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An Interview with Yolanda Patrice Jones, Law Librarian

October 12, 2016 by [Donna Sokol](#)



Yolanda P. Jones, Law Library Director at the Florida A&M University College of Law Library

Describe your background.

I grew up in [Chicago, Illinois](#). When I was growing up, I would always find my way to a local [Chicago Public Library](#) branch. My favorite was the [Carter G. Woodson Regional Library](#) on 95th and Halsted, which became a kind of refuge for me. I hung out so much at my high school library that the librarian said I might as well help out at the circulation desk. When I was an undergrad in college, I worked in the residence hall libraries, and when I attended law school – surprise – I worked at the law library circulation desk.

What is your academic/professional history?

I received my B.A. in English and literature with minors in history and classical civilizations from the [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#) in 1985, and my J.D. from the [University of Michigan Law School](#) in 1988. I worked briefly for a government agency before attending library school at the [Clark Atlanta University](#), School of Library and Information Studies. The library school has since closed, but it was there that I took the legal research course taught by Nancy Johnson, and where I learned about the legacy of its founder, [Dr. Virginia Lacy Jones](#), who had a vision of the library profession as a place where women, and particularly African-American women, could thrive as well as serve their communities.

In 2008, I earned a Ph.D. in information science and technology from [Drexel University](#) in Philadelphia, where my research interest was in the area of legal information behavior. I conducted a study of how law students did legal research as part of a Farmworker Legal Aid Clinic. My [dissertation](#) is titled: “‘Just the Facts Ma’am?’ A Contextual Approach to the Legal Information Use Environment.”

Before I became the Law Library Director at the [Florida A&M University College of Law Library](#), I served in a variety of positions, including the [University of Miami](#) (where I was a reference librarian), [Indiana University](#) (as librarian for electronic services and reference), [Villanova University](#) (as the assistant director for Reader Services and then as the assistant director for Electronic Information Services), and [Wayne State University](#) (where I was the assistant director).

How would you describe your job to other people?

In general, I see my role as a law librarian as helping people to find the legal information that they need for their scholarship, their work, and their personal lives. The mission of the Florida A&M University College of Law Library is to support the teaching, learning, research, and service to the community conducted at the [College of Law](#). What I do as a law library director is to collaborate with everyone who works in the law library so that we can fulfill that mission together, and to do my best to provide the guidance and the resources that will help us to carry it out.

Have you ever worked at the Library of Congress?

When I was a library school student, I worked for a summer as an intern at the [Congressional Research Service](#) (CRS). It was a life-changing experience to live and work near the Library of Congress. I always focus on legislative history in my advanced legal research courses (along with Nancy Johnson's [Sources of Compiled Legislative Histories!](#)), and I talk about my experience at the Congressional Research Service. I had quite an adventure though, when as a CRS intern I got lost beneath the [Capitol Building](#) during an architectural tour of the Capitol. I wandered into an area that was used as a barber shop in the horse-drawn carriage era, complete with marble bathtubs!

What is something most of your co-workers do not know about you?

When I was at the [AALL Annual Meeting in Chicago](#) this past July, I went to another of my favorite library hangouts, the [Chicago Cultural Center](#), downtown on Michigan Avenue. When I was growing up in the 1970s, the Cultural Center was a working library. Now it is mainly used as an art exhibit and performing arts space. What struck me was that when it was a library, I had no idea of its [history](#) as an 1890's era "palace" with a Civil War memorial, lavish mosaics, and one of the largest freestanding Tiffany domes in the world. These magnificent fixtures are being restored, and I can't help but think that a lot of times people don't realize that the library truly is priceless.

Most of all, what I really hope they know is that I owe a big debt of gratitude to all of the librarians that I have worked with over the years, and most recently to the librarians that I am currently working with at Florida A&M. I have learned so much from my colleagues, and I still stay in contact with many of them, often at conventions. I greatly admire and respect all of them.