analysis Two

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Introduction

A successful contemporary law library director should seek opportunities to insert the law library, wherever possible, into projects that benefit the law school and its mission and that draw on the talents and expertise of the law librarians. The goal of the modern law library director should be to make the law library an integral part of each and every undertaking within the law school community. Every facet of the law school and its various departments and offices can benefit from either law library research and instructional services or the creative thinking and analytical orientation that librarians bring to the table. Even projects, initiatives, or programs that on their face seem to have no relationship to libraries should be considered fair game for library input and collaboration. It is this kind of integration into the law school community that will make law libraries indispensable and help to ensure our continued relevance.

Facilitating this kind of law library integration into every facet of the enterprise of legal education involves much more than merely responding to requests for assistance. It means being proactive in seeking out opportunities for library involvement. It means paying attention to cues and subtle inferences from colleagues that signal a desire for help or an unmet need. It means thinking about law school-wide work flows and how the law library can aid in streamlining them. It could also mean thinking about how to reimagine past project failures—library or other—and recreating them as successful law library undertakings.

Subject-Specific Intranet Pages Project

Gary's goal of creating subject-specific Intranet pages for faculty in specific areas is a perfect project for collaboration between the library and IT. Failing to explore the possibility of a library and IT collaboration around this project would be a missed opportunity. Gary's library staff has the expertise to gather the appropriate content, create bibliographies, and provide links to appropriate resources. Thinking on a grander scale, Gary's team might even build taxonomies that could help facilitate the automated population of pages as new content is posted. This is expertise that Will and his staff likely do not have. In fact, the faculty for whom these pages are to be created may not themselves know of the most important and up-to-date online

resources for their particular subject areas. Yet, the job of designing and constructing web pages is clearly one best completed by the web designers on Will's team. Will seemingly understands this, given his offer to have his web designers help out with this project. Yet, Gary politely declined Will's offer of help.

Gary's reason for declining Will's offer of help is an interesting one. Gary feared that were the web designers enlisted to work on this project, the project might get taken over by IT. There may some history of these types of take-overs having happened between departments. Even so, declining the offer of help seems less than strategic. There are several ways that Gary could enlist Will's help while retaining some control over the project. Gary could have expressed his interest in working with Will's web designers while also frankly expressing his concerns about the project being taken over. Then, the two of them could have openly and honestly discussed the issues with an eye toward establishing some parameters, guidelines, or boundaries outlining what parts of the project are to be controlled by whom. Gary might also have suggested that the research librarians sit down with the web designers to see if those actually charged with the work might reach consensus on control issues. If the two of them were then unable to agree on these parameters, Will could then politely decline the help.

An alternative and perhaps more subtle approach would be for Gary to withhold his concerns about a project takeover and to express his interest in discussing how he might collaborate on the project with Will's team. During this discussion they could carefully assign responsibilities without directly expressing concerns at the front end. Gary could then pull back on moving forward if, and only if, troubling issues came up during the assignment of responsibilities. This approach avoids the possibility of putting Will on the defensive unnecessarily. Deciding which approach will ultimately be most advantageous depends on several factors including the quality of Gary's relationship with Will (are they friendly and collegial or not), their history of successful or unsuccessful collaborations, and even Gary's personality type and communication style. Nevertheless, rather than harboring undisclosed fears or concerns, my approach would be to lay all of my cards on the table and have an up-front and candid conversation about my fears of a possible project takeover.

Gary should think carefully about why controlling the project is so important to him. Is it merely an ego thing? My view is that control over the project should not be of concern to Gary. The issue of control seems somehow less important than getting the project done and forging collaborations. This is a project that Gary wants to have completed. Presumably, he believes it will provide a service to both faculty and students alike. Given Will's offer and seeming interest, the opportunity to have the work done and the quick provision of these services seems more important than issues of control. As long as the librarians have the final say over content, overarching control would be of little concern. Is Gary's fear that the library would not get the proper recognition for the project? Whether the project is considered a library project or an IT project, Gary could surely find creative ways to recognize the librarians' contributions to the project and to bring them to the dean's attention at appropriate junctures.

Being partially responsible for completing a project that serves a faculty need is better than not completing the project at all. If Gary declines IT help, the project might get completed without the web designers. However, it could take double the time and double the amount of library resources. Gary should think carefully about whether this is the best way to serve the law school and the interests of the law library.

I would definitely have worked to forge this proposed collaboration between the library and IT. Such collaborations are a great use of law school resources, serving a faculty need, and demonstrating the library's ability to work with other departments on projects not traditionally undertaken by the library. This collaboration could serve as a model that might cause other law school departments to consider using the library and IT for similar projects.

