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# Collaborative Relationships between Law Librarians and Legal Writing Faculty

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### **Faculty**

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How would you characterize the professional relationship between law librarians and legal writing faculty in your law school? Fraught? Satisfying? Productive? Nonexistent? Given law schools' greater demands on these groups' time and talents and the ABA's calls to emphasize educational experiences that develop students' practical skills (e.g., research, analysis, and writing), law librarians and legal writing faculty should strive to develop a meaningful dialogue so that each group better understands what the other can provide in terms of expertise and the two groups can develop a mutually beneficial work dynamic.

We are fortunate to work in a law school with legal writing faculty colleagues who welcome collaboration. Most of the reference librarians are formally part of the faculty who teach full-semester sections of the required 1L legal writing curriculum. Because our law library director knows that she and three law librarians are each committed to teach a section of legal writing every fall, we hire law librarians with both practice and teaching experience. We meet

regularly with our legal writing faculty counterparts to discuss exercises, challenges with students, conference approaches, and other matters related to first-year legal writing instruction. For administrative purposes, we are adjuncts. For the good of our students, we are legal research and writing professionals. This article stems in part from our legal writing teaching experience in this context.

Legal research and writing programs are often composed of those who have been law librarians or legal writing professors for decades and those who are just beginning their academic careers (plus the gamut between). More experienced members of the professions literally wrote the books that shaped modern legal research and writing pedagogy. Those who have joined the fields more recently come with new perspectives and no institutional knowledge of workplace politics to color their perceptions. Though we represent different eras, diverse teaching approaches, and experiences in law schools that may or may not recognize our expertise and hard work—law librarians and legal writing faculty can work together to teach legal research, analysis, and writing in a way that improves student learning and is personally and professionally rewarding.

Modern law librarians are expected to do much more than staff the reference desk and respond to faculty requests; in particular, they are asked to fill a variety of roles in legal research and writing programs. There is a spectrum in divisions of labor and degrees of collaboration among law librarians and legal writing instructors—groups an outsider might assume would naturally need to

coordinate.<sup>1</sup> Depending on the law school, some law librarians teach term-long, standalone, 1L research courses; some teach a few weeks or a couple of class sessions within a legal writing class (with varying degrees of coordination with the legal writing professor); and some (admittedly outliers) teach their own section of legal writing. At times law librarians are guest speakers for legal writing professors; consultants at the reference desk for students' legal writing questions; classroom instructors who introduce legal research, translate the vendor representatives' sales pitches, or provide research refreshers in the second half of the year; or all of the above.

Legal writing faculty members face similarly diverse demands on their skills and time, and they have increased responsibilities in the law school community and opportunities for engagement. Legal writing faculty are often expected or encouraged to produce scholarship (regardless of whether they are tenure-eligible), teach courses other than legal writing (e.g., negotiation, pre-trial litigation), serve on law school committees, and assist in moot court and academic support roles.<sup>2</sup>

Both groups face increasing work commitments than perhaps was the case

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<sup>1</sup> See 2004-2014 ALWD/LWI Survey Reports, <http://www.alwd.org/surveys/2004-2012-survey-report/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Association of Legal Writing Directors & Legal Writing Institute, Report of the Annual Legal Writing Survey (2014), <http://www.alwd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014-Survey-Report-Final.pdf>. Law librarians are increasingly invited or expected to participate in these activities too. See Charlotte D. Schneider, *Inclusion and Participation: Law Librarians at Law Faculty Meetings*, 107 LAW LIBR. J. 113 (2015).

in years past, and they are often expected to be more credentialed than has historically been the case. For example, law library directors (the culminating position for many reference librarians) have more years of practice experience now than thirty years ago.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is no wonder an informal survey of recent postings for academic reference librarian positions indicate a preference for applicants with a Juris Doctor, a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science, and practice experience to be considered for entry-level positions. Teaching experience is also more regularly sought after in job descriptions than it was for law librarians even a decade ago.<sup>4</sup> This is a relatively new development in a profession where the master's degree was once the only required level of education. As a result, an academic law library may be staffed with librarians at various stages in their careers that joined the profession with varying expectations with respect to teaching beyond helping students learn through reference interactions.

Ultimately, law librarians and legal writing faculty are in this together and have an opportunity to make these working relationships mutually beneficial and

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<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Slinger & Sarah C. Slinger, *The Career Path, Education, and Activities of Academic Law Library Directors Revisited Twenty-Five Years Later*, 107 LAW LIBR. J. 175 (2015).

