

Small But Mighty: Small Academic Law Libraries' Specialty Legal Collections as Cues for Contemporary Collection Development

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Abstract

Much has been written on collection development techniques used by large academic law libraries and how they maintain their myriad scholarly collections. Often, they describe large budgets with armies of selectors creating world-class collections. However, there has been a lack of representation in the literature on how small academic law libraries with lean staff, small budgets, and specialized collections create, maintain, and grow their collections within established parameters while adding ebooks and other format changes. As academic law libraries of all sizes grapple with the evolving constraints on contemporary collecting practices, successful approaches from smaller libraries can serve as cues for yielding positive collection outcomes in the short and long term.

This article features case studies of the law libraries at Vermont Law & Graduate School (VLGS), a private standalone law school known for its environmental law and policy programs, and University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law (UNH FP), a former private standalone law school, now part of New Hampshire's land grant flagship public university, known internationally for its intellectual property programs. These law libraries have developed unique assets in their specialty collections, while addressing the common challenge of adding accessibility to their online programs. By examining the individual collection development methods, beyond the ABA Core Standards supporting their schools' curricular needs and cornerstone academic programs, the VLGS and UNH FP collections offer both similarities and differences in parent institutional structure, foundational and supplemental funding, and format preferences. These complementary examples provide options and inspiration adaptable to the

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varied situations of other academic law libraries. These case studies review acquisition strategies, tools and techniques, deaccessioning criteria for print and online materials used to maintain the specialty collections, as well as collection strategies for discontinued institutional programs. These featured collections are worth prioritizing even in times of inconsistent year-to-year funding. Both VLGS and UNH FP are fortunate to work with colleagues through NELLCO's Interlibrary Loan and NELLCO's Palmprint, providing reliable access to infrequently used or historical primary materials on demand. Taken together, the VLGS and UNH FP strategies that have proven effective offer potential approaches for law libraries as they position their collections for the future.

Academic law libraries, whether small or large, can employ similar hyper-focused strategies for managing specialty collections that are essential for both residential and online students. In evaluating and maintaining specialized collections, libraries might adapt the successes of UNH FP and VLGS by prioritizing holdings that align with their mission and adjusting their resource lineup on an annual basis, considering cost, format, and usability metrics in these decisions; layered with ongoing community outreach for these materials.

I. Introduction

A. The Gap in Literature: Collection Development in Small Academic Law Libraries

Historically, the Law Library literature has focused on the large, historic collections of the Ivy League law libraries, but precious little has been written about the collections of the smaller, regional, or niche law schools.³ Following recognition of Vermont Law and Graduate School and University of New Hampshire's Franklin Pierce Law School of Law's topical collections as "treasures of the legal academy,"⁴ an examination of their respective collecting histories and approach in environmental law and Intellectual

³ Amanda Bowles Watson, *Beyond the Completion Fallacy: Mission-Based Rightsizing of Academic Law Library Collections*, 116 *Law Libr. J.* 285 (2024).

⁴ Nicholas Mignanelli, *Whither the Monograph?: Changes to the ABA Standards on Library and Information Resources and Their Unintended Consequences for Legal Scholarship*, 2 *Northwestern Law Journal des Refusés*, Iss. 1, Art. 1. (2024) Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/nljr/vol2/iss1/1>

Property, yields opportunities for academic law libraries of all sizes to develop or feature more specialized collections as they adapt to the contemporary library landscape and constraints.

Whether formally publicized or not, many law schools have specialized collections that not only support their curricular needs but also may help define their law schools. When possible, academic law libraries should identify and emphasize their specialized topical collections to demonstrate their law school's unique mission. Most law libraries likely have at least the beginnings of a specialty collection that can be used as a distinctive lever and featured asset to share with the library and scholarly community.

