

AALL-Rightsizing Law Library Collections

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Hi, everybody. My name is Nicole, and I'm a professor and director of special programs, academic affairs at Roger Williams School of Law. Welcome to Rightsizing Law Library Collections. During the program, all participants are encouraged to ask a question at any time, click the question pane on your control panel and type your questions. Your questions will be addressed in the Q&A later in the session. And live captioning services are available to you today.

To access them, please visit the link we're dropping in the chat right now. Thank you to the CPE committee and members of the AALL committee who helped plan this event and thanks to AALL for sponsoring the webinar.

To start with, I am going to read a land and labor acknowledgment and introduce our speaker. Roger Williams University School of Law where I am today is located in Rhode Island. I acknowledge the Indigenous people on which our campus resides. This country would not exist if it were not for the free and slave labor of Black people.

And the town of Bristol and the very campus our land is on have benefited significantly from the trade of enslaved people from Africa. The economy of New England, Rhode Island, and where I am located in Bristol was built from wealth generated through the triangle trade of human lives. During this time of our reckoning with slavery and the disparate treatment of Black people, we honor the history. While the movement for liberation and justice is building and we're witnessing the power of the people, many are still being met with violence and even being killed. Our hope is to become agents of change for members of our society who have been met with violence, physical, mental, and emotional. And as holders of justice, we believe that our students who will soon be practitioners of law can be and already are agents of change, as well.

We have the poll results. How would you judge your library's relevance to your parent institution? 47% said it was very relevant. 36% said it was somewhat relevant. Mostly 13% are not relevant. And 4% said it was entirely irrelevant. Thanks everybody for your honesty.

I am going to introduce Amanda. Amanda Bolles Watson is the director of the University of Houston Law Library and assistant professor of law and legal librarian. She teaches legal research. Her work has earned many accolades including the AALL LEXUS Nexus call for papers award, and a research grant from the AALL and LEXUS NEXUS. The director of the state librarian of Mississippi and the manager of information services at Phelps Dunbar, and a first-gen college student. She wrote a paper, which we may drop in the chat, but is also available on SSRN and was uploaded as a handout for this session and is going to largely serve as the basis for our discussion today. So, to start us off, Amanda, the paper presents a problem that how law is accessed has radically grown and changed over the last 200 years. But the idea of counting titles as a measure of quality in academic law libraries has not. Can you talk a bit about the history of this issue and then share sort of the concept of right sizing as the paradigm shift and solution.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Sure, when we think about the beginning of our country, we had very few laws and they could only be accessed if you could go to a place that held them. It made sense that a successful, quality law library is one that had the things that people needed to access. So, we see in 1876 an early report about law libraries that equate to number of volumes. At the time that was accurate. I call this a completeness model. Buy everything that you can, have as much stuff as you can, be as complete as you can so the people coming to

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your library can get what they need. But of course, that radically changed. Around the same time, we have these guys who are originally going to come west. They publish cases, we have the treatise boom. Make the law review this super prevalent thing. And then the internet happens, and everything has changed. By that point it's impossible really that even Library of Congress would have a complete collection; right? But because of certain things, we're still trying to have a complete model. So, namely, I'm talking about the ABA standards. Then in 1985 U.S. News and World Report starts modeling that volume question and they didn't drop it until 2022. A hundred years more than that, and we're still sort of equating our success with this paradigm that's completely shifted, but we haven't shifted how we're measuring quality.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Thank you. You described the problem of where and how and in what form institutions value the library. You state quote the misplaced belief that all academic law libraries should be large spaces filled with massive physical collections has created over many years a false vision of law libraries as expensive warehouses of individual materials instead of houses of innovation. This distorted view distills the quality of libraries to merely the size of their collections. End quote and woof. I hear you.

