

LEADER
PROFILE

THE NATION'S LIBRARIAN

As Acting Librarian of Congress, AALL member-leader David S. Mao oversees the largest library in the world.



DAVID S. MAO

- ACTING LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS
- LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
- WASHINGTON, D.C.

On October 1, 2015, David S. Mao was appointed Acting Librarian of Congress. Mao has been an active member of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) since 1996. He has participated in numerous AALL committees, special committees, and task forces and served as Executive Board treasurer from 2007-2010. His tenure as a law librarian has included work at a law firm, teaching as an adjunct professor, and a remarkable career at the Library of Congress.

The importance of the role of the Library of Congress in society cannot be overstated, given that, in addition to its service to the members of Congress and its support of the legislative process, its goal is to be “a chief steward of America’s and the world’s record of knowledge.” Indeed, the Library is the largest library in the world, with more than 160 million items that include books, recordings, photos, manuscripts, and other items of historical significance. It is the charge of the Librarian of Congress to bring the Library’s vision to life.

As Acting Librarian of Congress, Mao oversees the entire Library—including the Congressional Research Service, Copyright Office, Law Library, Library Services, and National and International Outreach—to ensure that its mission is being fulfilled. Mao previously served as the Deputy Librarian of Congress, in which role he oversaw the strategic reorganization of service units, the appointment of a chief operating officer, and the hiring of a chief information officer to lay the foundation for the successful implementation of “an open, agile and flexible five-year plan” to “effectively position [the Library of Congress] for the future.”

Prior to his appointment to Deputy Librarian, he served as the 23rd Law Librarian of Congress overseeing the services, collections, and operations of the Law Library of Congress, which hosts the most comprehensive legal

collection in the world. While there, he expanded its collections, improved storage, renovated the reading room, and improved access to legal materials in the public domain. He also oversaw the development of the *Magna Carta: Muse and Mentor* exhibition that celebrated the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta’s first issue and showcased the Lincoln Cathedral Magna Carta—one of four existing manuscripts dating to 1215—and

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS VISION AND MISSION

VISION: The Library of Congress is a chief steward of America’s and the world’s record of knowledge, and is a springboard to the future, while providing indispensable services to Congress.

MISSION: The Library’s central mission is to provide Congress, and then the federal government, and the American people with a rich, diverse, and enduring source of knowledge that can be relied upon to inform, inspire, and engage them, and support their intellectual and creative endeavors.

Source: “Library of Congress Strategic Plan: FY 2016 Through FY 2020.” Learn more at bit.ly/LOCplan.

over 75 items from the Library of Congress.

Mao recently shared his professional journey and career insights with *AALL Spectrum*.

What would you consider to be your primary early influences?

My time as a student at Georgetown University Law Center was the primary experience that led me to this career path. During my first year, I was given a legal research and writing assignment and had no idea where to begin. I went to the library’s reference desk and asked a librarian for help. He patiently listened to my questions, helped clarify my confusion with the sources, and then left the desk to guide me to the correct area of the stacks. He not only helped me find what I needed, but also demonstrated how to use the sources correctly and effectively. That developed my early appreciation and respect for the profession.

Tell us about your professional journey—from lawyer to Acting Librarian of Congress?

After law school, I was in private practice. A few years later, I took the opportunity to work again in a law library [Mao worked at Georgetown’s law library while earning his law degree], and at the same time, returned to school for a graduate degree in library science. I then worked for nearly eight years in various library positions at an international law firm. I joined the Library of Congress in 2005 as a section head in the Congressional Research Service, the part of the Library that provides non-partisan analysis and research for members of Congress. I was named Deputy Law Librarian in 2010, managing the global legal research portfolio of the Law Library of Congress, and then Law Librarian in 2012.

In January of 2015, I was appointed Deputy Librarian of Congress. I have had some wonderful experiences and opportunities at the Library of Congress.



Whether one comes to the Library of Congress in person or through our website, the Library empowers us in the present not only to touch history, but also to imagine the future.

What have the positions you've held taught you about the Library of Congress and the role it plays in society as the world's largest library?

