

Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Law Libraries

Northeast Roundtable Report

Hosted by
Suffolk University Law School
Boston, MA
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Please see Appendix A for a list of Roundtable participants

Introduction

Suffolk University Law School hosted the Northeast Regional Roundtable on [Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Law Libraries](#) on April 26, 2024. There were twenty-five participants who work in a variety of law libraries (academic, court, and law firm), legal innovation centers, and a graduate school of library science. The Roundtable used scenario-building methodology that involved small group discussions on the potential impacts of generative AI on law library staffing, collections, and space. The program was facilitated by [Cas Laskowski](#) from the University of Arizona.

Key Takeaways

1. Generative AI emerged as many law libraries were already grappling with reduced budgets, shrinking physical spaces, staffing challenges (including retention, recruitment, salaries, and debates over credentialing), the lack of preservation of born-digital content by vendors, and changes to ABA standards that impacted academic law libraries.
2. There are many ways in which librarians could use AI to address existing challenges, but AI could also exacerbate those challenges in addition to creating new ones.
3. Librarians could be devalued and marginalized by their institutions if they do not take the lead in implementing AI in their libraries.
4. Collaboration will be essential moving forward, as libraries must work collectively, partner with other departments in their institutions, connect with government agencies and officials, and engage with vendors to effectively implement and manage AI technologies while preserving their unique roles and value.

Opportunities Afforded by AI

Participants discussed numerous ways law libraries could use generative AI technologies to enhance the ways they serve their users/patrons while simultaneously improving their standing within their institutions.

Enhanced Accessibility and Integration of Information

Libraries invest heavily in subscription databases from multiple vendors, yet users often struggle to navigate these resources effectively. Generative AI technologies offer solutions to streamline access and optimize the use of these costly subscriptions by integrating content into a unified, user-friendly search experience. By consolidating access to subscription resources and making them more discoverable, libraries could derive

maximum value from their investments, encouraging greater patron engagement and utilization.

At the same time, AI could provide customized results to account for users' varying levels of need and experience. From novice researchers to experts in their fields, users will get results that are presented in the way most useful and understandable to them.

Repurposing Library Spaces for Optimal Use

Libraries could use AI analysis to determine optimal space configurations based on usage data and patron behavior. Despite the trend of libraries transitioning to more online collections, most still have demand for their physical space. Because the demands can vary, libraries would benefit from flexible, community-focused spaces. AI could be used to design library spaces that can easily adapt to a range of needs, including group study, quiet areas, and modular configurations that support diverse research activities.

Law Librarians as AI Experts

Law librarians are well-suited to be AI experts because of their unique combination of expertise in managing complex research systems, organizing information, and understanding user needs. Their familiarity with navigating a variety of databases, ethical considerations, and confidentiality requirements makes them adept at overseeing AI's implementation in legal contexts. Additionally, their roles as educators and intermediaries between technology and law enable them to translate complex AI concepts into practical applications, making them ideal leaders in guiding AI adoption within legal institutions.

Combining the ideas of law librarians as AI experts and making optimal use of library space, libraries could create dedicated areas equipped with tools and resources for patrons to experiment with AI technologies, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration.

Challenges of AI Adoption and Implementation

While AI offers many potential benefits to law libraries, its adoption and implementation come with significant challenges that could disrupt traditional roles, impact user experience, and diminish the unique value libraries provide.

Loss of Oversight and Control

There is a risk that AI tools may marginalize the role of librarians, making their expertise and institutional knowledge seem less valuable. This could lead to downsizing and replacing positions with AI that may be "good enough" but not at the same level of quality.

Control over collections, services, and even space allocation could shift from library professionals to AI algorithms, vendors, or other departments (that then use AI), leading both to worse outcomes for users and reduced library influence within the institution. AI may prioritize efficiency over the human elements of service, such as personalized interactions, empathy, and tailored guidance, which are core to a library's value proposition.

Loss of Distinctive Collections

Even when collections remain under the control of the law library, heavy reliance on AI could lead to more uniform collections and less distinctive library offerings, undermining the specialized value libraries have cultivated over time.

User Privacy Concerns

Implementing AI technologies often involves gathering and analyzing large amounts of user data, which could put patron privacy at risk and create ethical dilemmas about how much information should be collected and shared.

