

Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Law Libraries

Midwest Roundtable Report

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Please see Appendix A for full list of Roundtable participants

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Introduction

On March 1, 2024, legal experts and legal information professionals assembled at Georgia State University for the fourth regional roundtable on Artificial Intelligence & the Future of Law Libraries.

The Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety, an executive order issued in October 2023 by countries who attended the AI Safety Summit, calls us into action.

A major problem facing law libraries today is a gap of understanding about the value they bring to their institutions. Due to losing control of the narrative about their value, budgets may be cut and opportunities may be lost to support faculty, students, lawyers, clients, and judges. However, law libraries often are and can continue to be at the forefront of learning new and emerging technology. Moreover, law libraries are often a trusted source for embedding this knowledge about new and emerging technology within their institutions. Law libraries can shape the narrative surrounding the value of law libraries by training our staff to be effective teachers and promoters of new and emerging technology, being strategic in ensuring we are meeting the needs of our institutions, and collaborating across institutions to create standards and share insights.

Roundtable participants discussed possible strategies for libraries to take control of the narrative, and specifically how we can leverage AI to do so. Discussions focused on the need for AI-trained librarians, collaborations with law schools, firms, and court librarians, and demonstrating the law library's value to relevant stakeholders.

Key Takeaways

1. We need to shape the narrative surrounding the value of law libraries and how we can be harbingers of information trends and emerging technology.
2. It is important that librarians understand and utilize AI strategically.
3. We need to be realistic that AI has the potential both to increase and decrease library value, and so we must continue to reinvent ourselves to best serve the needs of our institutions.

Opportunities afforded by AI

Libraries could be seen as the primary resource center for AI. Libraries could expand beyond current ideas of what a library should be and could gain more freedom as a result.

Libraries are positioned to lead the discussion of AI use on campus and gain respect of university leaders, perhaps even influence curriculum development.

Using AI appropriately can help libraries cut back on “busy work”, so we can focus on human to human services , including teaching, customer service, and advocacy. As teachers about this technology, we have a role in fostering critical thinking skills needed to evaluate the technology and the information it produces. We can strategically reallocate resources to ensure we are meeting current user needs and reaching new patrons, proving our return on investment. This will also allow us the bandwidth to increase our value through recruiting qualified staff, continuing our staff’s professional development, and communicating our value to our stakeholders.

Libraries are positioned to lead the discussion of AI use on campus and gain respect of university leaders, perhaps even influence curriculum development. For law firms, librarians are positioned to be curators of information and skills. Librarians can and must be agile, continuing to develop skills so they can impart these skills to their communities.

Today’s librarians can collaborate with library schools to ensure future librarians have the skills modern libraries need. We can expand our traditional concept of what a law librarian can and should do and think outside the box of credentialing. We can even collaborate across and outside libraries to develop our own AI tools that are more equitable and less prone to bias, and work together to create standards for digital platforms.

Challenges of AI Adoption and Implementation

The doomsday scenario is that librarians and other professionals in the future no longer exist as careers or are whispers of what we used to be because we are seen as irrelevant due to AI. This fear can lead to digging our heads in sand, and ignoring the need to adopt and implement AI. If library staff are unwilling to take risks or learn new technologies and how to teach them, it can make it challenging for libraries to defend their value. The

challenge is to reinvent ourselves so we are not in opposition to AI but aligned with it to make us all more efficient and effective. Another institutional challenge is that human resources may not understand the need for adapting to future emergent trends, and so may not prioritize this in hiring decisions. Compounding these challenges is the lack of sufficient collaboration between libraries that AI and emerging technology requires of us. Without a consortia of law libraries focused on AI implementation, libraries lose budgeting leverage with vendors and our stakeholders then lose out in access.

We also have to be aware of the environment around us and their valid concerns. Due to concern for academic integrity, faculty may want to ban AI from classrooms. Due to concern for professional ethics, courts may be wary of AI use by lawyers. Additionally, the legal information field in general may be heavily influenced by what law schools and law firms decide they need to do to survive economically. In law schools, whatever investment is made, it must be equal with regard to access for all students. Student success is separate from personal resources.

As law libraries, the challenge we need to meet is showing and telling how law librarians can be harbingers of effective AI implementation to increase return on investment for library staff, students, faculty, lawyers, courts, clients, and other stakeholders.

Needs: Identified needs arising from discussion

Librarians must have the proper toolkit for taking advantage of AI. This starts with library education, which must foster growth and increasing skills. Libraries must also train their librarians so that they are able to use AI and to teach others how to use it, even if this may be outside of what they are comfortable with. This will keep the usage of AI rooted in the library so that it will continue to be seen as a resource center.

If librarians are experienced in new tools, then they will be positioned to be a part of the conversation surrounding those tools. They should focus on the idea that AI is a resource and that this is an information access issue. Those in the legal information field must coordinate to move towards standards for digital platforms.

Library collections must be prepared for AI. This means that all collection data must be accurate so that it can be processed correctly by AI.

Seeds: Interesting ideas for potential implementation

One idea is for libraries to develop an AI-capable system, which writes treatises so well that there is no need to purchase from publishers. This will give librarians time to develop niche collections because AI is developing our own treatises.

Libraries can use AI appropriately to cut out busy work and focus on advocacy and customer service. Ideally the library will be fully and appropriately staffed, and able to touch every user with a positive experience.

We can collaborate with library schools to make sure students have the skills modern libraries need. We can work with the information schools for micro-credentialing and training.

We can collaborate with each other to form a consortia around AI implementation, giving us budgetary leverage with vendors and more access to effective AI legal tools. This can also serve as a way to standardize and enhance librarian training about AI.

We can even collaborate across and outside libraries to develop our own AI tools that are more equitable and less prone to bias, and work together to create standards for digital platforms.

Academic law librarians should be communicating with court and law firm librarians on developing ethical frameworks for AI usage.

Conclusion

We need to shape our libraries' stories about AI where we have a vital role in implementing, evaluating, and teaching about it in our institutions. . Librarians must be ready to drive the conversation about AI and advocate for AI standards. We must be ready to collaborate with each other to enhance and leverage our resources and access. We need to invest in tools and training to equip librarians to provide AI training and instruction. AI will not make us irrelevant if we adapt and strategically assess where our skills and needs can work with AI to most effectively support our stakeholders. Law librarians have reinvented themselves before, and we can do so again. If we do so, law libraries can remain the trusted information centers of their institutions. As we learn and grow, so will our institutions and stakeholders.

Appendix A: List of attendees

Forthcoming