Do you have a method for assessing how effective libraries are at meeting their missions? Is this a bit of a dog chasing its own tail. If the librarians at the libraries are creating their own mission statements and then assessing them based on how good, they are at following the mission statements they created are we just then running around in circles?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think the circle could only happen if no one is paying attention and nobody cares, which we know in librarianship is one of our biggest problems is we care too much. I doubt there are a lot of places that are creating a self-serving circle here. The way to know if you're succeeding is through assessment. And planning and assessment are two sides of the same coin. And oftentimes as librarians we're good planners, but we're not sometimes allowed to assess. Because our needs are not at the forefront. We would love to throw this stuff away or recycle it or donate it or whatever, except we need to keep our volume count high. That was the major thing I was thinking about when I started thinking about this paper probably six years ago. There are many ways to assess yourself. I love logic models. I have a little article coming out in Spectrum soon about how to do a logic model for anybody who wants to learn how to do that. There are many ways to do an assessment. It does not have to be super formal. It's basically the process of your entire team at every level just gathering feedback about whether the things you're doing are meeting your goals. And with collections, you know, there are ways that we do that currently, like checkouts and, you know, use counts. But there are other things we could be doing, as well, to see if we're really meeting our mission.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Sure. The article really focuses on how a high prayer library should be attuned and focuses on the unique mission of its parent institution. Some schools are focused on bar passage, others to faculty scholarship. How about when an institution changes its focus? How can libraries practice responsiveness?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think that's through planning. Every library should have a long-term plan and a short-term plan, and your plan should be responsive to its institution. We're regulated to serve our institutions. So, if your institution changes its mission then you also have to change your mission. I can think about things like, you know, at UH for a while we were really, really focused on energy. So, our energy collection was really bustling. And then that just kind of ticked down a little bit. We didn't stop. It just wasn't as prominent. So, we kind of had to think about how do we re-shift our mission around collection services around energy.

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It's a constant process. You don't plan once and assess once. You plan all the time. And you assess all the time. It becomes this continuous cycle of improvement where you're sort of always reaching and trying to be better and learning and doing more.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: How practically do you do that? Do you have a planning committee that works throughout the year? Do you have a regular spend the month of June every month assessing everything? Practically at your library, how do you do that?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I don't think your off base where you have touch points for big planning session. If you can get to a different part of campus or a different part of your building so you're really focused on that. But part of it, people are like always looking for birds or whatever. You should always be thinking about what.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Do people say always be looking for birds?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Yes, birders, Nicole. You're not a birder and now we know. There are birders on this call. What is working? What's not working? What do you have support for? This is how you find out things. If you stay in a one time a year, you're not getting information. The people in the circ desk know if it's working. The people in collections, the people replacing labels, or shifting, moving chairs. It's sort of constantly like tell me what's happening and be immersed and invested in your entire team is the way to plan and assess. But then yes, I do pull what I would call my exec people together to do more like focused planning. Like okay, this is what I found out. This is what you found out. Share information plan, push that back out. We'll do an all-staff, how do people feel about these words, what do you think about this? And that kind of. It's very hard work to do, but I think it's important and good work.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I just want to give a shoutout to the extroverts, library staff. We are often the people who are talking to everybody. So, when a faculty member has a new interest or something they're delving into or a student group is particularly focused on something or bringing in a hot new speaker rings, it's usually the extroverts. Anyone out there who is doing some type of planning, look to your extroverts. They can't just talk to the people in the library. They have to talk to the people everywhere and they generally know what's going on. My next question is sort of going back to the dusty books. In the article you made this connection between stakeholders seeing dusty, irrelevant books and being very dismissive of the value of the library. And further the value of the law library staff. So, how can we avoid being so easily dismissed and undervalued by our parent institution, whether that's a school or a firm or a court?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think we have to tell the truth. I mean we know that there are things in our collections that don't get used. And sometimes we might say well, you know, I know this isn't getting a ton of use, but the use it is getting is very important. I'm going to keep it for that reason. That's true. That works. But there are also things that we know are just we're dusting them. We are literally dusting them. And that disconnect between us not saying these are things we can let go of. Our administrators know there's a disconnect. We're not telling the truth always.

