Everything You Need to Know About the Law Society Library: Value, Innovation, and Service

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Good morning. I'm excited to be here to speak about law libraries, because working in a law library is an experience I've found to be deeply rewarding. I'd like to take this opportunity to provide some background on the Law Society Library, to talk about what I do as a law librarian, and to convey the vibrancy, variety, and complexities of modern law libraries.

The Law Society of Saskatchewan regulates Saskatchewan's legal profession. To govern lawyers, the Law Society enforces standards for conduct and competence. The goal in regulating competence is to protect the public. While the Law Society isn't a government organization, it's authorized by legislation to carry out this task. Every province has a Law Society which also supports a law library system.

Organizationally, the library is part of the Law Society's Legal Resources department. The library supports the legal information needs of all 1800 lawyers in the province, as well as the public, by providing a practitioner-focused legal collection covering every area of Canadian law, legal information services, and research assistance. We've also stepped into the role of publisher and database developer. Saskatchewan is too small to attract much attention from Canada's legal publishers, so we've created a variety of Saskatchewan-focused legal publications and databases. We provide two staffed libraries in the Regina and Saskatoon Queen's Bench Courthouses, as well as several unstaffed libraries in rural courthouses.

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Many law libraries, including ours, have a unique funding model. Lawyers are required to be members of the Law Society and a portion of their annual fees funds the Library. We also receive an annual grant from the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, a charity that distributes interest generated by lawyer trust accounts.

Like most practitioner-focused law libraries, our mandate was historically centred on maintaining lawyer competence by ensuring lawyers had access to the resources they needed to practice. Technology has enabled law libraries to push the limits of how this is accomplished. Thanks to the leadership of past library staff, including my fellow panelist Susan Baer, the Library embarked on a desktop access model for online resources that we continue to this day. Our goal is to facilitate lawyers' access to online legal resources no matter their location in the province. This is key as our lawyers are geographically more spread out compared to other provinces. This approach has led to some challenges. Primary law (case law and legislation) is generally available online for free. eBooks and online sources containing legal analysis are not. Canada's legal publishers can be resistant to licencing online resources to practitioner law libraries in ways that makes sense for law libraries.

Our mandate has also grown in recent years due to the growing number of individuals representing themselves in court due to Canada's access-to-justice crisis. This has enabled us to diversify beyond our historical role and place greater emphasis on serving the public. Helping the public has become a larger and larger priority for law libraries looking to demonstrate continued relevancy in an environment of budget reduction.

As a librarian in a small special library, I wear multiple hats: I sit on the reference desk, conduct research, help the public, lead instruction sessions, write blog posts, maintain the collection, evaluate new products, help negotiate licences, and so on. Every day is different. Like many law librarians, my day is shaped by the reference and research requests I receive. Our Saskatoon reference librarian, Ken Fox, and I provide a full range of reference services to lawyers in the province.

Lawyers information needs are practical, time sensitive, and can involve any area of the law. They are connected to a legal action or are part of a lawyer's efforts to stay up-to-date with the law. Needs range in complexity from simpler requests to in-depth research on a point of law. The more straightforward requests I answer could involve locating a case, statute, or literature on an area of the law. I might be asked to determine sentencing ranges for a criminal offence, identify how courts have interpreted a case or statute, or trace legislative changes.

Ken and I provide in-depth legal research to lawyers as well. In this situation, a lawyer wants me to locate primary law and legal analysis that supports the argument they plan to make or the amount of damages they want to seek. I view law librarians as a part of a team

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effort crucial to a successful legal outcome. Research requests often take hours to complete. They're deeply interesting as I continually learn new things about the law.

Lawyers also contact me to request instruction sessions. Like academic librarians who teach students about information literacy, law librarians teach legal research using many of the same concepts and principles present in the information literacy class. For example, I'm currently working with the Law Society's Professional Development department to develop interactive instruction sessions to lawyers anywhere in the province using distance technology.

Our library is open to the public and I'm available to assist public patrons. Not all law libraries in Canada are open to the public. However, we encourage the public to visit and take advantage of our resources and services. Please refer your students to the Law Society Library if they're researching the law or need legal information. We're happy to help.

We've seen a growing number of the public contacting us for assistance in recent years. This includes inmates from the correctional centres. Like lawyers, members of the public have a variety of legal information needs. The most common queries I receive concern family, estates, and criminal law. How we assist public patrons differs from the assistance we provide to lawyer patrons.

I can provide general information about the law. However, I'm not a lawyer. I can't provide legal advice, interpret the law, or comment on how to proceed with a legal action. There's a fine line between legal information and legal advice I'm cognizant of during reference transactions with the public.

I strive to connect our public patrons with plain language legal information. A great deal of legal information, including many resources in our print and online collection, is written for lawyers. Legalese is often difficult to comprehend. Fortunately, there are organizations, such as Saskatchewan's Public Legal Education Association, dedicated to creating legal content in plain language. A leading 2013 report, the Access to Civil and Family Justice report, identified the importance of legal information. It recognized that while more legal information is available online than ever before, its less clear what legal information is credible. Generally, many people are unaware of how to access reliable legal information relevant to their jurisdiction. This concept, of course, is central to information literacy instruction in academic libraries. It's also one of the reasons the Law Society Library helped create the Saskatchewan Access to Legal Information Project, a partnership among justice stakeholders and public libraries to advance access to legal information.

Law librarians have a natural role to play in helping the public locate legal information. In fact, I'll be participating in an exciting pilot project in the new year at the Regina Public Library. Twice a month, I'll be at the Central Branch as a law librarian on-site available to help connect

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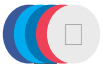
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the public with legal information.

Thank you. That's it for my portion of the panel. I've only scratched the surface of law libraries. My contact information will be on the final slide. Please feel free to contact me by email, Twitter, or through my blog if you have any questions.

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