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Book Review: Academic Law Library Director Perspectives: Case Studies and Insights

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¶60 Who should read this book? Everyone contemplating becoming a lawyer, college prelaw placement advisers, law school librarians and placement officers, and anyone interested in legal ethics and the practicalities of the legal profession should read *The Trouble with Lawyers*. It is likely that some (especially Big Law lawyers) may not be happy with the book's premises and conclusions, but the truth is not always pretty.

Wu, Michelle M., ed. *Academic Law Library Director Perspectives: Case Studies and Insights*. Buffalo, N.Y.: William S. Hein, 2015. 422p. \$95.

*Reviewed by Adeen Postar**

¶61 As a relatively new law library director (starting in May 2014), I eagerly anticipated the publication of *Academic Law Library Director Perspectives: Case Studies and Insights*. I hoped the perspectives of so many successful sitting library directors would inform the new directions in which I wanted to take the University of Baltimore Law Library. I was pleased to find that beyond the sage advice the book offers, it is a very accurate and complete picture of the state of academic law libraries today. This book should be required reading for every law librarian, as well as law school administrators and faculty.

¶62 The book is divided into four parts: general advice, unwritten roles, service contributions, and developing issues. Much of the book is organized through a series of fictional case studies that the book's editor, Michelle Wu, characterizes as "reflect[ing] real dilemmas faced by law library directors" (p.xi). Wu also notes that "the facts were structured to raise common challenges and issues in situations where few (if any) of the actors are behaving as well as they could" (p.xi). The case studies are set up to be extreme examples of situations in which directors may find themselves. Some are nearly caricatures, but the technique works: the more bizarre the scenario, the better and more interesting the response. Each case study has at least one analysis by an experienced director. Most of the case studies center on "finance, personnel, and communications" (p.xi). I wish I could cover each essay in depth, but space constraints allow me to highlight only a few.

¶63 The part on general advice includes information and strategies about getting a law library director job, fundamentals of finance and data available to libraries, information on nonautonomous law school libraries, and an interesting chapter entitled "When (and How) to Say 'No.'" The sections on landing the job are straightforward. The first is a portion of an article that first appeared in *Law Library Journal* and provides a step-by-step guide to the job process, from the initial search to the interview, and a brief section on negotiating salaries and benefits.¹³ James Duggan's chapter on "Negotiating after Receiving the Directorship Offer" is a detailed and nuanced picture of the negotiation process, with good advice on the various possibilities a director candidate might face after getting an offer but before

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13. Barbara A. Bintliff et al., *Rebuilding the Profession: Recommendations for Librarians Interested in Becoming Academic Law Library Directors*, 99 *LAW LIBR. J.* 101, 2007 *LAW LIBR. J.* 6.

accepting the position. Duggan incorporates discussion on important nonsalary benefits like summer stipends, sabbaticals, travel funding, and even equipment and office requirements into a possible negotiation strategy. This all would be very useful to first-time directors in institutions where salary offers may be made under great financial pressure.

¶64 Information on budgets and their processes is covered through a series of questions answered by directors from three very different law schools: Elizabeth Edinger from Catholic University, Spencer Simons from the University of Houston, and Suzanne Wones from Harvard University. Their perspectives are revealing in their different emphases on how library money is budgeted, spent, and accounted for, and the questions they are asked in these sections go to the essence of what any director should know about a library budget.

¶65 In his “Libraries and Data” chapter, Darin Fox gives a useful summary of some of the data points for academic libraries. Fox’s advice on tailoring budget data to the American Bar Association questionnaire is spot on, but not all integrated library systems can so neatly spit out the data he describes, and following the questionnaire structure may require a great deal of front-end engineering to the budget and a lot of negotiation with administrators at your law school and university.

¶66 The real star of this part is Michelle Wu’s “When (and How) to Say ‘No,’” and for reasons that go beyond the great advice she provides. For rank-and-file law librarians, this essay shows how integral the law library is to the operation of the entire law school and the pressures that the director is under to meet perceived law school needs that cannot or will not be satisfied elsewhere. Wu writes rather eloquently on the balancing of interests that should occur when the library is asked to take on new tasks and responsibilities, both for the law library and the parent institution. This chapter alone should be required reading for every law librarian, not just aspiring directors.

¶67 Looking next at the part on unwritten roles, the “Library Director as Negotiator/Horse Trader” follows in the same vein as Wu’s and should also be required reading. Both Billie Jo Kaufman and James Heller analyze a scenario in which the library director has to respond to a surprise decision from the law school dean that the library will have to provide office space in the reading room to several faculty members. Kaufman and Heller speak to the responsibilities of the law library director to the entire law school and how important it is for the director to be a team player and to have a seat at the law school administration table while maintaining good relationships with faculty. They both write about successfully negotiating for the law library and for all law school constituencies. Both note that negotiation requires fact finding, trading for mutual gain, and the possibility of gaining (and losing) something in the process. Heller starts his chapter with a quote from the lyrics of an old Bo Diddley song, “Who Do You Love?,” that speaks to anger and irrational actions. Heller cautions that no matter how provoked, librarians should never react aggressively to a bad situation but rather should work with friends, allies, neutral parties, and perceived enemies to arrive at the best outcome possible.

¶68 Three case studies cover the role of the director in assorted personnel issues. The first, “Library Director as Counselor and Mediator,” discusses workplace issues, including performance, proper supervision, and work ethics and training. Karl Gruben and Kris Gilliland both provide excellent insight and advice on handling thorny employment issues. Footnotes for both essays provide excellent resources for further exploration.