About what's realistic in our collections. I think that goes back to other things that we talked about, about fear of loss. And we can talk about that more. But I think just being honest is the most important. And not all of us have supportive administrators that we feel like we can have

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those conversations with. So, I know there's more to it than just, "Just tell the truth." But that's where the disconnect comes in, I think.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I feel like I've heard people say I'm afraid of giving up this set because there's going to be a space grab, because there's going to be, it's going to seem like we're not as busy as we are. So, we'll get to fear. But I know that definitely played a role in it. Jennifer, if we could put up question number two, our next anonymous survey question. On the theme of value. Do you feel as though your parent institution values the law library staff? And your choices are very much so, mostly, somewhat, not at all, and I don't know. I don't know what to do with the dead air. I feel like I want to tell a joke, but that doesn't seem like a good idea.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: When you were talking about extroverts before, I want to put in a plug for your introverts, too. And say it is a manager's responsibility to create a culture where introverts have ways to contribute. You might have to build some trust with someone and build a community, but you really do need buy-in at everybody level, not just from one or two key people, but from all the people to do successful planning and assessment. We're all embedded in different ways.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Yeah. That's absolutely right. As you can see our poll results are hovering around mostly and somewhat at 37% and 35%. I'm glad that not at all is under 10%. And kind of disappointed that very much so isn't higher. But again, thanks everybody for being honest. So, about fear. What role does fear play in the process of right sizing your collection?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think it is maybe the biggest part of the story. You know, all of our professors, most of our faculty members went to elite institutions with beautiful, just jaw-dropping, awe worthy collections. Some of those people might be on this call right now. Part of their mission is to have these beautiful collections. They have the people, the archivists, to care for those collections. Then that trickles down to people who do not have the staff or space or conditions or frankly the beautiful collection. We've got stuff. I don't know that I would call it beautiful; right? But our faculty almost expects little miniature versions of their preeminent institutions. I make the joke that we're all measured of how Yale we are. On a scale of Yale to Yale. Frankly, I had a conversation with librarians at Yale and they're like we're not even that anymore. We're cleaning out storage units. How do we get past this perception that we're not successful if we don't look like Harvard or Yale or Michigan. And I think the way through that is to be, to have more of a message about what our missions are and to tell that story more openly and to know that you are going to throw away something somebody wants. You are. For me, it was a few weeks ago somebody was like there was a yellow book that was on this shelf. They didn't even know the title. I'm going to have to let that go, it was for the greater good that that book isn't there. The just-in-time need is going to come through for you. You're going to be able to borrow things. It's going to be okay that you through away a hundred-year-old law journal. Some people are not going to like it and that's just going to have to be. Not all of us are in a position to take that on and I think that's a critical choice of like when and how you do rightsizing. But facing the fear and knowing you're not alone. I've done it and there are other librarians that you can call on and talk to, to help you through it.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I also think that we are not what we have in the collection, the physical collection at any given moment. We are a network of amazing professionals, all over the country, who will pick up the phone when someone calls or answers an email and shoot us something that we absolutely need. Also, making the standard completely unreachable sets us up for failure.

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Even by the standard bearers. Also, it doesn't leave room for the growth and change and decolonization that you also talk about in the paper where the sort of more traditional law libraries may not be collecting in some of the areas that are most relevant and most diverse. So, there are other values. And it needs to be okay that there are other values when we're ascribing value to our institutions. Following up on the fear question, how do we know when that fear was well founded? When does the concern about an electronic format and relinquishing control be unhelpful?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: This is an important question. It has concerns with inertia and consortia. We have pockets of places that are doing really well in that. But it's not that our fears aren't founded. Any of them. It's that they may not be as important as other considerations and you have to figure out where the balance is for you.