Loss of Physical Space and Community

As libraries increasingly adopt AI and digital tools, there is a risk of losing physical spaces traditionally used for community-building and in-person interactions. As noted above in the Opportunities section, libraries could use AI to repurpose the space to better serve the institution, but it is also possible that the space is converted entirely away from library purposes. This could diminish the role of libraries as communal hubs and reduce opportunities for personal connections between staff and patrons.

Needs: Identified Needs Arising from Roundtable Discussions

Achieving the identified opportunities while addressing the challenges will require law libraries to align AI initiatives with institutional goals, advocate for their expertise, secure adequate funding, and collaborate across departments and with external partners. Libraries also need to prioritize staff development to ensure they have the skills and support to lead AI implementation effectively.

Align with Institutional Goals and Strategies

Participants emphasized the importance of implementing AI initiatives in ways that enhance how the library carries out its role in advancing and supporting the institution's mission. This means understanding and prioritizing institutional needs first, so that any AI implementation supports the broader goals of the organization. Law libraries must position themselves as partners in achieving these objectives, using AI to reinforce their value and contributions to the institution's success.

Be AI Leaders, not Followers

Law libraries must take a proactive stance in adopting AI technologies to avoid becoming marginalized. If libraries remain passive, they risk ceding control to other departments or outside vendors, potentially losing influence over decision-making and diminishing their value within their institutions. Libraries need to actively advocate for their expertise, secure a seat at the table, and be visible leaders in AI implementation. Otherwise, decisions about collections, services, and space could be made without their input, resulting in a loss of autonomy and relevance. In essence, it is crucial for libraries to drive the change rather than react to it.

Work Collaboratively

Successful AI implementation in law libraries will require extensive collaboration on multiple fronts. Participants emphasized the need for inter-institutional collaboration to create shared resources and tools. Partnerships with vendors are also crucial, as libraries must work closely with them to ensure that AI solutions are tailored to their specific needs rather than dictated by vendor priorities. This collaboration involves active participation in the development process, advocating for standards, and negotiating terms to better integrate their collections.

Libraries also highlighted the need to work with government agencies at the local, state, and national levels to address issues such as data transparency, access to legal information, and ensuring AI tools adhere to ethical and regulatory standards. Additionally, they stressed the importance of rejecting “black box” solutions that obscure what content is included or how the technology functions. Building cross-disciplinary alliances within their own institutions—such as partnering with IT departments—will further ensure that AI initiatives align with broader institutional strategies. These partnerships help bridge the gap between technical and research expertise, allowing for more effective and sustainable AI adoption.

Support Staff Development and Professional Growth

Supporting staff development and professional growth is essential for ensuring that law libraries remain adaptable and prepared to leverage AI technologies effectively. Lifelong learning and ongoing training, particularly in new technologies, should be prioritized. Creating an environment that encourages experimentation and exploration allows staff to stay engaged and continuously build new skills. This includes providing the freedom and resources to pursue professional interests, institutionalizing support for professional development, and reevaluating roles with each hire to reflect evolving responsibilities. Career progression should be a focus, and positions should be rebranded to align with changing duties, ensuring staff are recognized as indispensable partners in AI initiatives. It is also crucial to advocate for the library staff’s role in AI implementation and provide opportunities for librarians to educate others on emerging technologies. By taking this

proactive approach, libraries can position their staff as essential contributors to achieving broader institutional strategic goals.

Invest in AI Implementation

Achieving success with AI initiatives will require securing adequate financial resources. Without sufficient funding, libraries risk being unable to take advantage of the opportunities or address the challenges described above.

Seeds: Interesting ideas for potential implementation

The Roundtable discussions generated a variety of creative ideas that could shape the future of law library services. While these concepts are not fully developed solutions, they represent potential starting points for innovative projects that may grow into actionable initiatives as the project moves forward.

Library-Designed AI Tools for Collection Analysis

Implement AI tools to analyze a library's collection, identify gaps, and evaluate whether the collection supports specific courses, areas of study, or areas of practice, enabling more strategic collection management.

Virtual and AI-Enhanced Library Spaces

Create adaptable virtual library environments that cater to user needs, offering customized spaces for research, collaboration, and instruction.

AI-Enhanced "Supercatalog"

Develop a comprehensive catalog that integrates data from multiple libraries, creating a unified research experience and providing a richer, more accessible resource pool.

Addressing Legal Information Deserts

Use AI to expand access to legal resources for non-lawyers, supporting access to justice efforts and making critical legal information more widely available.

