

## MY COMMUNITIES

### **MEMBERS OPEN FORUM**

Jun 24, 2021

The AALL Diversity and Inclusion Member of the Month program highlights librarians and information professionals whose work advances the cause of diversity, equity, and inclusion. For June 2021, Camille Broussard, Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Information Services Director of The Mendik Library, was nominated for her decades of work and contributions within the profession, along with her involvement in creating the Social Responsibilities SIS standing committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.



#### **Biography**

Camille Broussard joined the New York Law School Library staff as head of reference services in 1991. She has been the director of the Library since 2008. Before going to NYLS, she was the collection services and reference librarian at New York University Law Library, and attorney services librarian at the Boley Law Library, Northwestern School of Law at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon.

Professor Broussard teaches an Advanced Legal Research seminar, research workshops, and database searching classes. As part of her teaching duties, she works with faculty members to integrate legal research skills and training into their coursework. It is her firm belief that law students who see the contextual connection between the theory and the practice of law will be more prepared to engage completely in the practice of law.

Professor Broussard is also an active member of the professional law librarian community. She belongs to both the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) and the Law Library Association of Greater New York (LLAGNY), with focuses on legal research and the social responsibilities of the profession. She has chaired the AALL Awards Committee, the *Law Library Journal* and AALL Spectrum Editorial Advisory Boards, the Committee on Mentoring and Retention, and the Social Responsibilities Special Interest Section.

## **You were involved in creating the Social Responsibilities SIS standing committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. What was the catalyst for creating the standing committee?**

Being a lesbian or gay member of AALL in the 1980s often meant that you were expected to keep a very large part of yourself, and your experience hidden in your daily life. If you were lucky, you lived in a city and worked in a place where your "regular" life was not questioned. For many law librarians, that, unfortunately, was not the case. Even for those of us who were lucky enough to be "out" and accepted, finding other law librarians to chat about community issues and worries, whether important political ones or purely social, was not easy and for some impossible. Carol Alpert, a reference librarian at NYU Law School Library, was well aware of this situation and as a community activist wanted to create a space within AALL where people could identify and connect. With the support of the NYU Law Library Director, Diana Vincent-Daviss, as well other members of the Contemporary Social Problems SIS (CSP-SIS) like Ann Puckett, Director of the University of Georgia Law Library, Carol was encouraged to do so. In 1985 she did just that. At the annual meeting in New York, Carol, and a very few folks (I mean like six people) gathered for dinner. I joined AALL that year – I did not know Carol Alpert or of the intrepid dinner group . . . but it did not take long to find them and my home within AALL. It is now 36 years later, and it is amazing to see how far we have come – how many new members we have welcomed, mentored, and given a place to call home. Elvira Embser-Herbert covered our history very well in her [AALL Spectrum article](#) in 2006 (*A Community Within: Why the Heck is there a Standing Committee for Lesbian and Gay Issues Anyway?* 10(4) AALL Spectrum 12-21 Feb. 2006).

## **How has the Social Responsibilities SIS, or the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity standing committee, served its members and AALL needs?**

CSP-SIS welcomed and mentored us as a standing committee, and we began to grow. From its inception, the Standing Committee on Lesbian and Gay Issues worked to create an educational space for discussion on issues of concern to the lesbian and gay community and to raise awareness of law-related problems of gay men and lesbians within the law librarian profession, their patron groups, and the society at large. Many members of AALL were unaware that they knew-much less worked with-any lesbian and gay librarians. It did not take long for us to see issues that all law librarians would benefit from exploring. After a few years, we welcomed colleagues that identified not just as lesbian or gay, but also as bisexual and transgender. And over the years, we have proudly expanded from LGBTQ+ to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