I was having this conversation with somebody who was like listen, I have the space. I have the space. I'm not in danger of losing the space. What do I do? How do I become more responsive to mission? That was more about a shift and a move and having a historical collection and a current collection than it was about rightsizing in terms of recycling, donating, letting go of things. The hard decisions, they just come in monographs. I'll be real honest. You will know. You can get buy-in from your whole team and there will just be something that everybody disagrees on and you really are looking at these books like one by one to decide what to keep and what to let go of. And I think the answer there is if you can't let go of it, that's okay. Ask again in a year. Ask again in a year. Ask again in a year. We've just started the process here, reviewing the collection from last year. And it may change in a year. It may change in two years. I'm not saying you have to you're not going to do it perfectly. There's no such thing as perfect. But you just have to do your best to make the call on every title, on everything you're doing.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Thank you. Can you talk us through a specific practice and describe how rightsizing would work? You state the habit of trying to collect as many titles as possible has created some buying policies that should be reevaluated. For instance, collection development policy might say that materials should not be duplicated across formats, meaning if held electronically, it should not be held in print. This decision is based on having as many titles as possible rather than carefully considering each title and the best format for that title. Although format is certainly part of the decision-making, the paramount consideration should be alignment with mission, needs, and priorities. Can you talk about how right-sizing as a principle guides this work?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Yes. So, I think often the reality of what happens to us is that we have to purchase these wholesale sets of materials from the West, from LEXUS most prominently and other companies, as well. But then there's a strange budget dollar. You're thinking we have that on West, and we won't get it on print. Then you try to teach a group of people how to use the encyclopedia and you realize it's hard to do online and doesn't really lend itself to the format. Maybe I did need this thing. Study aids. Maybe we're going to keep these online study aids and not buy print study aids, but maybe print study aids are actually more effective than online study aids. It becomes this question. I think what you have to do is ask yourself what should your collection be made up of? Are you still going to have times when it's between these two titles and this title is on LEXUS, which I have to pay for. But it doesn't mean we should all cancel our favorite encyclopedia just because it's on West Law. It may be the mission of our institution that first years are still learning to do research, so we get the encyclopedia. One thing I found, Nicole, is most libraries had already rightsized their purchasing

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because they had to, because of budget. But they were holding onto dead titles to inflate their title and volume count.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Can you talk specifically about that? So, if I'm afraid that if I give up room, there's going to be a space grab, what would you advise? Would you advise we'll give up the room because maybe rightsizing to you means maybe doing something else with that space that's mission oriented to the university or the law school? Or would you say rightsizing in this case may mean keeping the dusty books that no one uses on the shelf because it will continue to be library space.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I would encourage us all to stop thinking of loss in this way, that small is loss. Or that giving up space is a loss. Or that we've done something bad. The reality is that sometimes there is a better use for that space; that's just realistic. Also, you're not really using the space. You're just using it as a storage facility. But we've been fed this message that if we're not large, we're not successful. And I think everyone should just forgive themselves for thinking that because you have been told it very directly.

So, if that still lingers in your mind, it's fine. It is a paradigm shift to say stop asking me how many volumes we have. That's not how we measure quality here. Stop asking me about my square feet. I don't answer emails about square feet. Stop it. That's not what's important about us. What's important about us is what we do, how we connect people to our materials. Those materials may be on our shelves or somewhere else. If I think about Iowa, it's like this palace of books. And it should be because that's what they intend and set out to be and they have the funds and the team to have that collection. But it doesn't mean that you have to be that collection, or I have to be that collection. I think about when I see sort of pictures of law libraries, it is the like very serious-looking, remarkable, you know, leather-bound books. Right.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: That sort of sticks with me as what we're supposed to be. And then another thing is like the very clean lines, like big, innovative space. But that doesn't leave a lot of room for what many of us actually are, which is something that's short of that, but not less good.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Or has qualities of it, it has pockets of it. A lot of us have spaces where we can keep some of those beautiful sets and they are functioning as decorative. But as I talk about in the paper, there is science that that decoration matters. It matters to a lot of students that many of us are trying to attract. It helps them cognate more deeply because they take themselves more seriously. There's nothing wrong as I jokingly call books as wall paper. It does make people feel a certain way. There's evidence that it makes people feel a certain way. But probably floors and floors of that is not needed. For us it aligns with a study space. We have all of our old Texas Reporters and Texas Codes. They're beautiful. They do mean something to students, but it doesn't mean we need to keep every old title we have.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: You talk about saying law librarians should also constantly consider how they should decolonize and diversify their materials. Can you talk a bit about how rightsizing and decolonization coexist?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Sure. I think it's just a factor in every decision we're making. The same way as like do we have the staff to keep this up to date. Like all of those different things? We know that our collections are written primarily by white men because those were the people who, you know, wrote things for centuries. So, now when we have a decision to make and we

