

# Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Law Libraries

## South-Central Roundtable Report

Hosted by  
The University of Oklahoma College of Law  
at SMU Deadman School of Law

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## Introduction

As part of a wider, national effort, on February 9, 2024, law librarians, legal academics, legal information professionals, lawyers, and artificial intelligence experts participated in the "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Law Libraries South-Central Roundtable," hosted by the University of Oklahoma College of Law and sponsored by the Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law. The roundtable discussions employed a vicious and virtuous cycle scenario-building methodology, addressing staffing, collections, and services themes in the context of AI implementation.

Participants engaged in rich dialogue about the virtuous and vicious cycles of AI integration. They envisioned scenarios where AI could either enhance or detract from the roles and effectiveness of law libraries. Topics discussed included the potential for AI to streamline library services and improve accessibility, as well as concerns about the loss of human interaction and the implications of data security and bias. This collaborative effort aimed to identify opportunities and challenges presented by AI, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding of AI's impact on the future of law libraries.

## Key Takeaways

- **Balancing AI Integration and Human Interaction:** The discussions highlighted the need to find a balance between leveraging AI technologies to improve efficiency and maintaining essential human interactions within law libraries.
- **Opportunities for Enhanced Accessibility:** AI offers significant potential to enhance the accessibility of legal information, making it easier for diverse users to find and understand legal resources.
- **Professional Development and Advocacy:** Law librarians must engage in continuous professional development to stay ahead of AI advancements and advocate for their roles within their institutions, ensuring their expertise is recognized and utilized.
- **Ethical and Security Concerns:** The roundtable emphasized the importance of addressing ethical considerations and data security challenges associated with AI implementation in law libraries.
- **Scenario Building for Future Planning:** Using scenario-building methodology, participants explored various futures for law libraries, focusing on both potential benefits and risks of AI adoption, guiding strategic planning efforts.

## **Opportunities Afforded by AI**

### **Enhanced Information Accessibility**

AI technologies provide significant opportunities for enhancing access to legal information. Participants highlighted that AI could streamline the digitization of archives, making unique collections more accessible to a wider audience. This can be particularly beneficial for publicly funded institutions that aim to democratize access to primary legal sources. Moreover, AI can aid in the curation and retention of print materials, ensuring the preservation of important historical documents.

### **Improved Legal Research and Education**

AI can transform legal research and education by integrating advanced search capabilities and offering personalized learning experiences. For instance, AI tools can help create more efficient legal databases, enabling faster retrieval of relevant case laws and statutes. Additionally, AI can assist in developing interactive teaching methods, such as virtual reality simulations, which can enhance practical skills training for law students. The use of AI in grading and providing feedback can also free up faculty time, allowing for more personalized interactions with students.

### **Increased Efficiency in Law Library Operations**

Participants recognized that AI could perform lower-level, repetitive tasks, allowing law librarians to focus on more complex and intellectually stimulating activities. This includes tasks like metadata creation and routine administrative duties. By automating these processes, AI can help law libraries operate more efficiently, reduce costs, and allocate resources more effectively. This increased efficiency can lead to more innovative services and programs within law libraries.

### **Enhanced Collaboration and Partnership**

AI offers opportunities for enhanced collaboration and partnership within the legal community. For example, AI-driven tools can facilitate partnerships between law libraries and various legal entities such as bar associations, legal aid organizations, and other academic institutions. These collaborations can lead to the development of comprehensive legal information systems and training programs that benefit a broader audience. AI can also help librarians become more proactive in engaging with their communities and advocating for the value of their services.

### **Development of New Professional Roles**

The integration of AI into law libraries is expected to create new professional roles and career pathways for law librarians. These roles may include AI specialists, data curators, and digital archivists who are skilled in managing and leveraging AI technologies. This evolution in

professional roles can lead to more dynamic and rewarding career opportunities in law librarianship. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of continuous professional development and education to keep pace with technological advancements.

## **Challenges of AI Adoption and Implementation**

### **Ethical and Privacy Concerns**

Participants raised significant ethical and privacy concerns related to AI adoption in law libraries. One major issue is the potential for data breaches and ransomware attacks, which can compromise sensitive legal information. The use of AI also raises questions about data governance and the ethical use of data, particularly concerning the transparency of AI algorithms and the sources of their training data. Ensuring that AI systems do not perpetuate biases present in their training data is another critical ethical concern, as biased AI can lead to discriminatory outcomes in legal research and decision-making processes.

### **Job Security and Professional Identity**

The potential impact of AI on job security and the professional identity of law librarians was a significant concern among participants. There is a fear that AI might replace human roles, particularly lower-level and repetitive tasks, leading to job displacement. Moreover, the shift towards AI-driven processes could undermine the professional identity of librarians, reducing their roles to mere facilitators of technology rather than active contributors to legal research and education. This erosion of professional identity can also diminish the perceived value of librarians within their institutions and the broader legal community.

### **Over-reliance on AI and Loss of Human Interaction**

Participants cautioned against an over-reliance on AI, which could lead to a decline in human interaction and personalized services in law libraries. The use of AI chatbots and automated reference services, while efficient, can lack the personal touch and nuanced understanding that human librarians provide. This shift might result in decreased satisfaction among library users who value personalized assistance and the human element in their interactions. Furthermore, the reliance on AI could lead to a homogenization of services, potentially neglecting the unique needs and contexts of diverse user groups.

### **Financial and Resource Constraints**

Implementing AI technologies in law libraries involves substantial financial and resource investments, which can be a significant barrier for many institutions. The costs associated with acquiring, maintaining, and updating AI systems can strain already limited library budgets. Additionally, there is a need for continuous training and professional development for library staff to effectively manage and utilize AI tools. This requirement for ongoing investment in both technology and human resources can be challenging, particularly for smaller law libraries or those with limited funding.