We have offered many resolutions and educational programs at the annual meetings to help our colleagues see connections between our work as law librarians and the societal issues that have an impact on our community. One such project was creating the bibliography on Sexual Orientation and the Law. At the 1987 annual AALL convention, the membership passed a resolution urging libraries to acquire legal materials on the role of lesbian and gay people in society. Many members of AALL had never had any contact with that body of literature. In support of that resolution, the Standing Committee prepared a bibliography. We made 200 photocopies to distribute from a table at the 1988 annual convention of the Association in Atlanta, Georgia. To our surprise, the copies were in high demand and flew off the table, and notes were left asking for a copy to be mailed. The bibliography was later updated and published in the Law Library Journal (86 Law Lib. J. 1-103 (1994)) and then again as a book in the AALL Publication Series (*AALL Publication Series, No. 82*). This was indeed a satisfying accomplishment for those of us who knew how many young people had grown up using public or school libraries where the only entry in the card catalog for homosexuality was a card saying, "Please see the librarian for materials on this subject." (And that assumes that many young people knew the word to look for was 'homosexuality'!)

As we all know some issues are difficult and discussion can be challenging. In 2017, the Texas State Legislature was in the midst of debating a controversial state law to regulate bathroom use for transgender Texans. When I rose at the Open Forum in Austin to ask AALL to amend its site selection policy for future meetings to recognize that there may be times when a selected location should be changed or canceled at the last minute and to provide a mechanism for doing so, I know it was hard for many folks to hear and digest. But this was not a random issue of concern to just the Standing Committee. It was based on AALL's responses to previous meeting site selection issues. Some members in attendance were not members in 1991 when we raised the issue of the meeting in New Orleans because the Louisiana State Legislature had just enacted severe restrictions on abortion rights or when we worked to move the 1998 annual meeting from Denver because of the Amendment 2 ballot initiative passed by Colorado voters in 1992 that prohibited the state from enacting anti-discrimination protections for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. After my statement, a number of members responded to raise related issues: members from California in support of their colleagues who could not receive state travel funds to Texas because of the new legislation's language; members from North Carolina worried about legislative efforts there; and others concerned about regional meetings (109 Law Lib. J. 737 (2017)). The [current AALL Annual Meeting Site Selection Policy](#) was amended in 2017 after the meeting to reflect our concerns.

**What initiatives can libraries undertake to create a more inclusive library culture that aligns with diversity, equity, and inclusion principles? Also, do you have any advice for librarians working to build a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment in their libraries and AALL?**

All of us must continue to work within our association's structure to raise issues that affect our members, and the people we serve, in various ways. We need to work within the AALL organization to encourage discussion and the debate necessary to make our professional home base better for all of us. Helping all of our members make the connection between issues and our work as law librarians is, to me, a very important part of belonging to AALL. It is imperative that we help all of our members make the connection between the issues we pursue and address as a body and our work as librarians. Our job is to provide the resources and materials all of our patrons need and to understand how to direct students, researchers, judges, attorneys, and others seeking access to justice, to the best information. There are many issues left to debate and we must all work together and support each other as we raise them. Library Directors must support and encourage our team members to be proactive. I learned a valuable lesson in 1988 when Peter Nycum, my director at Lewis & Clark, let me make 200 copies of the bibliography to bring to Atlanta – Pay It Forward!

We should actively support our community efforts – workplace, local, and AALL communities. As librarians, we must all help each other identify the materials and research support needed to make society a better and more just place for all of us. We should work within our organizations to support diversity and inclusion efforts. We can start a discussion group on issues of inclusion or perhaps we just need to support our colleagues who have started one. We can work with HR to update job descriptions to include appropriate language requiring the ability to interact and work effectively with colleagues and patrons from different cultures, viewpoints, and diverse backgrounds. We can work to update and ensure that our Library's strategic plan and collection development policy reflect our commitment.

This is our profession to lead and make better. To succeed we must harness an ever-expanding breadth of necessary expertise by enhancing our partnerships with many and varied organizations – not just courts, publishers, and libraries, but with other technology and information sector colleagues as well. At the same time, we must continue to educate ourselves about the importance of our task and the need for a sustained collaborative effort. One saying that has always rung true for me: Lead, Follow or Get out of the way!