Using a case study method to explore the strengths and challenges of specialty topical collections in small law libraries, this article explores strategies for creating, maintaining, and growing specialty academic law collections from the most unusual corners. These insights are from two small libraries that have identified areas of law to nurture and have been distinguished nationally. In the northeast, you'll find two small academic law libraries with world class specialty collections - Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS), a private, standalone school and University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law (UNH FP), a once private, standalone school, now part of a land grant, public university. Consequently, unique content parameters are presented for building and maintaining subject collections central to each schools' mission. Specific examination is given to the school's collection histories, collection maintenance, and relationship to their broader library's collection, as well as the contribution to law schools, the legal community, and the broader scholarly community; demonstrating how specialized topical collections can provide a positive impact on the scholarly world beyond our individual ivory walls and are agnostic in terms of size.

What is meant by a specialty collection?

To better describe the collections, we define VLGS' and UNH FP's curated, topical collections as specialty collections. This narrower terminology distinguishes these materials from what could be termed "special collections." Vanessa King uses the definition of "library and archival

materials in any format (e.g., rare books, manuscripts, photographs, institutional archives) that are generally characterized by their artifactual or monetary value, physical format, uniqueness or rarity, and/or an institutional commitment to long-term preservation and access. They are housed in a separate unit with specialized security and user services. Circulation of materials usually is restricted.”⁵

Vanessa King’s definition could be read to include a topical collection; however, this use of the term special collection is more often associated with rare or archival materials. Applying specialized collection terminology, as opposed to special collections terminology, distinguishes and amplifies the unique value a topically focused specialty collection can bring to a more general legal collection in a law school.⁶

What is a small library?

Numerous criteria group libraries into size distinctions, such as the number of full-time faculty, the number of students, or the number of library staff. As a collection-focused paper, it therefore seems necessary and proper to classify by collection size for this data point. Amanda Runyon and Leslie Street recently provided collection-based metrics in their article, *Finding the Middle Ground in Collection Development: How Academic Law Libraries Can Shape Their Collection in Response to the Call for More Practice-Oriented Legal Education*. Accordingly, this analysis of how practitioner-oriented print materials are included in academic law library collections specifies a small law library as having no more than 250,000 print volumes.⁷ This benchmark places the VLGS and UNH FP library collections in the category of “small library.”

Specialty collections’ role in contemporary collection development

Specialty collections have been present in academic law libraries and distinguish each law school’s strengths. These collections may have waxed

⁵ Vanessa King, “Special Collections: What Are They and How do We Build Them, 46 *Int’l J. of Legal Info.* 89 at 89 (2018).

⁶ Deborah Mayo-Jefferies, *Special Collections in Law School Libraries*, 86 *Law Libr. J.* 503, 504, (1994).

⁷ Leslie A. Street & Amanda M. Runyon in 102 *L.Lib.J.* 399 at 423 (2010). (University of Pennsylvania and William and Mary Law School);

and waned over time and may not have typically been a primary focal point or featured prominently. Instead, specialty collections served a supplementary role in tandem with the library's core content, supporting common research needs. As core library content delivery shifts to a leased electronic platform model, and as libraries address diminished shelf space, through natural collection growth or reduced building footprints, developing and maintaining specialty collections would preserve the breadth of content for researchers in both the short and long term. Many academic law school libraries support curricular programs in unique areas or with more depth than the rest of their standard JD program. These academic strengths may relate more precisely to a school's distinct mission, geographic locale, or intellectual expertise.

As academic law libraries contemplate their collection development plan direction, prioritizing specialty collections as a best practice would solidify the library's unique value for its institution as well as the greater scholarly community. Regardless of a library's size, regardless of a library's specialty collection size, regardless of a library's administrative structure, deliberate attention to specialty collections could collectively insulate or reduce the inadvertent loss of unique scholarly content when libraries streamline their offerings. With an emphasized specialty collections approach, academic law libraries could collaborate in an expanded manner, creating a more distributed model amongst a larger number of law schools. This strategy would yield multiple benefits. First, institutions can promote these specialty collections as part of their distinguishing strengths to attract students, scholars, and donors. These specialty collections align with institutional missions, leading to successful scholarly output. These specialty collections demonstrate compliance with explicit and implicit law school accreditor standards as underlying components of the academic program. Acknowledging the direct institutional benefits of specialty collections further justifies the necessary resources for the materials, which simultaneously benefits the external scholarly community by contributing to the distributed variety of law library content. Without the academic law library community proactively monitoring their collective holdings, law schools passively risk their access to scholarly information as contemporary publishing models restrict or discard content. Shifting law library collection development plans toward more specialty collections is a pragmatic method

for achieving the academic law library role in a contemporary environment.