Library Computer Lab Redesign

One opportunity Gary failed to explore during his meeting with Will was the possibility of collaborating with IT on the library computer lab redesign. Will mentioned that one of his upcoming projects was to upgrade the moot court room's technology. The fact that IT is working on a technology upgrade in a room used for educational purposes seems serendipitous. The technology upgrades being implemented in the IT moot court project might closely match the goals and technology needs of the library computer lab redesign.

Even if the goals and technologies in question are not similar, IT is executing a technology upgrade project involving a discrete law school space which is one of Gary's goals for the library. I would have queried Will about the details of the moot court room project to see if the technology upgrade seemed relevant to the goals of the computer lab redesign. Will and his team will likely have done research on the latest courtroom presentation technologies, they may have spoken with technology and furniture vendors, and they might even have literature from vendors or other information to share. Will's team will almost certainly have more expertise on existing building technology infrastructure, hardware needs, and other more technical issues.

Just talking with Will's team about current teaching methods and the library computer lab's perceived technology needs is likely to be helpful for the library. Gary should at least have described the library computer lab project to Will and asked if he and his team would be interested in consulting with the library in an advisory capacity. There may even be an opportunity to make joint purchases, get quantity discounts, and save the law school money in the long run. I would not have let this opportunity slip by.

New Courseware System Beta Testing

Beta testing the new courseware system that IT is prepping presents another opportunity for collaboration between the library and IT. The librarians that Gary directs likely teach their own courses, and they may also teach instructional sessions in other

law school courses. Given their ongoing teaching role, the librarians are undoubtedly familiar with the courseware system or systems used by law school faculty. They are likely to understand the functionalities important to faculty, and they may even know of new features that faculty are hoping for in the new system. Beta testing the new courseware system seems a perfect fit for the librarians, and Gary should speak up and pose this as a possibility.

Committing library staff to a project before consulting with them first can be problematic. The library staff's time and energy are finite, and Gary must be careful not to overcommit. Although others may disagree, I am a big proponent of erring on the side of overcommitting. I think the library should be involved in as many projects outside the library as possible. I believe it is the law library director's role to ensure that the library is involved in every facet of the law school and its programs and initiatives. It is through these involvements that the library can demonstrate its value in the overall mission of the law school. For these reasons, Gary should suggest that the librarians might be willing to help with beta testing the new courseware system. Gary should say to Will that he needs to meet with the librarians to discuss their current projects, deadlines, and priorities to see if the beta testing work is feasible for them. In this way Gary can pose the library as a possible source of help without making any definite commitments.

Once he has suggested the librarians as a possible source of beta testing person power, Gary should meet with the librarians as soon as possible to discuss this proposal. I would even suggest putting this item on the agenda for the next librarians' meeting, and visiting influential librarians individually prior to the meeting to bounce this idea off of them. These individual meetings serve a couple of purposes. First, they allow key librarians to think the issues through prior to the meeting, and they ensure that the librarians understand Gary's perspective. They also allow Gary to hear any concerns or reasons for resistance prior to the meeting so that he can consider them thoughtfully and carefully. These one-on-one informal discussions can often allow the library director to talk through concerns in an informal setting where people feel safe and where frank discussion is likely to be more forthcoming.

While this beta testing project may be important to Gary, he should remain cognizant that the librarians may feel quite differently about it. Gary should be ready to hear any concerns raised by the librarians, and he should be clear about his reasons for wanting them to participate in the project. He should keep an open mind, and honestly consider the librarians' points of view. Gary should approach the meeting with the idea that there may need to be some shifting of priorities or rearranging of workloads in order to make the beta testing feasible for the librarians. Finally, Gary should keep in mind that he may have to realize that this project just is not feasible for the librarians to take on. If that is the case, he should get back to Will as soon as possible to decline the project and inform Will of his reasoning.

Center for Health and the Environment Database

There may be an opportunity for collaboration around the creation of a database for the newly created Center for Health and the Environment. Library staff have likely

been involved in providing research support for the faculty involved with the Center, and if not, they have perhaps been involved in providing research support for other faculty working in the areas of health law or environmental law. If the database is to house existing research, or materials that need to be gathered through research, it makes sense that the library be involved in both the building of the database and the research necessary to populate it. Relatedly, if the database is to contain lists of or links to research resources the librarians are also the right people to gather those resources. At the very least, Gary should query Will about whether there is to be research involved in collecting materials for this database. If Will is unsure, Gary should offer to have a librarian consult with the faculty in question to offer research support if needed. Once again, there may be an issue of committing library staff time without first consulting with the library staff, but no firm commitments need to be made at this time. Gary can frame the conversation as an inquiry into possible library support without making hard and fast promises.

