

LEADER  
PROFILE

# AN INSPIRED JOURNEY

Former AALL special interest section chair Larry R. Reeves's career has taken him from coast to coast—and back again.

---

**LARRY R. REEVES**

- ASSOCIATE DEAN, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LAW, AND DIRECTOR OF THE ALYNE QUEENER MASSEY LAW LIBRARY
- VANDERBILT LAW SCHOOL
- NASHVILLE, TN



## QUICK HITS WITH LARRY R. REEVES



### iPhone or Android?

iPhone

### Mac or PC?

I use a Macbook Air at home and use a PC at work.

### Text or phone call?

Text

### E-books or print?

Definitely print.

### Did you upgrade to Windows 10?

No, we're always at least one version behind.

### Phone order or GrubHub?

Prefer to call in.

### Favorite takeout?

I almost never order takeout—I like to eat out with people and don't eat at home. If I did, it would be Thai.

### Favorite app? Uber

currently belongs to the Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries and is also chair of the Society of Academic Law Library Directors.

*AALL Spectrum* recently spoke with the Oklahoma City native about working in higher education, the skills law librarians will need in the future, and the key factor that motivates law students to work in legal information.

### What inspired you to pursue a career in higher education?

I really loved law school. Unlike a lot of people, I went directly from law school to library school. About halfway through law school, I figured out that I didn't really want to practice and would probably enjoy staying in an academic environment.

I enjoy learning about a lot of different subject areas, and libraries provide great opportunities to do so. I don't consider myself an expert in any one particular field of law; but I work with experts in many different law specialties. I also really enjoy the teaching aspect—it's rewarding to work with students and witness their growth, from the time they enter law school to the time they start their career.

### Have you taken advantage of any additional educational opportunities since obtaining your Master in Library and Information Science?

I've participated in leadership development programs over the years, and I've pursued other professional development formally and informally. I just finished an Association of Research Librarians fellowship—a two-year, intensive leadership development program with a cohort of 26 fellows—that involved institutes and site visits. It was an invaluable opportunity to compare and contrast institutional culture at a number of different schools from the perspective of their senior leadership.

Also, AALL Annual Meetings are really an invaluable learning

Larry R. Reeves had part-time, work-study jobs in both his college and law school libraries; so becoming a law librarian, he says, was somewhat of a natural career choice. It's also ended up being somewhat of an adventure.

Reeves has moved six times to pursue degrees and new positions. Law school took him from Oklahoma to Philadelphia; obtaining his MSILS took him to New York's Pratt Institute School of Information. His career as a legal information professional began as a reference librarian at Brooklyn Law School and was followed by a cross-country move to Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

Reeves returned to New York in 2005 to work as an adjunct associate professor and reference librarian at Fordham University's School of Law. In 2008, he relocated to the Washington, D.C., area to serve as associate director

at the George Mason University School of Law Library in Arlington, Virginia. He's made one more move since—to Nashville in 2012—where he is currently associate dean, associate professor of law, and director of the Alyne Queener Massey Law Library at Vanderbilt Law School.

The one constant amongst all the change has been Reeves's involvement in the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) at national and local levels. He chaired AALL's Social Responsibilities Special Interest Section in 2009 and 2010 and served on the Bylaws and Resolutions Committee from 2002 to 2004. He

experience. I don't think I've missed an AALL conference since I started my career. I try to be involved. The meetings are an opportunity to connect with colleagues around the country; it's important to stay engaged in conversations about where the profession is heading and how libraries are changing to better serve patrons.

#### **Have you noticed any educational trends in recent years?**

Right now, because of the new ABA accreditation standards and requirements for experiential learning, all academic institutions are taking a look at whether or not they can design research courses to be a simulation course, thereby satisfying experiential learning requirements. That's a trend that's been going on for a while—toward making legal research classes less about bibliography and more about the practice of law.

When I started teaching, there was this sense, for myself, that if I wasn't standing in front of the class talking, students were going to think they weren't getting their money's worth. But actually, it requires a lot more effort to create a hands-on, interactive simulation than to lecture; and people get a lot more out of it. I've changed my teaching methods over the years, and seen that practice evolve within the profession. There are a lot less lectures and more simulations than there used to be.

#### **Would you say legal information professionals have access to education throughout their career?**

[My institution] certainly continues to fund professional development, as much as it ever has. There is such a diversity of learning opportunities that are available to the legal information professional now, that perhaps weren't available in the past. If a school can't fund travel or there isn't the opportunity to audit a course on campus, librarians can certainly take advantage of online courses. Everyday, I get a new email for a webinar I can sign up for and learn something new at my desk

without going to a conference or taking a course. For instance, Duke offers a MOOC (massive open online course) on copyright law that's really popular. A number of my colleagues took that this past year.

#### **What's the biggest higher education issue we are facing?**

Anticipating the skills that will be needed five to ten years from now and trying to build and develop a staff that possess those skills. The way libraries operate is already dramatically different as a result of the transition from print to digital; the types of skills librarians need now are much different than the types of skills needed when everything we bought was actually touched, processed, and put on shelves.

#### **Which skills are in high demand?**

We need people with technological skills. The types of research that law faculty are doing now are increasingly empirically driven, so they're more often using a large dataset to support their research. We need people who can understand, curate, and manage data so it can be manipulated in a way that can serve faculty research needs, and also be made available for others in the same field.

#### **How do you anticipate legal education will change in the next few years?**

It will be interesting to see how law schools adapt to the new marketplace, and also how library services change. A couple of faculty members at Vanderbilt partnered to teach a law innovation course, which essentially looks at how to capture disruptions in the legal marketplace—creating an app somebody could use to develop simple contracts; that sort of thing. The faculty member who developed the course said that when it was first offered during the 2013-14 academic year, the course created a lot of anxiety for students; you're talking about disrupting their career path and career goals. But he says the students he has this year are much more open to the

idea and much more entrepreneurial in their approach to managing their careers. The next generation has grown up exposed to technology and has learned to anticipate change.

#### **Do you foresee any other trends?**

The legal marketplace has changed so much. We've seen a drop of almost half the number of students applying to law schools; there are just fewer people seeking that traditional legal career path into the big firms. Certainly that path still exists, and will continue to, but I think we'll have a larger share of graduates looking at nontraditional legal career paths—in particular, ways they can capitalize on change in the legal marketplace. Changes are going to be occurring; shouldn't legal professionals be the ones managing that change?

#### **Are there any ways you think education in the legal information field won't change in the next decade?**

We can reach people through social media, or really any other means—but most people I talk to, when thinking back to why they decided to become a law librarian, usually were motivated by a positive interaction with a law librarian. I became a law librarian because of my relationship with my director at Temple, John Necci [Reeves earned his JD from the Temple University Beasley School of Law]; he encouraged me to go to library school.

A couple of students tell me each year they're interested in becoming a law librarian—maybe they enjoy the process of research or being in an academic environment. But you know, I think the reason they think it might be an option is honestly because they see people doing it, and it looks kind of fun. I've talked to colleagues who are law firm librarians who say a law librarian encouraged them to go to library school—that was their introduction to an alternative career opportunity. Ultimately, it comes down to the one-on-one relationship with a law librarian serving as an example for students or inspiring someone working in a firm. ■