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can choose something that is more diverse, we should because it matches the population of our students and it matches the population of the profession of law and we need those voices, you know, to match the voices that we're trying to educate.

For me, it literally comes down to choice and monographs. There are lots of ways to do. This I'm still hoping that Greenslips will add some sort of significance if there's a minority author or editor on something. I would love to see that. But it hasn't happened yet. It takes a little bit more work than that. But I think it's work worth doing.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Could you advise those of us who may be at an institution where they are not focused on decolonization or diversifying the law?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Sure. I'm in Texas, hi. I literally have a bail bondsman in my phone if I get arrested for lending a banned book to a minor. I'm not even allowed to say DEI in Texas anymore.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: This is a whole other session.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: We can have tea as we talk about it. To have a collection that is more balanced is the point here, not one that is specifically one race or ethnicity. It's just not all one type of voice. There's lots of ways to do that. And it will depend on what the point of your institution is, how you're doing that. And then in that way I don't think it can be out of tune with your institution because we're all collecting. You can just think about your collection and how that piece fits in for you. And for some it will be bold principal ways. For others it will be because we choose one monograph over another because we want to include more minority voices.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: The article touches on how a rightsized collection makes things more findable both on the shelf and online. Practically this requires an investment in quality meta-data and systems work. Can you speak to how these changes were made or this process unfolded at your library?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Yeah. I probably for 20 years now have been talking about although I love government documents and I have a particular love for government librarians, our catalogs, if you put in a search, most of our catalogs just return government documents because of the way the titles are. And they're often not the thing that you're looking for. Because discovery layers don't really work for law libraries, because our vendors don't participate in them. It's been this mission of mine to figure out how we make finding more useful for students. There are people like us who are going to find the materials, because that's what we do. But for others, our catalogs are basically just inventory control. They're not discovery devices. So, how do we change that? How do we make that different? And an obvious answer, an obvious step for me was to declutter. Just like in your home, you need to clean out your closet because you can't find the things you're looking for, it is the same in your stacks and in the same in your electronic records. You have to do the same sort of maintenance and pull out the things that aren't serving what you're trying to do. So, then if a student does a search that's as simple as like contracts, they're getting the things you want them to get. And that's coming back to you. I was lucky to walk into an institution that had a very clean catalog. It was reflective, which meant we had a ton of work to do, but it was clean. Not everyone has that. Some people would have a three-year project before they could even attack an idea like meta-data. It's knowing where you are and being realistic with yourself. This may be a 6, 7-year project. But if you can get the junk out of the way, then the other things become easier to discover, on the shelf and in the catalog.

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NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: So, it's the year 2023 when we're recording this. It's nearly 2024. Do you think that law students use the catalog as a discovery tool?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Some of them do. We know because we see, we can see it; right? In our statistics. We can see that they are trying. Do I think that they are successful? Maybe if they know what they're looking for. I don't know that there's a lot of success happening in broader finding, in browsing-type behavior. And I think that's another webinar; right? On the innovation of whatever this next layer is going to look like. It's a problem I'm working on. I know a couple of other people are working on it. But I do tend to think that our catalogs have become more collection and inventory control and that's something we need to face as a profession, I think.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I'm not doing any work on this. I'm just complaining about it. I feel like we spend all of this time focusing on teaching the students how to use it only for them to not use it and not use it effectively and I get very frustrated with this. But that is my hot take. I have a few more questions. But if anyone wants to throw questions in the GotoWebinar question-asking mechanism or chat, feel free to. So, let's say you need to make a hard decision, as you sort of described monograph versus monograph. And this is like the end of the year, low-budget, make a big decision. What kind of data do you draw upon to rightsize the collection at your law library?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: So, I'm going to guess that you mean data as in information and not data as in statistics? Is that right? Or do you mean statistics?

