

Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Law Libraries

Western Roundtable Report

Hosted by the
Stanford Law School, Robert Crown Law Library
Stanford, CA | May 10, 2024

Taryn Marks, Stanford Law School, Robert Crown Law Library
Tina Ching, Stanford Law School, Robert Crown Law Library

Please see Appendix A for full list of Roundtable participants

Report published September 2024

Future of Law Libraries Initiative



Introduction

Stanford Law School's Robert Crown Law Library hosted the Western Roundtable on [Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Law Libraries](#) on May 10, 2024, in Stanford, California. A diverse group of active legal information professionals from academic, government, and the private sector, as well as legal research platform vendors, attended the session. The participants traveled to Stanford from across the West including representatives from California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Hawai'i, and Alaska. This was the final of the six originally scheduled roundtable discussions affiliated with the Future of Law Libraries project, a project founded by Cas Laskowski and Teresa Miguel-Stearns from the University of Arizona, James E. Rogers College of Law.

The Western Roundtable followed the scenario-building methodology of the previous roundtables and was moderated by Taryn Marks, Associate Director of Research & Instructional Services at the Robert Crown Law Library at Stanford Law School. The lively discussion moved through the vicious and virtuous cycles for the law library's space, collections, and staff. It operated under the [Chatham House Rule](#) to encourage the free-flowing expression of ideas, thoughts, and brainstorming. Participants were encouraged to think broadly, to bring their experiences, their fears, and their hopes about AI into the conversation. Throughout the session, notetakers recorded participants' conversations; halfway through, participants paused to reflect on the first part of the conversation and to generate key ideas that they wanted to be sure were memorialized. These reflections and notes were used to draft this report.

Key Takeaways

- **Human connections** will be even more important as AI integrates into our lives. We need to actively recognize and reaffirm the value of people and our relationships.
- **Collaboration across library types and with vendors**, while supporting competition in the industry, will enable better outcomes for improving access to legal information.
- **AI will require a flexible and proactive approach** for its effective use. Those who take a wait and see approach risk exclusion from the conversation and being left behind.
- There is **deep and valid concern about how truth** will be determined and verified by AI.

Opportunities Afforded by AI

Participants in the Western roundtable discussed several opportunities that AI could offer in future scenarios. The highlights of the opportunities identified include a future in which we use AI to:

- Improve access to information in physical and digital spaces.
- Foster and encourage creativity and human connections.
- Create AI partnerships that help make information more discoverable, reliable, and accurate.

Improving Access to Information

AI has the potential to improve access to information. Participants envisioned a future in which AI seamlessly integrates physical and digital spaces, resulting in better access to and deeper engagement with information. With AI, law libraries provide equivalent access to high-quality information in both digital and physical spaces that also protects private information. The library, whether physical or digital, is a cathedral for learning and information, and is filled with people who care for that learning and information. Regardless of a user's location or a patron's question, they begin their information quest in libraries that are working in conjunction with AI. In this envisioned ideal world, AI lowers barriers and costs to access information.

Fostering Human Connections

Participants envisioned AI as fostering and encouraging creativity and human connections. By capitalizing on AI's capacity to complete routine and repetitive tasks, librarians and other information professionals focus on more creative and complex tasks. AI also frees up time to build relationships with other people and organizations, including patrons, library consortiums, other libraries, and access to justice advocates.

Ensuring Reliable and Accurate Information

AI partnerships could make information more discoverable, reliable, and accurate: participants saw authors and vendors working together to create better content and librarians as active partners in vetting AI systems and teaching others the best way to use those systems to find data and information. AI helps sift bad information from good and identifies possible next steps in queries. In this future world, users work with AI to make connections between different sources, analyze information in new ways, and push creativity. Data mining and research are open and available to all. Libraries and librarians are the hubs for data and information access.

Challenges of AI Adoption and Implementation

Participants in the Western roundtable identified several challenges and concerns with adopting and implementing AI. As they imagined these futures, they saw challenges including:

- AI either eliminates physical space or changes the need for physical space to simply support data storage.
- AI provides “good enough” information and content so the value of unique people and experts decreases, eliminating facts and humanity.
- AI impedes access to information.