Strategic Planning

Whether at the meeting of all of the dean's direct reports, or later in a one-on-one meeting with the dean, Gary should volunteer to serve on the strategic planning committee. The strategic planning process is vitally important in establishing goals and objectives for the law school and for fleshing out programs and initiatives to carry out any identified goals and objectives. Being a part of the strategic planning process is an opportunity to help shape the future direction of the entire law school. Moreover, it is an opportunity to identify, early on, ways that the library can play key roles in each and every program and initiative undertaken in the strategic plan. Having the law library director on the strategic planning committee is great way to ensure that the library stay relevant by beginning to design services that will enhance the programs identified in the strategic plan. At the very least, having Gary on the strategic planning committee will give the library insight into the direction the law school is likely to move in which can help the library to set priorities that match up with the priorities of the larger law school community.

I recently served on the Strategic Planning Committee at the University of San Francisco School of Law, and I immediately felt the benefits listed above. One additional benefit was my ability to demonstrate to doubting faculty that a law librarian can offer valuable insights and a unique perspective on the future of the law school and of legal education. I was able to showcase my insights and opinions which are based on years of working at several different law schools. Serving on this committee definitely helped me to build trust, earn respect, and garner influence on the law school faculty.

Serving on the Strategic Planning Committee can certainly have its downsides too. Serving on the Strategic Planning Committee was a major commitment of time and energy for me. Numerous lengthy meetings, interviewing other faculty and staff, and preparing multiple drafts of the plan took far more time than I'd ever anticipated. This left me with far less time to supervise library staff, write, prepare teaching materials, and work on other library-related projects. These other aspects of my job

definitely suffered from some neglect. Any law library director taking on such a commitment should therefore be prepared.

One way that I helped to prepare my staff for the strategic planning experience was to simply speak with them openly and frankly about it. I had a conversation with my librarians at one of our meetings about why I thought serving on the Strategic Planning Committee was good for the library, and about what a major time commitment it might be. During the strategic planning process, I again spoke with the librarians acknowledging that I was spending less time in the library and working on library-related issues. I asked them how they were being impacted and how they felt about these issues. These conversations allowed them to voice any problems or concerns that may have arisen as a result of my absence from the library. It also allowed me to learn from them that they respected and admired my involvement on the committee. It allowed them to reassure me that they understood the importance of this work and supported my devoting so much time away from the library.

Relatedly, I used these conversations with library staff as a way to involve them in the strategic planning process. The law school strategic planning committee met weekly as did the law librarians. So each week I would update that law librarians on the strategic planning process, alert them to novel issues or initiatives being discussed, and get their feedback. Involving the librarians in discussions made them feel more a part of the process, and it gave them a chance to, through me, gain a seat at the strategic planning table.

Distance Education for some LL.M. Courses

Librarians have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of designing and implementing distance education programming. This is perhaps less true in the law school context as evinced by the relatively small number of completely online, librarian-taught, Advanced Legal Research or Specialized Legal Research courses offered in law schools across the country.¹ Nevertheless, building on this expertise, there are numerous ways in which the law library can contribute to making the LL.M. distance education curriculum unique and successful. Gary should offer the library's assistance with this project by suggesting that a librarian be appointed to the committee.

Once again, this is a situation where Gary is faced with the choice of whether or not to make a commitment of staff time prior to speaking with the library staff. Again, my choice would be to make the offer, then speak with the librarian or librarians in question later. This circumstance—helping to build a distance education program for LL.M.s—presents opportunities that are so uniquely suited for the talents of a librarian, and that fit so squarely into the mission of the law library, that they just cannot be passed up.

If Dean Diane is unclear about how a librarian could be helpful on this committee, Gary should be ready to detail the possible contributions that a librarian would

¹ My informal polling of law library directors across the country reveals that as of August 1, 2014 only about 20 of the more than 200 ABA-accredited law schools offer entirely online librarian-taught research courses.

make. First, just doing the research necessary to thoroughly explore existing distance education or online LL.M. programs around the country could take significant time and effort. This work seems uniquely suited to the talents of a research librarian. Second, Gary should explain that the librarians are themselves involved in doing innovative, outcomes-based, experiential teaching in their research courses. They are familiar with and skilled at outcomes-based course design, and they regularly devise research-related, hands-on exercises that offer students real world research experience. Some of the librarians may have designed online course modules, and others may have taken distance education courses as part of their own law or library science degree programs. Moreover, the librarians are certainly familiar with the courseware system used by most of the law school faculty, and they therefore know what works well with this courseware and what does not. Relatedly, many online courses encounter copyright issues relating to reading materials, born-digital content importation, or license agreements. The law library is the natural arbiter of fair use in these situations, especially if law library resources are to be used. All of these factors make the librarians particularly equipped to help assess distance programs and to make realistic recommendations about how to proceed in designing new online programming.

