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Seen it All, Heard it All, Done it All. Is it All Worth it?

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Seen it All, Heard it All, Done it All. Is it All Worth it?

By **Julie Lim**

Changes in technology, accreditation standards, and the economy have created opportunities to make a law library more valuable to its institution. Articles have been written about demonstrating the value of libraries and the integration or embedment of librarians into an academic legal environment. This article describes the unique experience of City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law in integrating the law library and its librarians into the law school program from the inception of the law school and the law library's evolution into its current role as an information facilitator and expediter.

Brief History of the CUNY School of Law and Legal Research in the Curriculum

Founded in 1983, CUNY School of Law is a publicly funded law school located in one of the outer boroughs of New York City. Because of its public funding, the mission of CUNY as a whole is to provide affordable higher education to New York state residents. The mission of the law school is tailored to educate law students for the practice of law

with special emphasis on public service and public interest law. The law school also promotes the goals of social justice through the legal representation of under-represented populations in New York City. Our law student body and faculty are among the most diverse in the country.

The law school's curriculum is committed to integrating theory and doctrinal knowledge with core lawyering skills, and it continues to evolve to reflect the best practices of the legal profession. It is an innovative program based on the theory of experiential learning, which prepares students for the profession through the use of simulations, experience in practice settings, and live-client clinics, which incorporate issues of professional responsibility and doctrine with legal theory and a practice perspective throughout the curriculum.

From the beginning, law librarians have participated both in the curricular program, including teaching a first-year required legal research course, and in the governance of the law school. By participating in the various aspects of the law school program, the law librarians have become part of a team in pursuing the law school's mission.

CUNY Law School's curriculum is designed to emphasize lawyering skills. The first-year lawyering program, for example, is designed to replicate a legal work environment and introduces the essential skills of a lawyer—legal analysis, legal writing, oral arguments, negotiations, and professional ethics. The legal research course is a separate, graded course required of all first-year students and is taught by the law librarians. When CUNY School of Law was established, the founding faculty recognized that the law librarians were the legal research experts and should therefore teach legal research to the first-year students. They also thought that legal research would be given greater emphasis as a separate course. The fundamentals of legal research are taught in the fall semester in the first year. Sections of approximately 20 students are assigned to law librarians teaching the two-credit course. Depending on the availability of the law librarians and the size of the entering class, law librarians teach up to three sections each.

Subsequently, based on experiments by some of the law librarians and first-year lawyering faculty, the practical aspect of legal research was also integrated into an "open universe" simulation in the first-year lawyering seminar course in the spring semester. Prior to the semester, the law librarians assist the lawyering seminar faculty in developing this major simulation. Insights about the class and the simulation are exchanged between the law librarian and the faculty member. Teaming with a first-year lawyering faculty member, the law librarian returns as a research consultant to the lawyering seminar that she or he taught in the fall semester. Since the law students have already worked with the law librarian during the previous semester, they recognize the law librarian as an expert on legal research. During the seminar, the law librarian can further hone the students' research skills. Additionally, since a faculty member is present during the research sessions, many of the faculty members continue to interject research principles in subsequent lawyering classes throughout the spring semester. As a result, a closer working relationship among all parties involved—law librarian, faculty member, and students—evolves.

To further the integration, the law librarians continue in their roles as research experts and teachers during the second and third years. They are engaged in the research components of the upper-class courses such as the second-year lawyering seminars, clinics, and concentrations—which are similar to clinics but combine classroom training and externship placements.

Law librarians have also assisted with doctrinal courses such as the administrative law course, where a faculty member requires students to comment on proposed regulations. This opportunity builds on the basic administrative law research taught in first-year legal research by allowing more in-depth administrative law research for students. I have been teaching the immigration law research component for the Immigration and Refugees Rights Clinic (IRRC) for several years. Recently, Douglas Cox, CUNY School of Law's international law librarian, who previously represented Guantanamo detainees, has joined me in teaching the research component since the IRRC has expanded to include national security. Another CUNY School of Law librarian, Yasmin Sokkar Harker, is teaching the health law research component for the Health Law Concentration and is also working with a librarian from another CUNY college using LibGuides. This project is a collaborative approach on a university level for a health law course at that college taught by a CUNY law faculty member.

Co-teaching by law librarians and faculty members is another approach used, resulting in more exposure of the law librarians in their areas of expertise and recognition that law librarians are part of the team in furthering the lawyering skills of students. Also, the students now view the law librarians as consultants whom they can ask for assistance—similar to a legal workplace environment.

Law Library Faculty Status and Governance

CUNY School of Law appoints law librarians with dual degrees (JD and MLS) to professorial ranks with faculty status. Although professorial titles are as “law library” faculty, salary ranges of law librarians are the same as law faculty. Equitable salary scales have not always been the case, but the school’s current salary range reflects the value that the law school places on the law librarians and their responsibilities.

With faculty status, the law librarians are extensively engaged in the governance of the law school. Each law librarian has voting rights as faculty. Every year, each faculty member, including the law library faculty, is assigned to faculty committees such as Admissions, Appointments, Reappointments, Tenure Review, Promotion, Curriculum, or Academic Standing. Such active engagement reinforces a strong working relationship between faculty and law librarians. For example, work on the Curriculum Committee allows us to understand the needs of certain courses where we can work with faculty to integrate legal research. The Reappointments and Appointments Committees allow the law librarians to understand and help support faculty scholarship.