Diminished Value of Physical Spaces

Participants imagined a world in which AI either eliminates the need for a library’s physical space or converts physical space into data storage space. Libraries are simply QR codes. Because AI is digital and omnipresent, humans have lost reverence for a library’s physical space. People design space to support AI and to house data, rather than thoughtfully designing it for human beings. Libraries do not support physical collections or serve as collaborative spaces for research and engagement with resources.

Limited Human Connections and Value

Another stark challenge participants considered was that of quality. Here, AI provides “good enough” information and content, diminishing the unique value of people and experts. Knowledge from people is not valued and ok becomes “good enough”. Human-to-human interactions are limited to non-existent. AI creates collections and data, which then creates new content from AI without human oversight or correction. Everything becomes “slop,” biased, and mediocre. Nothing is unique, niche, or special since everything is created (then re-created) by an AI.

As a result, AI eliminates facts and humanity. Everything is digital, so it is subject to widespread and immediate deletion, manipulation, and deception. Facts no longer exist. In this future, human qualities and characteristics, such as empathy, judgment, big-picture thinking, kindness, and the ability to interact with each other, no longer exist.

Decrease in Access to Information

A final concern of roundtable participants was that AI would impede access to information. In this future, information always lives behind a paywall or is subject to premium memberships. Even access to AI services requires a fee. Nothing is open source. Bad metadata created by AI leads to more bad metadata: nothing is findable. Librarians exist only as custodians of the AI or are almost non-existent, replaced by a few highly trained tech workers who run the “library” AI. No human wants to be a librarian.

Needs: Identified needs arising from discussion

As the conversations at the Western roundtable weaved throughout the day, several needs arose. These needed actions echoed throughout all three of the topics (collections, space, and staff). In this consistency, participants saw a common theme: AI is here and we are already engaging with (or actively ignoring) it. The following immediate needs were identified:

- Legal information professionals need to be part of the AI conversation.
- AI needs to be approached thoughtfully, critically, and with an eye to accessibility.
- Collaboration and competition in the AI space needs to be encouraged and fostered.

A Seat at the Table

Legal information professionals must be part of the AI conversation. Conversations around AI, its use, its implementation, its pros and cons, etc., are happening across all institutions and at different levels within those institutions. Legal information professionals need to have a seat at that table and need to actively contribute to these conversations wherever they are happening, in various spaces and communities.

As part of the conversation, legal information professionals need to have open minds and be ready to reassess their own assumptions about libraries, librarians, information, access, and resources. As stewards of AI, legal information professionals must be the ones proactively testing, pointing out weaknesses and biases, and critically examining these new systems as they evolve. Law librarians should be determining how AI interacts with library systems and legal resources, and teaching patrons and users how to responsibly engage with AI as an information resource. Proactive engagement in professional development is needed around learning how to use, test, and evaluate these systems.

Analysis and Accessibility

AI needs to be approached thoughtfully, critically, and with an eye to accessibility. As stewards of information and information access, legal information professionals must analyze AI as they do any new source of information or database. Conversations with vendors to critically assess contracts, rights, and agreements must occur. How AI impacts intellectual property rights and antitrust law must be a part of the advocacy toolkit. Through their analysis, all legal information professionals must advocate for open-source AI, in how AI is used and presented. As AI integrates into resources and services, accessibility in every sense of the word (e.g. physically, mentally, digitally, legally) must be considered and evaluated.

Collaboration and Competition

Collaboration and competition in the AI space needs to be encouraged and fostered. AI could be the harbinger of a single information source that manipulates and closes off

information. Legal information is already too consolidated and monopolized by major players. More competition and additional avenues are needed for access to information. It is critical for legal information professionals to pay attention to court cases that examine these issues and talk with vendors, patrons, and others in various communities about ensuring open access to information.