Everyone has an open invitation to come here and learn. Whether one comes to the Library of Congress in person or through our website, the Library empowers us in the present not only to touch history, but also to imagine the future. One recent morning, I quickly surveyed reference librarians across the Library to ask what they were working on that day. The range of research they were helping patrons with was extraordinary—everything from the

transmission of measles to the art and architecture of Ethiopia. The Library is truly a dynamic place of discovery and learning.

ALL members look to the Library for its leadership in many areas, including classification and cataloging, digitization and preservation, and access to legal and scholarly information from around the world. What's one thing the Library is doing of which you're most proud?

All of these things are important and intertwined. The Library acquires, registers, catalogs, protects, preserves, and makes accessible the cultural heritage of the United States. I am most proud of the Library staff who make that all happen on a daily basis.

You have managed a lot of change during your tenure, including the strategic realignment of Library service units and the appointment of a chief operating officer and chief information officer. What are the keys to successful change management?

I have focused on collaboration and open communication. The staff members of the Library of Congress are talented, dedicated public servants who are passionate about their work and bring great ideas to the table. It is important not only to provide leadership, but also to communicate a direction and rationale, and then to listen to feedback.

How does your background as a law librarian benefit your current position as Acting Librarian?

As Law Librarian, I had to deal with a range of experiences applicable to the Library as a whole, including collection development, storage planning and improvements, expanding online access, and physical infrastructure updating. In both roles, I have drawn heavily on my library experiences—working with a large staff, collaborating with the scholarly community, using digital technology, and managing collection access.

Libraries and librarians have a mission-critical role to play in the information age. With so much information and data available, we offer expertise in navigating resources, ensuring primary source materials are accessible, and pointing researchers to lesser-known materials.

What's the biggest challenge you face as Acting Librarian?

Storage certainly is an ongoing issue and always has been at the Library. National creativity and output doesn't stop, and thus the nation's library collection will not stop growing. Our information technology infrastructure and processes also need updating, and we are making progress on that issue. And finally, human and financial resources are a challenge, as they are for any federal and cultural institution. So expanding our development activities to supplement our annual appropriations budget is an area where I'd like to see us do more.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the profession?

Most libraries share, to some degree, similar challenges as the Library of Congress, in terms of keeping up with information technology trends



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS STRATEGIC PLAN

As Acting Librarian, David S. Mao is charged with overseeing the 2016-2020 Library of Congress strategic plan. The plan encompasses:

- Service
- Collections
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Technology
- Organizational Structure

View the entire plan at bit.ly/LOCplan.

and making sure employees are well trained and prepared for the future. Resources also continue to be challenging for most public and cultural institutions. Libraries and librarians have a mission-critical role to play in the information age. With so much information and data available, we offer expertise in navigating resources, ensuring primary source materials are accessible, and pointing researchers to lesser-known materials. It is important that the profession is able to continue providing these critical services.

What career advice do you give to new law librarians?

Those new to the profession should create networks, not only within their organization but also externally. Librarians should join professional associations (both local and national—and perhaps even international) and attend conferences to give themselves the widest possible view of their industry. They should find a niche within that industry and know—and be able to express—how they can bring value to the organization.

What role has AALL played in your career?

Being a member of AALL has helped me to develop my professional skills and to advance my career. I've learned through the Association's many leadership opportunities (e.g., working on committees, special task forces, and the board) and been able to transfer those experiences directly to the workplace.

What's something most people don't know about you?

I have an adventurous streak—from scuba diving, to skydiving, to speeding on a race track. ■

QUICK HITS WITH DAVID S. MAO



iPhone or Android? iPhone.

Text or phone call? Text.

E-books or print? Both.

Last book you read for business? *Testifying Before Congress* by William N. LaForge.

Last book you read for pleasure? *Stabbing in the Senate* (authored by my Library of Congress colleague Colleen J. Shogan).

Most awe-inspiring book in the Library of Congress? Gutenberg Bible.

Most awe-inspiring non-book item in the Library of Congress? The "original rough draft" of the Declaration of Independence.

Must unusual item in the Library of Congress? The contents of President Lincoln's pockets on the night he was assassinated.