Finally, Gary should discuss with Diane the possibility of the librarians identifying opportunities to add a legal research component to any and all courses taught in the proposed distance education program. This could take the form of a stand-alone, librarian taught, specialized legal research course delivered online, or it could be something less. Librarians could design a research module to fit in as part of a larger subject-specific distance education course, or they could merely design a subject-specific research exercise for use by faculty in their unique online courses. After discussing all of the various possibilities, Diane should see the wisdom of including a librarian on the committee. However, if Diane disagrees, Gary should open a conversation about having a librarian appointed to the committee *ex officio*. This would facilitate library input but also assuage any fears the dean may have about having a librarian as a voting member of the committee.

Admitted Students' Open House

Gary should suggest that the library staff play a role in the upcoming admitted students' open house event. Here, Gary need not necessarily overcommit right away, but he should note, at the very least, that there will be library staff on duty during the open house event, and that they would certainly be willing to welcome students and offer directional assistance within the library to those in need of it. Since the open house event is scheduled in the evening at dinner time, Gary should check with his associate director or with other librarians if necessary, to find out if any of them are willing to be the official representative of the library at this event in his absence. Having someone from the library at this event is important for a couple of reasons. First, having librarians present at the open house will give the students a sense that the library plays a key role and contributes greatly to the sense of community that the dean considers important. Relatedly, a librarian can discuss with the newly admitted

students the importance of legal research in the practice of law, the role that legal research will play during their first year of law school, and the opportunities for legal research education that they will be offered throughout law school. Perhaps more important is the opportunity to highlight to incoming students the technological advances and tech tools available in the library so that students begin to understand that the library is so much more than just print collections. When querying the librarians about their availability, Gary should emphasize these issues to demonstrate the importance of librarians attending these types of events. Ultimately, however, although it would be nice to have a librarian attend the open house, it does not seem absolutely crucial. Therefore I would not go as far as requiring a librarian to attend this event.

Another possible opportunity that this event presents is to have the library staff members give short informational library tours as part of the open house. While this undertaking requires some advanced planning and adequate staffing, it is a wonderful way to highlight the library's role in legal education, to mention some of the services available to new students, and to show off what is often the most impressive space in the law school. Because this would require adequate staffing and a bit of planning, Gary should tell the dean that he will see if he can organize this undertaking and report back on whether or not it is feasible. If not, Gary should make a point of ensuring that library tours are part of future open house events.

Appointments Committee Research

Though the research required by the appointments committee would need to be turned around quickly, this is yet another example of a project that seems a natural fit for a research librarian. Even though my instinct is to offer library help first and ask the librarians later, this is one where I would advise Gary to dash back to the library and query certain librarians before mentioning the possibility of library help to Pam. Pam clearly needs this work done quickly, and if all of the librarians are maxed out and unable to take anything on right away, there is no need to even make the offer. However, Gary may have a go-to librarian that always seems to be able to make time for more and who genuinely seems to enjoy new projects and new interactions with faculty. If so, Gary should see if this librarian (or any of the librarians) can shift priorities and make room for this short-term project of gathering candidates' scholarship. In addition to gathering the scholarship, the library could be particularly helpful in assessing the scholarship by enlisting various citation analysis tools like Publish or Perish or showing Pam how to use them herself.

Some may ask why this project is important at all since the work is not particularly challenging or of a scholarly nature. I do, however, consider this type of opportunity important. Mining opportunities for the library to do work supporting law school committees is just one more way to demonstrate the talent and indispensability of the librarians. It is one more way to insert the library into every facet of what the law school does. This type of work helps to market the library and its services to key faculty. Some of the members of the appointments committee may not avail themselves of library services. This experience of getting committee

support from the library could turn them on to using the library for their own scholarly research support. In my opinion, any chances for the library to serve faculty pursuits, no matter how small, are worth pursuing.

Lower Level Library Space

Although the idea of a mini-retro-dance party on the lower-level of the library is appealing to me personally, I can understand why library staff and others might consider this activity to be inappropriate. Given the fact that the only things currently housed on the lower floor are journals and microforms, Gary should carefully consider how this space might be repurposed to better serve the needs of the both law library and the larger law school community.