Seeds: Interesting ideas for potential implementation

The conversation at the Western roundtable was remarkably upbeat. Significant challenges and needs were recognized (including the recognition that many of those conversations and decisions were already happening). However, participants focused primarily on the opportunities and potential ideas for the future. Based on those discussions, attendees identified the following seeds:

- A global consortium of AI-training librarians
- Active engagement as proactive advocates for information
- Skill-based hiring and development of a pipeline for AI training

A Global Consortium

One seed for next steps involves legal information professionals from across the globe coming together to create a global consortium. This consortium trains law librarians and other legal information professionals in how to interact, train, and assess AI models. These expert professionals then collaborate with vendors to help ensure that AI models are well-trained and accessible to users. This consortium would help propel legal information professionals as a vital group of experts working to improve AI.

Advocates for Information

Librarians, participants said, are already engaged in advocacy work, and could easily dive in more deeply to become advocates across multiple fronts. These advocates would work to advocate for and protect information, quality AI systems, access to justice, accessibility, copyright and fair use. Studies (some of which are already being developed) examine AI and provide both assessments and recommendations. Advocates reach out and develop working relationships with important stakeholders in multiple fields. Advocates participate in important conversations about AI policy and ensure there is representation for legal information professionals. Advocates regularly communicate with each other about common efforts and pool resources.

Within institutions, communities, and organizations, legal information professionals instigate conversations about AI. They actively engage with the challenges, benefits, impact, pros, and cons of AI and its broader implementations. As an advocate for legal

information, they promote regular discussions with stakeholders, patrons, users, and communities about AI.

Develop the Pipeline and Professional Development

Now is the time to coordinate and develop a pipeline of information professionals with diverse skillsets and competencies. The profession should actively recruit and train librarians interested in developing, vetting, and assessing AI and who then develop best practices for the use of AI, including when to ask a human and when to ask an AI. Hiring, training, and professional development focus on the valuable skills needed for today's success and future opportunities. The legal information profession regularly assesses the skills needed and evolve for the future.

Conclusion

The final roundtable of the first year of the Future of Law Libraries: Artificial Intelligence, Opportunities, and Advancement highlighted both the opportunities and the pitfalls of AI. As AI and its use evolves in the legal information industry (and in society as a whole), a variety of opportunities arise. Law librarians and other legal information professionals represent a variety of important interests in this conversation and are poised to be valuable stakeholders and advocates for responsible, collaborative AI. As participants in the roundtable identified, the future success of the profession will rely on collaboration, advocacy, and professional development opportunities focused on active engagement with AI. These conversations have already started. The time for librarians to engage with them is now.

Appendix A – Western Roundtable Participants, May 10, 2024

- Erik Y. Adams, Sidley Austin
- Joe Cera, Berkeley Law Library
- Kristie Chamorro, Berkeley Law Library
- Stephanie Davidson, Willamette University
- Tina Dumas, Nossaman
- Eli Edwards, UCLA School of Law
- G. Patrick Flanagan, BakerHostetler
- Jonathan Franklin, University of Washington
- Will Huggins, Stanford Law Library
- Brian Huffman, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
- Cas Laskowski, University of Arizona
- June Liebert, O’Melveny & Myers
- Michael Lissner, Free Law Project
- Rob Mead, Washington State Law Library
- Sharesly Rodriguez, San Jose State University
- Anna Russell, Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Library
- Rachael Samberg, University of California, Berkeley
- Jenny Silbiger, Hawai‘i Supreme Court Law Library
- David Whelan, San Diego Law Library
- Jessica Whytock, University of California, Irvine

Several attendees, who wished to remain anonymous, may have contributions appearing in this report.

We would also like to acknowledge our notetakers, who diligently and clearly captured the conversations held at the Western Roundtable. Without them, this report would not have been possible. They are:

- Sean Harrington, University of Oklahoma
- Lily Haupt, Stanford Law Library
- Grace Lo, Stanford Law Library
- Sergio Stone, Stanford Law Library
- Kristin Wolek, University of Arizona