Also, active engagement develops trust. For example, I have been elected five times by the faculty to serve on the Personnel and Budget Committee, which decides on the appointment, reappointment, tenure, and promotion of all faculty members at the CUNY School of Law.

In the past, some law librarians have treated the committee work as a burdensome chore and engaged minimally. Many now recognize it as an opportunity to engage actively with the governance of the law school to further our partnership with the rest of the community. The law library faculty has equal say, but it is up to the individual law librarian to exercise this privilege. Many of us actively collaborate with other faculty members on various committees in promoting the mission of the law school. We have shared goals.

The close working collaboration of the law librarians and law faculty in teaching and governance activities also allows the law librarians to exchange scholarship ideas with the law faculty. Because of the relationships, the law librarians have a better understanding of faculty scholarship and can provide the support needed by the faculty. It also allows opportunities for law librarians to collaborate on scholarship. At CUNY, many of the junior law librarians have participated in faculty scholarship workshops, which allow faculty to freely exchange ideas and provide feedback on works in progress. Such interactions lead to developing stronger relationships and trust. One result of working together is a chance to co-write scholarship. One law librarian is co-authoring with a law faculty member an article on the future impact of current national security law on individual rights.

Making it Work and Lessons Learned

When the law school was in the development stage in the early 1980s, the founding faculty and administrators wanted to design a law school where all constituents, from custodial workers to faculty members to students, were equal partners in developing an institution that valued the contributions of all its members. As equal partners, all would have shared goals for the institution. We wanted the law school to succeed, and we wanted our law graduates to be among the best public interest lawyers in the country. Over the years, external forces modified some aspects of the law school program, but our goal to produce the best public interest lawyers is still prevalent. And the ethos of equal partnership between the law librarians and law faculty still exists at CUNY. The concept of “embedded law librarians” has existed at CUNY School of Law since before it became common in the legal academy.

From the beginning, the advantage of integrating the law librarians into the law school was the teaching of legal research as a first-year course that was—and continues to be—both required and graded. From day one, law students recognized law librarians as experts in seeking legal information and in manipulating the legal tools to

track legal information. We continued to develop the relationship with students as they took upper-level courses that required legal research and, most importantly, when they did internships or summer legal work where legal research was essential.

Today, we continue to seek opportunities to be involved with the law school curriculum. For example, through the years, the law librarians have been involved with first-year orientation by presenting information on library services. To further increase our engagement in orientation, we participate in teaching a prelaw seminar the week before regular classes begin. The seminar exposes the first-year students to the required lawyering seminar course.

An important factor for our success is the understanding of the institutional structure and governance. Understanding the dynamics of an institution and how governance works at that institution allows law librarians to create a strong working relationship with the stakeholders. Even at institutions where the law librarians do not have faculty status, there are opportunities to participate in advancing the mission or goals of their institutions. For example, strategic planning is now expected at academic institutions. Law librarians can participate in identifying and providing information for such a committee. They can play a vital role in gathering data that helps an institution to develop and define a strategy for the future.

Around the country, not all librarians are comfortable with the concept of embedding or integrating within the law school program because it requires a more proactive attitude in working with faculty, administrators, and students. It demands a significant time commitment and requires law librarians to balance various responsibilities, including teaching, library services, scholarship, and institutional governance. The levels of involvement and commitment required are not for everyone. Some of our law librarians found the commitment challenging and eventually went on to different institutions that would better fit their professional needs. Other law librarians, however, find the extensive participation in the law school to be professionally rewarding.

Also, for the past several years, we have implemented a team approach in handling the various library-related and teaching responsibilities. Since the law library has a small professional staff, which includes seven dual-degree teaching library faculty members (JD/MLS) and three MLS professional librarians, the team approach works well for us. Depending on the responsibility, each team can consist of two to four librarians who handle major responsibilities ranging from collection development and budgeting to faculty scholarship support. All the teaching librarians work as a group to prepare shared teaching materials, but each has academic control over the handling of his or her classes. All librarians handle reference questions from library users. Because of the team approach, communication among the law librarians is essential, though it can be challenging during busy times. Initially, such a level of communication was difficult, but over time it has improved.

We now recruit law librarians, especially recent library graduates, who believe in the law school philosophy and the law library approach of integrating into the law school program. We also look for individuals who are inclined to be team players. We make sure they understand and accept the high expectations of the roles of the law librarians at CUNY Law Library. The high energy level and innovative attitude of our more recently hired law librarians further promote enthusiasm and invigorate the senior law librarians. We are constantly evolving to reflect the needs of the institution.

Embedding law librarians in the way that CUNY School of Law Library does may be challenging, but it is worthwhile to be part of an institution that produces excellent public interest lawyers. Recently, at their invitation, I have attended several inductions of judges who were my students about 20 years ago. I realize that all the energy we have committed to the process has been worthwhile; seeing these individuals evolve from law students to judges with a deep understanding of social justice is especially rewarding. By being involved with our students' legal education, the law librarians have played a critical role in their professional development. And ultimately, that is why we are proud to play a large role in the life of our school.

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