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I think I mean both. Whatever statistics you keep that would inform that choice versus data as information.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: So, I love to have a price per poll. That's a big one for me. I like to see in the area how much are we paying. So, in that subject area, how much are we paying per pull for items, whether I'm going to buy something else in that area. I think about our teaching focuses. You know, what are we teaching right now? What our faculty? What are we doing scholarship on? All of those things are going to pay into the decision about whether we make a purchase, and the price. Who the authors are, are we adding diversity to the collection in any way? All of those things are going to come up for me.

If it's an area of the library that we're already strong in, I'm much less likely to get something. And an easy way I found to do this, and somebody here may have a more brilliant suggestion is I just print out the classifications, like Library of Congress classifications for all of KF and we sort of have like a yellow, you know, green, yellow, red on like how well we feel we've collected in different areas. And then we also know our, you know, from our own planning what our areas of major collection are. And then those get a little bit heavier-handed treatment in the green before we go to the yellow or a red.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: When you're going through some of the process of training, do you have anyone who is resistant?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: There's the Weeding Handbook, and the Complete Collections Manual, which I tell everybody about. Madeline Kelly. These are not for law libraries, because there's not a ton for law libraries, other than a few cool articles. You're doing work much harder

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than weeding. Because if you're weeding, you're looking at things that someone intentionally bought or kept only like a year ago. And most of what we're doing, I mean I have been sent pictures by people who are working through this process of things they had to pry off the shelf because it was like fused, molded. This is not weeding. And we're really not doing ourselves any favor by describing it that way because it's much harder than what we're doing with weeding. Weeding is a regular process, and you go out in your garden every couple days and you pull up.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: You do that while you are looking for birds?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: You can. You can weed and look for birds at the same time. Absolutely. (Laughter). So, I think training is a big one. And then, you know, cooperative method. This is not one person's job. Do not send your poor collections librarian out into the collection and tell them to rightsize it. It has to be a group effort. The reference librarians are brought in, the teaching librarians are brought into this process because you'll have different expertise, and many hands will make the work easier or at least more enjoyable to complain about than if only one or two poor people are doing it.

For those of you who are going to be the heads of these teams, you're going to touch every single thing. It's an impossible amount of stuff that you're going to look at and touch, but it's worth it in the end. Super hard work, but worth it.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: My advice on this is don't overwhelm your team with too much at one time. Because I've been at institutions where we were rightsizing a huge number of titles at one time, and it became too easy to say I don't have time to do that now. I don't have time to do that now. Instead of this is a priority, let's just get this done in a thoughtful way. So, I don't know. I like to tell people to eat the frog, but it is impossible to eat the frog if you have everything on your plate and then there's this huge number of titles, I have to take a look at.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Right.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I have a question from the audience.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Great.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Thank you, Natalie. What level of input do you seek or are you required to seek from faculty when deselecting resources?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: So, I definitely let them know what we're doing. But I also want to be very clear that we're the experts. That we're the ones who know what needs to be kept and what doesn't need to be kept.

