

Duncan Alford, Setting the Bar for Collegiality and Professionalism

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Author's note: I first met Duncan as a practicing attorney working together on a deal. Fast forward seven years and I am now sitting beside Duncan at an American Association of Law Libraries meeting. It will surprise no one that the traits that made him such an amazing librarian also made him an excellent lawyer. ~ CLO

Colleague, professional, expert, intellectual, admired. These adjectives form a picture of Duncan Alford. Duncan Alford, the colleague, scholar, and librarian, set the standard to which we in the law library profession aspire. A deep sense of loss describes the reaction of the law library community upon learning of his death.

Duncan was a native of South Carolina with deep ties to the state and his family. It made perfect sense that he found a home at the University of South Carolina School of Law, first as Associate Dean and Director of the Law Library, and ultimately adding Professor of Law to his titles, which recognized his deep commitment to legal education and scholarship as a faculty member. His journey to his ultimate home at South Carolina Law wound through multiple professions and states. His trip reflects accomplishment, growth, and vision. Leaving the state of South Carolina for the University of Virginia as a college freshman, Duncan lived, studied, and worked in Virginia, Washington, D.C., California, New York, and North Carolina. He studied first, then worked, and then studied some more. His professional career included time spent as a business analyst, corporate attorney, law clerk, law librarian, and professor. Before returning to his home state, he developed lifelong relationships at Columbia, Berkeley, Georgetown, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in his roles as attorney, academic, and librarian. Admired at each stop on his journey for his wise counsel, consummate professionalism, and intellectual rigor, Duncan excelled.

Duncan gave back to his profession in many ways. He embraced the positive. At conferences, he always greeted you with a smile and a hearty hello. His colleagues knew him well for his wicked sense of humor, describing him as funny with a great laugh and a big heart, someone who displayed kindness to all. He was also well-known and widely respected for his honest and deep thinking, engaging with the significant issues facing law libraries. He served the profession by providing support on multiple committees within the American Association of Law Libraries, the Southeastern Chapter of the American Association of Law Libraries, the American Bar Association, the International Association of Law Libraries, and the University of South Carolina. Duncan cared. His colleagues and new librarians were the numerous beneficiaries of his mentorship and counsel. He prioritized people.

Duncan valued and demonstrated the importance of scholarship as a professor and a law librarian. A fellow library director described Duncan as one of the best writers and scholars in the profession. This opinion was widely shared by his colleagues. At a time when many struggle with the demands of the workplace, he embraced the concept of work-life balance while producing quality scholarship. Duncan wrote pieces on a varied range of topics—from banking and international law to legal research and skills development. With over twenty articles, book chapters,

book reviews, and a co-authored book to his name, the commitment to and depth of his scholarship was widely regarded. He was a participant at the 2009 inaugural Boulder Conference on Legal Research and Education, presenting his paper, “The Development of the Skills Curriculum in Law Schools: Lessons for Directors for Academic Law Libraries,” cementing his commitment to scholarship.¹ His support for new librarians in their pursuit of scholarship was but one of many ways he served as a mentor. Duncan received frequent recognition for his scholarly pursuits as a recipient of the Van Calker Fellowship (Swiss Institute of Comparative Law), Fulbright Senior Specialist (University of Mkar, Nigeria), and as a visiting scholar at the College of Europe (Bruges), and the American Academy (Rome).

Duncan’s engagement in the scholarly enterprise and his support for librarians as scholars and the scholarship of the profession was marked by the University of South Carolina School of Law’s “Colloquium on the Law Librarian’s Role in the Scholarly Enterprise,” Columbia, South Carolina (November 21, 2008). Organized by Duncan, law librarians and law faculty from across the country presented on the topic of the Law Librarian’s Role in the Scholarly Enterprise. The South Carolina School of Law’s *Journal of Law and Education* published a selection of the conference proceedings, thus highlighting the importance of the topic to the profession.²

Duncan engaged. I vividly recall a personal tour of the law library at South Carolina pre-new building. As we walked by holes in the wall and a facility in clear need of attention, he wanted better for his students. Fast forward several years and a conversation about a new building, Duncan’s excitement was palpable. His attention to detail and design reflected a clear vision of “better” for his students and faculty.

Duncan’s passing marks a significant loss to the profession of law librarianship. His contributions were significant in terms of his leadership, stewardship, vision, and scholarship. Duncan is missed.

Duncan E. Alford (1963–2023).

¹ The Boulder Conference on Legal Research and Education (University of Colorado Law School, Boulder, CO, June 21–22, 2009), <https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/conference2009/>.

² “Symposium: The Law Librarian’s Role in the Scholarly Enterprise,” *Journal of Law and Education* 39, no. 3 (2010): 351–410.