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The Emperor's New Law Library: The Decline and Fall of Academic Law Libraries or a New Chapter?

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This polemical Essay explores the mutating nature of academic law libraries and the roles of their librarians and directors. It addresses several representative arguments debating the viability of academic law libraries, and, in the end, concludes that they will survive, albeit in diminished form and status. Law libraries will continue to provide an impressive array of vital services, including formal Legal Research instruction, establishing Legal Research Clinics and other clinical support, and even generating a revenue stream via grantsmanship and vibrant connection to the alumni and donor bases. It is possible to create models of sustainability for academic law libraries if innovation is permitted to prevail. While libraries and librarians, then, will survive (if not thrive), the prognosis for academic Law Library Directors as we now know them is somewhat more dire. Economic crises and changing law school administration can lead to significant erosion of law library directors' authority and status. The Author argues that this is a dangerous development, but it may well represent the fate of academic law libraries Much is contingent upon the ABA, which is also subject to market forces akin to those shaping law schools. Ultimately, in this opinion piece predicated upon her extensive experience in law libraries, the Author proposes a new form of consistent ABA oversight of law libraries in conjunction with the AALL (American Association of Law Libraries) leadership serving in an ombudsman capacity, so that academic law libraries might yet evolve in a manner commensurate with their potential to advance legal education.

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