I think there's some hand-holding that has to happen here, because you're going to have, you know, we had one faculty member who would say things like, "I want to give you these books to keep" and then I said well I don't want to keep them. They would say what a shame. But you didn't want them. Can you look at yourself there for a second? You don't keep everything. This is not an archive. We don't employ archivists. This is not temperature controlled. We have water sprinklers. Let's be realistic about what we're doing here. You will have faculty members who have the expertise that you want. You may email them a selective choice. We are looking at the philosophy section and we have these titles. They don't come off the shelf. Are any of these

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fundamental to what we're doing? But I would never say dear faculty, please come to the library on Tuesday and everybody give us your opinions. The story that I'll tell about this is the book giveaway story. We've all done this, right. Where you say here is a cart of things to give away and things disappear off the cart but then they show up again. People took them but then they realize oh, I don't actually want this. I think some of it is like taking medicine. Some people are going to be disappointed and that's just going to be what it is. The big things you do have to educate about are when you recycle, you definitely want to let your administrators know. And if you have like a marketing team know. Because there have been universities who have big social media. We found ourselves putting signs up. Here is why we're doing it instead of just asking the question.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I'm from a local government law library. My focus is on practitioners. But maybe this can be useful to academia, as well. When weeding older monographs, a large part of my decision depends on whether that area is affected by old law. It's a terrible way to describe it. But for example, a family law treatise from the 1950s will never be helpful to a practitioner, whereas treatises about HOAs and HOAs could be. We're the ones who know what to keep and what not to keep. How do I learn this skill of what to keep and what not to keep?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think even newer law librarians can understand this concept you're describing. Our admiralty books, it's okay if they haven't changed in 50 years. But we wouldn't even keep something about AI on the shelf for a year or two years before it's completely overwrought. There are times in academic institutions where we want to keep the scholarly record. We want to keep the thing that's outdated even if we signal that it's outdated in some way. Someone needs to be sort of keeping the record. I think you're right. I think about the age of material, area of collection, whether that's still a strong material. That's the weeding part, Nicole. In the year-to-year you're pulling the list of current treatises and texts back up and going through it again. Did any of this age out? We had a lot of interest in maybe one Supreme Court justice. We had a lot of biographies about that person. But as their career moves on maybe you only need one or two. You don't really need 20 books on that person. You can pull down based on different factors.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Do you use, as a consideration, who else collects in this area or who else has it? Or is it solely internally focused?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think this is a really tricky question, because if we're all getting rid of things at the same time, we can't really rely on who else holds it. I definitely think about is this something that has a persistent record. But if I think it's super important, I might still hold onto it anyway because it might be let go of. That's a difficult one. There are some great schools that do that work and I think that's fantastic. I would definitely look at it in the reverse to say if only three places hold this, this is something that we should hold, but I'm probably going to give it to main university where they have a special collection instead of keep it here in my pretty space.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I find these decisions hard because I live in a small state with almost no law libraries. Even if the law libraries exist, they don't have the resources that we have. And so, whether you want to be a repository for your state's legal information or not, you sort of end up being a repository for your state's legal information. We may also be the only library that has the ability to catalog it and tell people we even have it. So, there's some pressure. It may not be explicitly your school's mission to do this function, but practically you might be. Which

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might be different in a state like Texas, which I mean it's lousy with law libraries.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: We do have great law libraries, but it's also 800 miles wide. So, I don't know how many Rhode Island's we could fit in Texas, but it's a lot, Nicole. I think if you put the outline of Rhode Island over Houston, we might be in the same situation. Right?