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2015 AALL Biennial Salary Survey, 44.3% of academic law library professionals teach. AALL Biennial Salary Survey 35 (2015). According to the 1999 AALL Biennial Salary Survey, of those in academic law library positions whose title suggests they would be eligible to teach (i.e., library professionals), only 26% did. AALL Biennial Salary Survey 49 (1999) (library assistants/paraprofessionals, library clerks, and computer technicians are typically classified as non-professional positions, and individuals in those roles virtually never teach law students).

rewarding. We recognize that, depending on the law school, members of the two groups may have warranted, specific complaints about each other. Tension over differing teaching approaches, limited time to share in the classroom, and struggles for status and recognition likely top the list. These can be legitimate frustrations, but we suggest that building meaningful working relationships and respect outside the classroom can lead to better collaboration in the classroom.

So, how can law librarians and legal writing faculty develop stronger relationships? If nothing else, we can all find inspiration in our law schools' mission statements and the learning of our students. The ABA's increased emphasis on the value of how we work with students—teaching practice-critical skills—can be another point around which to rally. Law librarians in particular might consider how the mission of the library forwards the mission of the law school and supports the goals and objectives of the curriculum. Articulating the institutional relationship between the law library and legal writing program will establish common ground, a useful starting point.

With this broad philosophical backdrop in mind, we propose a few concrete solutions for building collaborative relationships between law libraries and legal writing faculty. Given our positions as law librarians, some of these suggestions focus on efforts law librarians can make, but with some extrapolation, many apply to legal writing faculty as well.

*Develop a healthy respect for your colleagues' expertise*

Law librarians and legal writing faculty each have distinct, if sometimes overlapping, areas of expertise. While legal writing faculty often teach and write about research, law librarians are more centrally research practitioners and, as a result, professionally keep up to date on research practices and tools perhaps at a greater depth than legal writing faculty can. Similarly, while law librarians often think deeply about how research impacts legal analysis and arguments, legal writing faculty focus more directly on writing skills and keeping up to date on new ways to think about persuasion, for example. Each population can benefit greatly from the knowledge base of the other.

Because collaboration often takes place in the classroom context, we begin with teaching. Both law librarians and legal writing faculty value identifying and furthering specific learning goals for their students. Law librarians who are invited to teach in a legal writing course or who are pursuing an invitation should talk with the professor about the course objectives and pedagogical goals. Through active listening, the law librarian could offer suggestions on ways his or her proposed content and approach will complement or further those goals. Rather than arriving to teach the class session with presumptions about what research skills the students need to master, the law librarian should think *with* the legal writing faculty member in advance about how he or she can add to the objectives already in place. The result brings librarian expertise to bear in a way that

forwards the goals of a specific class.

In a similar vein, librarians sometimes receive assignments like “talk to my students about secondary sources.” Librarians should resist giving or simply accepting this type of blanket request. Legal writing faculty could offer details about where the activity falls in the semester, what students will be expected to do or know after the research session, and what kinds of research experiences the students have already encountered. To the extent the legal writing faculty member does not provide this information at the outset, law librarians can request these details so that what they present better meets students’ needs and the professor’s expectations. The resulting class session will be much better tailored to the students’ backgrounds and needs.

Opportunities for respectful collaboration extend beyond classroom instruction. For example, law libraries can support legal writing programs by developing a study aid collection that includes research and writing books and displaying it prominently in the library. At the Moritz College of Law (our law school), the library has coordinated with legal writing faculty to maintain a strong research and writing collection housed in the reserve room, bringing legal writing faculty expertise to bear on the collection. The library also consults with legal writing faculty regarding cancellations of items like reporters to see whether they are being used for teaching purposes. This collaboration ensures that our collection meets the needs of the faculty and students.

Moritz law librarians also take advantage of legal writing faculty expertise when hiring student research assistants. During the hiring process, we consistently ask students for references from their legal writing faculty. Talking with legal writing faculty in this context allows the library to showcase some of its projects while consulting with the legal writing faculty on their experiences with particular students. As a result, the legal writing faculty have the opportunity to contribute to library projects related to their areas of focus, and the library hires students with better research skills.

*Build and share your knowledge*

Law librarians and legal writing faculty each have expertise in their fields, terms of art relevant to those fields, and bodies of literature reflecting this expertise and language. Each group can benefit from becoming versed in the professional realm of the other to overcome misperceptions that may exist (e.g., law librarians believing legal writing faculty are mistakenly content to rely on vendor representatives to teach legal research, legal writing faculty believing law librarians without JDs have little to offer in the classroom). Legal writing faculty can read *Law Library Journal* or *Legal Reference Services Quarterly* to get a sense of the scholarly work written by law librarians. Law librarians can read *Legal Communication & Rhetoric: JALWD*, *The Second Draft*, or *Legal Writing: The Journal of the Legal Writing Institute* (or even legal writing textbooks) to

familiarize themselves with legal writing pedagogy and paradigms. Law librarians who understand instructional frameworks like CRExAC, CRRACC, and TREAT can better craft research instruction that fits within the legal writing faculty member's curriculum. Legal writing faculty who appreciate the differences between bibliographic instruction and information literacy may have greater insight into how librarians can help law students find case law but, more significantly, learn a slate of research strategies that will serve them beyond first-year legal writing memos.