## **Needs: Identified Needs Arising from Roundtable Discussion**

The roundtable discussion identified several critical needs to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities presented by AI in law libraries. These needs highlight actions that can support the effective and ethical integration of AI technologies.

### **Enhanced Training and Professional Development**

Participants emphasized the necessity for continuous training and professional development to equip law librarians with the skills required to manage and utilize AI tools effectively. This includes offering specialized courses on AI, data governance, and ethical considerations, as well as providing opportunities for librarians to stay updated with the latest technological advancements.

### **Strengthened Ethical and Privacy Frameworks**

There is a clear need for robust ethical and privacy frameworks to guide the implementation of AI in law libraries. This involves developing comprehensive policies that address data security, algorithmic transparency, and bias mitigation. Establishing standards for ethical AI use and ensuring compliance with these standards are crucial to maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of AI systems in the legal field.

### **Increased Financial Support and Resource Allocation**

To effectively integrate AI, law libraries require increased financial support and strategic resource allocation. This includes securing funding for AI technology acquisition, maintenance, and upgrades, and investing in the needed infrastructure. Participants also highlighted the importance of allocating resources for staff training and professional development to ensure that librarians are well-prepared to work with AI tools.

### **Advocacy for Librarian Roles and Professional Identity**

There is a need for strong advocacy to promote the value of law librarians and ensure their roles are recognized and preserved in the face of increasing AI adoption. This includes advocating for the inclusion of librarians in decision-making processes related to AI implementation and highlighting the unique contributions of librarians to legal research and education. Efforts should also focus on preserving and enhancing the professional identity of librarians as critical thinkers and information specialists.

## **Seeds: Interesting ideas for potential implementation**

The roundtable discussion generated several innovative ideas for projects, collaborations, and initiatives that can help integrate AI into law libraries more effectively. These ideas represent potential paths forward to enhance the role and impact of law libraries in the digital age.

## **Collaborative AI Training Programs**

Participants proposed the development of collaborative AI training programs in partnership with other legal and educational institutions. These programs could include joint workshops, seminars, and online courses designed to improve AI literacy and skills among law librarians and legal professionals. Such collaborations could leverage the expertise of multiple institutions to create comprehensive and impactful training initiatives.

## **Continued In-Person Collaborations**

The roundtable highlighted the continued need for in-person collaborations between private, government, and academic sectors. These face-to-face meetings provide distraction-free time to work together on complex challenges and foster a deeper understanding of shared goals and obstacles. Such collaborations can help build stronger networks, encourage the exchange of ideas, and create a unified approach to addressing the ethical, practical, and technological issues surrounding AI in law libraries.

## **AI-Driven Research and Development Centers**

The creation of AI-driven research and development centers within law schools and libraries was suggested to spearhead innovation in legal research. These centers could focus on developing new AI tools and applications tailored to the needs of legal professionals and researchers. They could also serve as hubs for interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together experts from law, computer science, and information science to tackle complex legal challenges.

## **Enhanced Digital Repositories and Archives**

Another idea involved the enhancement of digital repositories and archives using AI technologies. AI could be employed to improve the organization, searchability, and accessibility of legal documents and historical records. This includes using AI for automated metadata creation, OCR (optical character recognition) for digitizing print materials and developing sophisticated search algorithms to help users find relevant information more efficiently.

## **AI-Powered Legal Aid and Pro Bono Services**

Participants suggested leveraging AI to enhance legal aid and pro bono services. AI tools could be developed to assist in providing legal advice and resources to underserved communities. This might include AI chatbots to guide individuals through common legal procedures, automated document drafting tools, and AI systems that connect users with relevant legal aid organizations. Such initiatives could significantly expand access to legal assistance for those who cannot afford traditional legal services.

## Conclusion

The roundtable discussion on "The Future of Law Libraries and AI" highlighted both the promising opportunities and the significant challenges associated with integrating AI into law libraries. Participants identified numerous advantages of AI, such as enhanced information accessibility, improved legal research and education, increased operational efficiency, and the development of new professional roles. However, they also expressed concerns about ethical and privacy issues, job security, over-reliance on AI, and financial constraints.

To address these challenges and capitalize on the opportunities, several critical needs were identified, including enhanced training and professional development, strengthened ethical and privacy frameworks, increased financial support and resource allocation, and strong advocacy for the roles of law librarians. Additionally, participants proposed innovative ideas for potential implementation, such as collaborative AI training programs, AI-driven research and development centers, enhanced digital repositories, AI-powered legal aid services, and the necessity of continued in-person collaborations.

Based on these discussions, three key recommendations emerge:

- **Invest in Continuous Training and Development:** Law libraries should prioritize continuous training and professional development for their staff to keep pace with AI advancements. This includes creating and participating in collaborative AI training programs that enhance librarians' skills and knowledge, ensuring they can effectively manage and utilize AI tools.
- **Develop Robust Ethical and Privacy Frameworks:** Establishing comprehensive ethical and privacy guidelines is crucial for the responsible implementation of AI. Law libraries should work together with other legal and academic institutions to develop policies that ensure data security, transparency, and fairness in AI applications.
- **Foster In-Person Collaborations Across Sectors:** Maintaining regular, in-person meetings between private, government, and academic sectors is essential for tackling the complex challenges posed by AI. These collaborations provide valuable distraction-free time for stakeholders to work together, share insights, and develop unified strategies for AI integration.

By focusing on these recommendations, law libraries can navigate the complexities of AI adoption and harness its potential to transform legal research and education. Embracing AI thoughtfully and collaboratively will ensure that law libraries remain at the forefront of innovation while maintaining their crucial role in the legal information ecosystem.

## **Appendix A – South-Central Roundtable Participants**

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