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I heard there's a ranch in Texas that's bigger than the entire state of Rhode Island.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I'm sure. I'm sure. We have a wonderful public law library in Harris County. The Harris County Law Library is a fantastic law library. They we do lean into them, and they lean into us about collection. If you have public visitors, that's part of our mission. We have to keep our state practice materials in print because there's some great people who talk about this in literature. That's a social justice issue. It can't just be online because they can't access it that way. We're not a public-facing library. We just face our students and faculty. We actually let go of things that we're like oh, why are we collecting? When I got here, we bought all of these Nola Press books. We need to buy things for students. It goes back to your mission and what it is you're doing. We have UT just three hours away and they're great about loaning things to us. So, we definitely lean into that. But they also get a lot more money from the legislature than we do, so we feel pretty comfortable having that sort of big brother relationship with them.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Sure. I have another question that's a variation of one of the other questions. What do you do about older material at a research library if you feel the need to hold onto it versus, you know, sort of the rightsizing? What are some other factors in the decision?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think if you feel the need to hold onto it, you have rightsized. Like if you know you're going to need it, that is rightsizing. It's not the age alone that is the point of rightsizing; it is the relevance to what you're doing., you know, if it's something that's being used, it's not dusty; it's not idle. But I do think there are oftentimes idle collections that happen to be old; right? It's because we've kept dead serials and dead volumes on the shelf, but it's not a corollary. That's just the thing. You may find yourself keeping something quite old because you think it has value. We have some Mexican Law collections that are quite old, but we are one of the only libraries in the country that has them, so we keep them. It's right for us.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Sarah points out that according to Texasproud.com there are 221 Rhode Islands that can fit in with the state of Texas.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Thank you. I'm so glad there are reference librarians on this call, and I appreciate you for that. (Laughter).

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I have another question about the collection development policy. Do you include decolonization ideals in your collection development policy?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: We do. We do. We have to be a little bit careful about how we say it because we're not allowed to say it in Texas. Just we can't say DEI in Texas. But we do. We do talk about that. Our collection development policy, our collections librarian is amazing, and we worked really hard on our collections development policy to try to make it really responsive to what we actually do. And that's really difficult work.

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NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: My next question is about the process. So, it seems like you need to look at your mission. You need to look at what other statistics or information that you have. And you need to look at your policy and then you need to be making decisions and then it's iterative.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Mm-hmm.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Have you changed your mission statement since you've been doing this rightsizing work? And what advice do you have about changing mission statements within the context of rightsizing?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I think you change your mission statement when your school and university change theirs. Or you revisit. Maybe it doesn't change. But you revisit it. So, our school runs on a five-year plan. I know a lot of state schools run on a five-year plan. We just eclipsed our five-year plan and went into a new one. A lot of things changed but some things stayed the same. As we weed this year, I have no doubt things will change. As we collected, things have changed. We have less oil and gas. We have more new technology for energy. We still have oil and gas, but not as much as it used to be. I think that you revisit it, whether you change it or not, probably at least once a year. And especially in response to changes that happen at your university or at your law school.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: I also love that the mission becomes something you can point to if there is sort of dissension about some of this.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Yes.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: It is guiding your work and because of that you're able to refer to it and say this is what I'm given, this is what we're working on. Take a look at the mission. If it's a tricky question.

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: Absolutely.

NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: It looks like I don't have any more questions. But is there anything else you wanted to say to finish us off? Final thoughts?

AMANDA BOLLES WATSON: I loved that we talked about value of librarians so much and we talked a little bit about faculty buy-in. But one thing I talk about in the paper is the idea that, you know, law libraries are sort of the holder of like little elves that do all the hard work and part of that is this idea of serendipity and your faculty members are going to say to you oh, but what about the serendipity of browsing the stacks? So, I think my challenge to all of us is that is not serendipity. There are three people behind that. Somebody who decided to give the brochure, the collections team decided to buy it, the access team put it on the shelf. The technical services team made sure it was shelved and labeled correctly. You've been set up. You've been put into a field of beautiful things to pick something beautiful. Congratulations. But in taking control, this is our work. We are the experts in this. That disconnect starts to fade. The value mismatch goes down. Because a lot of people were saying, I think 47 people were saying the library was very valued but then that number fell a lot when it was like the people behind the library. I think we have to kind of start shucking off this thing where we're perfect. We don't need anything. We don't eat or drink. We don't need to rest. We just work quietly in the corner sometimes. No, this is our very hard work that we're doing.

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NICOLE DYSZLEWSKI: Okay. Well, Amanda, thank you so much for being a total hero and talking to us about this. But stay tuned for part two. Amanda and Nicole and the bail bonds person. (Laughter). Thank you, everybody, for joining us. We appreciate your time. The recording of this will be available on AALL's eLearning soon. And have a great morning or afternoon.