

## SHOW NOTES

### *Working Effectively With the Law Library*

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#### **Presenter**

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In this episode, Professor Blythe Balestrieri of Virginia Commonwealth University joins us. She has vast experience in correctional librarianship, having worked in the field for several years.

Her presentation covers some of the history of correctional libraries, challenges that these libraries can face, and how librarians can work to alleviate some of them.

Prison and jail libraries started as religious institutions, attempting to work towards inmate rehabilitation. It wasn't until much later that law and recreational libraries started to become widespread.

In the late 1900s, a series of court cases helped establish an inmate's Constitutional right to legal information, often supplied by a law library. Access to this material became a 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Amendment issue.

However, these rulings have been implemented differently across the country, with many different libraries operating in completely different situations. Some are completely self-contained, with a wide range of information. Some are reliant on electronic databases, or a neighboring public library. Recreational libraries are subject to major budget restraints, limiting

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how extensive their services can be. Many times, law and recreation libraries are combined to keep budget and staffing to a minimum.

Professor Balestrieri listed five actions that correctional library staff can take to combat some of their challenges:

- Advocacy – Reach out to a recreational library counterpart in the system, and join forces. Many times, the libraries are mentally combined, so don't fight each other for budgeting; instead show how each side is important. Organizational equality, coming from the same department, lends a sense of legitimacy to the library.
- Communication – Ensure the library isn't forgotten about or resented. Most problems come from other staff members, not inmates (46:00). Try to convey how the library falls into their idea of a correctional facility. Rather than trying to educate, libraries keep inmates from idleness, etc. Associate with other members of staff, eat lunch with them, share a conversation.
- Education – When the library is being brought up, tailor the information. Give leadership a basic overview of what the library's been doing, how many requests are flowing through, how many materials are being used, what program attendance looks like, etc. Present library services as a security measure, keeping inmates from being bored.
- Training – Participate in the training academy for new custodial employees. This is two-pronged. The library staff gets to learn what the custodial staff does, and they get to spread the importance of their department.
- Team-building – Consider shadowing a custodial employee, to learn what they do. Consider being shadowed by custodial staff, so they can see and appreciate what the library does.

Public libraries are a great resource, and are typically happy to help. They offer a wider book selection, and host educational programs that can reduce stress for inmates and their families. Reaching out can reduce the burden on a correctional facility and extend the reach of programs beyond the facility.

The following court cases were referenced:

- Bounds V. Smith <https://Caselaw.Findlaw.Com/Us-Supreme-Court/430/817.Html>
- Thornburgh V. Abbott <https://Caselaw.Findlaw.Com/Us-Supreme-Court/490/401.Html>
- Lewis V. Casey <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/94-1511.ZO.html>