Reading each other's work can also build empathy. Both groups are often viewed as "the other" in relation to more traditional tenure-track faculty, yet both are often expected to teach required courses regularly at less than the pay rate of traditional tenure-track faculty. Each is often expected to pitch in for extra collegiate responsibilities supporting students at every turn with moot court, job searches, and extracurricular associations, yet both often have limited or no participation in faculty governance. This may not be true for both groups in all law schools, but working relationships among the groups can nonetheless be improved when each is aware of the professional struggles the other faces. Though perhaps a frank conversation among the groups is in order, learning about those struggles via each group's literature is an easy first step.

Both groups have expert writers, and once again, publishing is another path toward a collaborative relationship. Law librarians seeking an audience

outside the profession should consider publishing in *Perspectives*, where their work will be read by legal writing faculty and law librarians alike. Additionally, members of each group might consider collaborating on an article for publication anywhere, even a law review.<sup>5</sup> The article can be simple and focused on an assignment the law librarian and legal writing faculty member created together, or it can be something more complex addressing any shared interest.

To this end, a shared understanding of each group member's relative position is helpful. Some law librarians have opportunities for promotion within the main library system (even if they do not have advancement opportunities in the law school), so writing and publishing may be rewarded. On the other hand, a law librarian may have no incentive to write or publish, or in fact may have to do so on his or her own time. Legal writing faculty may face similar challenges or incentives to publish. Consequently, having a basic working knowledge of your colleagues' professional obligations and commitments can develop your sensitivity to their position to ensure you are not asking too much of them or missing opportunities to improve each other's lots.

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., Katrina June Lee, Susan Azyndar, & Ingrid Mattson, *A New Era: Integrating Today's "Next Gen" Research Tools Ravel and Casetext in the Law School Classroom*, 41 RUTGERS COMPUTER & TECH. L.J. 31, 37 (2015); and Aliza B. Kaplan & Kathleen Darvil, *Think (and Practice) Like A Lawyer: Legal Research for the New Millennials*, 8 LEGAL COMM. & RHETORIC: JALWD 153, 153-54 (2011).

*Share your resources*

Law libraries offer many resources—people, services, collections—and as a result have many opportunities to support legal writing faculty and by extension the mission of the law school. Perhaps most directly, law libraries can highlight reference services for legal writing students. Even if law librarians do not teach in a legal writing classroom, law librarians can talk to legal writing faculty about their research assignments and emphasize that students are welcome to ask research questions at the reference desk. As part of this conversation, both group members should specifically discuss what should or should not be conveyed to students so that the law librarian ensures he or she is accomplishing the legal writing professor's goals and maintaining the integrity of the assignment.

Professional conferences offer another way to support and learn from the work of legal writing faculty. Attending legal writing conferences presents another opportunity to engage in communication with legal writing faculty, share law librarians' research expertise, and learn about ways to more effectively fold research into the legal writing curriculum. Teaching legal writing is not a prerequisite to attend or make a case for funding. As one example among many, Steven R. Probst of Valparaiso attended ALWD in 2015 to describe collaboration with legal writing faculty in developing a skills-driven curriculum.

Hosting a smaller conference would bring the conversation closer to home. For example, the Legal Writing Institute holds one-day workshops every year. In

2015, the Moritz College of Law at The Ohio State University, hosted an LWI workshop, organized by a legal writing faculty member in partnership with a law librarian. In addition to this time and administrative commitment, the library also aided in funding for the workshop. This well-received workshop drew attendance across both communities, successfully forwarding conversations and cross-pollination.

Finally, law libraries can invite legal writing faculty to use space in innovative ways. For example, one of our legal writing faculty members at the Moritz College of Law planned a writing lab for appellate advocacy students and needed a space dedicated for that purpose. The library opened up and set aside a room specifically for this use, one close to the reference desk so that research help was close at hand. This kind of creative use of space helps the library support the mission of the law school and helps the legal writing faculty test new ideas.

Not every suggestion will work for every law librarian, law library, or legal writing faculty member, but in this difficult time for law schools, collaboration is often required. We hope these suggestions help law libraries and legal writing faculty create rewarding relationships that serve as professional models for our students.