For most law libraries, the days of ever-expanding print collections are gone, and space formerly used to house print collections are rightfully being repurposed to serve ever-changing contemporary student needs and larger law school space issues. Gary and the librarians should take a look at the microform collection to see if those materials are available in the library's electronic holdings. If so, these microforms can be stored remotely or discarded. Also, Gary should see if the usage of the remaining microform titles (those not duplicated in electronic collections) justifies keeping them readily available. Remote storage, with guaranteed 24- or 48-hour retrieval might be adequate for these materials as well. As for the journals, since journals are rarely if ever used in print anymore, those collections can also be either discarded or stored remotely.

Gary and his librarians should then frankly discuss the library's priorities for this space and juxtapose them with the priorities of the law school facilities committee. There may be some shared priorities or at least opportunities for both the library and the law school to benefit from repurposing this space. The facilities committee has identified the need for additional seminar rooms and at least one high-tech collaborative workspace. These seem like excellent uses of the library lower-floor space that would benefit the entire law school and drive more law student traffic into the library. Gary and the librarians might want additional library study rooms to be part of any repurposing of space. After talking through with the librarians any possible issues these alternative uses might present, Gary should propose the lower-level library space as a possible location that might meet the growing law school needs identified by the facilities committee. In talks with the facilities committee, Gary should continually push for the installation of additional study rooms to be part of any renovation plans. These new study rooms could be equipped with collaborative technology which would serve both the law school and the law library's perceived needs. It is likely that a renovation of the library's lower-level would meet everyone's needs and establish the law library as the most student-centered and technologically advanced space on the campus.

RA Training

At the faculty workshop, when Gary overheard the story of a recently fired RA who didn't know how to do research, it should have sparked an idea for a service that the library could provide. Again, the goal here is to insert the law library into every facet of law school operations, so although he wasn't specifically addressed, he should always have his law library thinking cap on. Gary need not make the offer right away, since he wasn't part of the conversation about the dismissed RA, but he should discuss the RA training issue with the librarians at their next meeting. Gary should work with the librarians to systematize the regular library training of RAs hired by faculty. This could be done in several ways. The library could offer regularly scheduled group trainings for interested RAs each semester. Faculty could then be encouraged to send their RAs to this once-a-semester training. Another approach would be to get the word out to faculty, in various ways, that whenever they assign any new project to an RA, the RAs' first undertaking should be to make an appointment with a research librarian. This librarian can then help the RA develop a research plan, identify useful databases and other print resources, and do on-the-spot training in Boolean searching and other relevant search techniques. Getting this message out to faculty could happen via a targeted email campaign, via one-on-one conversations between Gary, the librarians and faculty, and in any other ways devised by the librarians. The faculty will be grateful that their RAs are producing better research results, and the RAs will feel more competent and productive.

Alternatively, the firing of the RA mentioned at the faculty workshop brings to mind a marketing opportunity for the library's faculty research services. Gary should relay the story about the fired RA to the librarians, and brainstorm with them how to use that incident to market the library's research services. Perhaps an email campaign that delivers the message that law school faculty members need not deal with pesky RAs, they can send their research directly to a highly trained and often dual-degreed research librarian. This type of message to the faculty could be delivered in other ways as well. The point is to ensure that the faculty members know that there are skilled librarians available to both serve their research needs and serve the training needs of their RAs.

Presentation Software

During the faculty workshop, the conversation Gary overheard regarding questions on presentation software like Prezi and Haiku Deck should alert Gary to another possible opportunity for the library to provide a needed service. Several people on the faculty are curious about presentation software options. Gary should alert the librarians to this need, and see if they have the interest or the expertise to offer a workshop for faculty on various popular presentation software options. At the very least, if the library has the talent and the interest, the librarians could poll the faculty to see if there would be interest in such a workshop. The idea of a workshop on presentation software admittedly seems somewhat unexciting. So, the email inviting faculty to attend should contain a short presentation in Haiku Deck which would

pique faculty interest and demonstrate some of the possibilities available using these new software options. If there doesn't seem to be sufficient interest, the librarians might consider providing one-on-one training to the few interested faculty.

This faculty workshop could be the beginning of a larger series on teaching with technology. It could open the door for the librarians to embark on a series designed to show faculty how to use technology to aid them in achieving particular learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The successful and forward thinking library director should at all times be on the hunt for ways to serve the law school. Such service may entail traditional library services like research or instruction, or less conventional services like online course development or law school strategic planning. Library service to the law school may also take the form of facilities and space planning or ceding space for larger law school strategic goals. Whether it involves services, space, or library personnel, the law library should be poised to contribute services to each and every facet of the law school and its various offices. The goal should be to make the law library an integral and indispensable part of the mission of educating lawyers.