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Public Schools to Public Services

Laura Wilcoxon

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

I served as a public school librarian for seven years, and the five before that as an English teacher. That was twelve years of serving in loco parentis for children aged five to eighteen. In my time in those libraries, I taught everything from how to double click a mouse (“cha-cha!”) to how to determine the reliability of websites in this new information landscape. At times, I had to manage all duties for two libraries by myself. I was solely responsible for the collection development, weeding, circulation, ILL, behavior management, curriculum alignment, budget, and the library calendar of the school librarian. I was never just a librarian. I was a teacher, a coach, a disciplinarian, a mandatory reporter.



After desiring a new challenge in my professional life, I decided to make the leap to law librarianship. I attended the University of Miami School of Law, where I was fortunate to be taught by a diverse group of impressive librarians. The University offered such a variety of advanced research courses that I was able to complete all my required skills credits through librarian-taught classes.

In the public schools, elementary librarians have scheduled classes and regularly see all the students in the school. I considered this role to be akin to the “cool aunt” because students would come see me for an hour, which was rarely enough time for anyone to get into any trouble, and then I would send them away with a new book. But as a high school librarian, you are only effective if you can market yourself as useful to your students. That hustle is the skill that has carried me the furthest in my current role.

I assumed the role of reference and student services librarian at the University of Missouri School of Law in August 2021. Joining the law school at the same time the school community was returning to campus after being shuttered due to COVID turned out to be a great opportunity. It presented a clean slate regarding student outreach. From offering donuts and coffee at “Reorientation” to bringing my Golden Retriever in on Stop Day, my co-librarians and director have been incredibly supportive of any outreach I have proposed.

Transforming from the role of authority figure in the school library, to non-traditional law student, to faculty member in the span of three years has been quite the ride. I am now Laura rather than Ms. Wilcoxon. I facilitate rather than dictate the work done in the library. I work only on my niche area and have a team to depend on for the full operation of the library. This change has given me the space to be creative, the time to form bonds with student groups and individuals, and the room to grow as a professional in the manner I had hoped when I sat down to take the LSAT. Though my duties are more specialized now, I am still more than just a librarian. I am a valued member of the law school community with more opportunities ahead, yet to be discovered.

Laura B. Wilcoxon, Reference & Student Services Librarian at the University of Missouri School of Law

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