¶69 There are also several useful essays in this part on how to effectively work with issues involving unionized librarians and staff. In some libraries, this is a crucial factor in managing library personnel. Taylor Fitchett and Victoria Szymczak provide advice on interpreting collective bargaining agreements as they relate (in the case study) to a librarian filing a grievance over a termination notice for failure to perform her job. Both directors stress the need for consultation and frank and open discussions with library staff, human resources departments, and university and law school administrations to find the best way to handle these very difficult situations.

¶70 The essays on working with unionized staff have a similar theme. The case study centers in part on a university-wide reduction in force that affects a longtime staff member with a poor record of time and attendance. Kristina Niedringhaus and Courtney Selby address the need for “clear communication, creative thinking, and a detailed record” (p.255). Both provide advice and options that might manage the situation to allow termination of the problem employee while allowing the retention of a productive employee with less time on the job.

¶71 The essays on “Library Director as Fundraiser” and “Library Director as Opportunity Identifier” struck me as particularly important, especially for libraries whose budgets are under fiscal constraint. As far as I know, there is no fund raising training offered in library school, and my own education on this topic has been through professional reading, observation, and anecdotes from other librarians. The essay on fundraising summarizes typical scenarios and offers sound advice on how to best deal with them.

¶72 Pauline Aranas and Ron Wheeler respond to a case study that shows very directly how a law library can add value to its law school by identifying and taking on new roles. While identifying opportunities to contribute to and support various law school offices and programs do not go to the bottom line, they may leverage the library’s position within the law school, help raise the status and visibility of the library, and even mitigate against future budget and staff cuts. Aranas encourages directors to take strategic advantage of these opportunities to make sure they align with the core mission of the law library. Wheeler identifies participating in law school strategic planning as the key to “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” (p.199).

¶73 The “Library Director as Educator” focuses on educating administrators, not law students. Christopher Knott and Sally Wise offer analysis for a case study in which the library director is blindsided by the dean’s response to a budget crisis: centralizing routine library processes under the university library, requiring faculty to rely on research assistants, and shifting responsibility for legal research instruction from librarians to legal writing faculty. Both Knott and Wise stress how important it

is for the director to clearly communicate the many vital roles the library plays in the law school by supporting the scholarship and research needs of its students and faculty. Both also recognize the need for the director to find ways to assist in resolving the budget crisis without compromising essential library operations. They stress how important obtaining accurate information is in this process, both in knowing just how serious the situation is and in understanding whether the dean's proposals will actually ameliorate the financial situation. This case study and the responses are another essential section of the book.

¶74 The final entry I will cover in this part is "Library Director as Politician," with an analysis by Filippa Marullo Anzalone. The most compelling part of the case study concerns a new director who believed that the cuts he and his staff made to the library's collections, services, and staff were informed choices that minimized the effect on the law library's core mission while resolving the budget crisis at his law school. Unfortunately, the dean did not agree, feeling they were not deep enough and that the proposed service cuts would antagonize students and faculty. As Anzalone correctly points out, this scenario is all too common in academic law libraries today. Library budgets and staff are attractive targets for administrators looking to their bottom lines.

¶75 Anzalone looks at these problems through a political prism and asks us to determine whether the director, as a responsible and "virtuous leader," has actually made his decisions with skill, transparency, and "organizational loyalty" (p.331). She notes that the director did not adequately communicate his efforts to cut his budget and staff to the dean or fully discuss how those cuts would affect library services and the law school. Without that information and the possibility that those conversations would have established a rapport and supporting relationship with his dean and faculty, the new director has greatly limited his options for a successful outcome.

¶76 The part on service contributions covers responsibilities the director may take outside the law library (involving such roles as chair of a university committee and consultant to another law school library) and provides an especially important analysis that describes the multiple responsibilities directors have in ABA site visits, for their own schools and by serving on an inspection team. The essay explains the use and application of the ABA standards for libraries in a clear and concise manner, with suggestions on how best to comply with the standards. All three analyses show that these roles add tremendous value to our larger institutions and to the profession as a whole.

¶77 The two essays in the part on developing issues cover "Law Librarians' Roles in Modern Law Libraries" and "Privacy and Competing Library Goals: How Can Library Directors Lead When Values Collide?" Richard Leiter's essay on modern libraries attempts a herculean task: to sum up the impact of the shift from print to digital resources on the operations of the law library. He urges us to rethink how we provide access to our myriad databases and encourages the development of subject-based access tools.

¶78 Anne Klinefelter's essay provides a nuanced view of the many issues involving privacy concerns in our era of constantly evolving technologies. She asks us to consider how our traditional notions of privacy in academic libraries are affected

by legal, practical, and technical developments in scholarly communications and by the publishing industry. It is a compelling and important essay.

¶79 Is *Academic Law Library Director Perspectives* a perfect book? Of course not. I wish it had more detailed information about working with state budgets and a chapter offering candid and practical advice about how to strategically construct and use the ABA and *U.S. News & World Report* data to the greatest and most ethically sound advantage. A section on how to motivate library staff, especially in this era of ever-changing technologies, staff shortages, and budget challenges, would have been especially helpful. But the advice and knowledge included in this book is priceless. Through their contributions, each author has mentored future generations of directors and law librarians, and this book is a testament to their faith in the future of our profession.

¶80 Reflecting on the entirety of this book, I believe this is as much a letter of gratitude to my colleagues for illuminating the roles library directors play in legal education as it is a book review. I regret that I did not have a resource like this when I began my career as an academic law librarian. I would have been a much better librarian and made greater contributions to the various law libraries at which I worked had I known the difficult, crucial roles and broad responsibilities of my library directors. I am quite sure that the authors never intended the book to be viewed this way, but what they have produced is a very accurate picture of the pivotal role of law library directors and, albeit indirectly, on the state of academic law libraries. No one involved in legal education today should miss the opportunity to read it.