

Reference Librarian Interview

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For my reference librarian interview, I had the pleasure of speaking with Wanita Scroggs, J.D., M.L.I.S., who works at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida. Wanita is a Saint Petersburg native who obtained two bachelor degrees from Florida State University and Texas A&M, a law degree from Arizona State University, and her masters from University of South Florida. She has been working as a legal reference librarian for 20 years, after a career as a field investigator for the Department of Defense; her specialization as a law librarian is foreign and international law. Despite Wanita's previous experiences in a non-librarianship field, the career was not foreign to her as her mother was a librarian growing up and she was immersed in the field her entire childhood and young adult life. While talking, she fondly described her memories of getting her own library card as a kid, spending countless hours in the library throughout all of her degrees, and how she has found so much love and passion in the career.

My intentions when walking into this interview was to do more than just understand the basics of law librarianship. While sharing similar career goals as Wanita, being a Stetson Law alumna as well as currently working at the Dolly and Homer Hand Library (Hand Library) at Stetson Law has given me first-hand experience in the day to day schedule. Truthfully, Wanita was one of the first law librarians I ever met, and was one of the many great women in the Hand Library who inspired me to seek out librarianship. Growing up, I had always loved libraries and found excitement in public-interest related research, but I never knew there was a path where I could marry the two. For me, a successful career was never about the amount of money I could make, but more about the people I could reach, aid, and influence with my work. I can easily say that I have found exactly that with law librarianship.

There were two major themes that ran through my interview with Wanita: opportunities and wellness. While in law school, my classmates and I were constantly reminded as to how

difficult our first few years out of law school were going to be; between taking on obscene cases to working into all hours of the night, this was going to be our reality as associate attorneys. The legal field is all about winning at trial or getting big settlement—there is very little good in between the hustle and bustle which leads those in this profession to really neglect their wellbeing. However in recent years, there has been a huge shift towards prioritizing wellness within our legal community, and a lot of those movements have been directed by legal librarians! Whether it is providing wellness spaces in the library, having games and puzzles for students to decompress with, or even just being a listening ear, librarians have been serving on the forefronts to ensure positive change in the way the legal profession takes care of its workers.

It is no secret that lawyers and other legal professionals are constantly faced with ethical conflicts and high stress situations. This daily toll inevitably leads these individuals to turn to substance abuse, and have higher rates of depression. In 2022, about 20% of legal professionals reported having problematic drinking, and 28% reported having depression (Bezruczyk, 2022). Wanita explained that law librarian means more than providing research aid to students and faculty, teaching classes, and reshelving books, but also instilling into our students the importance of taking care of themselves in these high stress times. It is inspiring to see how much affect I will be able to have on my own students in the future, especially when now is the time that these foundational steps towards implementing wellness into the legal profession are being laid.

The other big theme to our discussion was opportunities. Law librarianship is one of the few job fields that require its professionals to obtain three major degrees: a bachelors, a juris doctor, and a masters. This requires 12 years of educational dedication, but can lend to a multitude of experiences. Our conversation regarding Wanita's prior career as a field investigator

for the Department of Defense had me reflecting on my past jobs and academic path. Over 12 years, I had dabbled in college admissions, clerking, medical research, environmental science research, and focused my degrees in environmental politics. In retrospect, nothing I had previously pursued would have ever led me to librarianship, but the skills that I had developed from them all created the perfect balance of interpersonal and professional abilities. It is hard to see the capital value of an experience when you have completely changed the career path you had initially started with. Despite how proud or accomplished I may be, imposter syndrome has consumed me a couple times throughout law school and my M.L.I.S.. When I discovered librarianship as that missing link between my passions and job, I immediately felt as if I had wasted so much time in the titles I had previously held. It took me talking to Wanita to realize the value of all the opportunities I had had up until now, and further how many more opportunities were about to come my way as I completed this degree.

I brought up this idea of opportunities at the end of my conversation with Wanita when I asked her what kind of advice she had for someone who was early on in this field, and her only piece of advice was to seek opportunities everywhere. Anything from classes I would not necessarily take, professional organizations and conferences, or even job and internships are all opportunities to grow in this field, whether they are related to my specific goals are not. I've come to understand that librarianship is all about learning, and that I will never learn if I constantly remain in the comfort of what I know and like. This interview has inspired me to look outside the bounds of law librarianship and discover other potential avenues of this incredible career, and I will continue to learn and grow from these conversations with coworkers and other professionals within the field.

Reference:

1. Bezruczyk, D. (2022, October 26). Alcohol abuse among lawyers and legal professionals. Alcohol Rehab Guide. <https://www.alcoholrehabguide.org/resources/alcohol-abuse-lawyers-legal-professionals/#:~:text=Among%20lawyers%20and%20legal%20professionals%2C%2020%25%20have%20%E2%80%9Cproblematic%20drinking.Thank%20you!>
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