AI-Driven Patron Intake Procedures

Develop AI-driven intake systems that enhance patron service by tailoring information delivery based on individual user needs and preferences.

Establishing Open Repositories

Create open, librarian-controlled repositories to ensure the integrity, provenance, and preservation of digital content, countering over-reliance on vendor-controlled systems.

Building Collaborative Infrastructures

Lead efforts to build collaborative networks across institutions, and even across national boundaries, to establish a shared and comprehensive legal knowledge base.

Conclusion

As the Roundtable discussions made clear, the future of law libraries in the age of AI will be shaped not only by how effectively libraries harness emerging technologies, but also by how they choose to prioritize their efforts and allocate limited resources. With many law libraries already under pressure to do more with less, adopting AI without careful consideration could exacerbate existing challenges around budgets, collections, staffing, and space. Instead, librarians must be strategic in how they implement these tools, ensuring that AI initiatives support their core mission and add meaningful value without overwhelming their capacity.

This environment demands that librarians be proactive leaders, willing to advocate for their roles and for the value they bring to their institutions. It also requires a willingness to make difficult choices about where to focus their efforts—and the courage to say no to requests and initiatives that do not align with their priorities.

Investing in people will be just as critical as investing in technology. As AI transforms the landscape of legal research and library services, it is the expertise, adaptability, and creativity of library staff that will determine the success of these initiatives. Providing opportunities for ongoing training and professional development will not only keep staff up to date on new technologies but will also empower them to take on leadership roles in implementing and managing these tools. This investment in staff is essential to fostering a culture of innovation and experimentation, where librarians feel confident in exploring new approaches and identifying where AI can best support their work. Equipping staff with the skills and support they need will ultimately strengthen the library's position as a hub of knowledge and ensure that the human element—empathy, critical thinking, and nuanced guidance—remains at the center of library services.

Successful implementation will depend on working closely with a host of partners, including other departments, vendors, government agencies, and other libraries, to develop shared resources, establish standards, and create AI tools that meet diverse needs while ensuring transparency and ethical use.

Ultimately, law libraries have an opportunity to position themselves as indispensable partners in their institutions by leveraging AI in ways that both support their traditional strengths and pave the way for new innovations.

Appendix – Northeast Roundtable Participants

Alex Barton, Associate Director, Administrative & Technology Resources, Boston College Law School Library

David Colarusso, Practitioner in Residence & Co-Director, Legal Innovation & Technology Lab, Suffolk University Law School

Kyle Courtney, Copyright Advisor, Harvard University

Jack Cushman, Director, Harvard Library Innovation Lab

Jessica de Perio Wittman, Director of the Law Library, Associate Professor of Law, and Cornelius J. Scanlon Research Scholar, University of Connecticut School of Law

Corie Dugas, Executive Director, NELLCO Law Library Consortium, Inc.

Sanda Erdelez, Professor and Dean, School of Library and Information Science, Simmons University

Claudia Jalowka, Deputy Director, Law Library Services, Connecticut Judicial Branch Law Library System

Cas Laskowski, Head of Research, Data & Instruction, University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law

Christopher Laut III, Director of Library and Knowledge Services, Sullivan & Worcester

Kristin McCarthy, Senior Legal Information Librarian, Boston University Law School

Todd Melnick, Director, Law Library and Clinical Associate Professor of Law, Fordham University School of Law

Kim Nayyer, Edward Cornell Law Librarian, Associate Dean for Library Services, Professor of the Practice, Cornell University Law School

Nor Ortiz, Technology and Research Librarian, Yale Law School Library

Raquel Ortiz, Assistant Dean for Library and Information Services, Roger Williams University School of Law

Bryan Petit, Collection Services Manager, Suffolk University Law School Library

Jennifer Sekula, Instructional Law Librarian & Assistant Professor of Law, Vermont Law and Graduate School

Courtney Selby, Associate Dean for Library Services and Professor of Legal Research, St. John's University School of Law

Roger Skalbeck, Professor of Law, Associate Dean for Library and Information Services, Co-Director, Intellectual Property Institute, University of Richmond School of Law

Latasha Towles, Law Practice Technologist, Charles B. Sears Law Library, University at Buffalo School of Law

Susan Zago, Law Library Director and Professor of Law, UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law
and others who preferred to remain anonymous

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