B. Library standards do not necessitate standard libraries

While academic law libraries are subject to requisite standards such as those from the American Bar Association (ABA), the American Association of Law Schools (AALS), and others, academic law libraries should interpret these dictates in the context of their institutional goals, resulting in collection variations among libraries rather than a series of matching libraries. The ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar accredits all United States law schools. Both VLGS and UNH FP are also subject to the regional accreditor, New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), for accreditation of their graduate programs.⁸ In this section, both organizations' accreditation standards are reviewed along with the AALS Bylaws with Executive Committee Regulations that apply to AALS member schools.⁹ While the ABA has the most explicit library standards, it is notable that all three entities prescribe consistent expectations for a sufficient academic law library to deliver its role for the law school.

⁸ Am. Bar Ass'n, Standards and Rules of Procedures for Approval of Law Schools, Chapter 6, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2025-2026/2025-2026-standards-chapter-6.pdf; New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) Accreditation Standard 7.22 "The institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate" at <https://www.neche.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Standards-for-Accreditation-2021.pdf>

⁹ 2025 AALS Handbook 69 (2025). AALS Executive Committee Regulations - <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.aals/aalshb2025&i=89> See Sections 6-8 Library "a. A member school shall maintain access to a library that supports the curricular needs and research of its faculty and students. A law library of a member school shall possess or have ready and reliable access to a physical collection, electronic resources or other information resources that substantially: (i) meet the research needs of its students, satisfy the demands of its curricular offerings, and facilitates the training of its students in various research methodologies; (ii) support the individual research interests of its faculty members; (iii) serve any special research and educational objectives expressed by the school or implicit in the missions and role of the law school. b. Whether physical or virtual, the library is central to the law school and shall be organized and administered to perform its educational function and to assure a high standard of service. c. A member school shall have a full-time director of the law library and a staff of sufficient number and with sufficient training to develop and maintain a high level of service."

The most relevant ABA standard that applies to library collections has been revised from Standard 606 to 604.¹⁰ Present Standard 604 mandates that “(t)he law school shall provide reliable and efficient access to a collection of materials...to carry out its program of legal education.”¹¹ This, for many years, has required a “core collection” that led up to the “arms race” of large print collections.¹²

In the past 10 years, the standards for libraries have loosened this ownership requirement to embrace access to information. The guidance documents of the ABA have been relaxed to include multiple collection format types and relinquished the set “core collection” concept, pivoting to vague standards of reliable and efficient access instead.¹³ The most recent revision of Standard 606, now in 604, was revised to indicate that reliable access to a core collection is no longer a goal, but rather that a library collection should provide reliable and efficient access to a collection that is complete and with sufficient continuing access.

Law schools with highly ranked specialty programs, supporting and distinguishing them from other schools, will likely need to offer more than the basics of the rented “law school” plans from the major legal research platforms such as Lexis or Westlaw. These large general platforms are excellent for high demand, more recent core content, with the precise holdings varying annually. For specialty programs, academic law libraries will typically need deeper, consistent, and more reliable content sources to

¹⁰ ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools - revised 2023/2024 (August) https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2023-2024/23-24-revised-standards-and-rules-since-aug-2023.pdf; see also ABA Cover Memo on Revised Definitions, Standards and Rules, Feb, 2024 at https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2023-2024/24-feb-midyear-standards-rules-updates.pdf

¹¹ *Supra* note 4.

¹² *Supra* note 7.

¹³ Am. Bar Ass’n, Standards for Approval of Law Schools and interpretations, Standards Archive, 2015-2016, http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/misc/legal_education/Standards/2015_2016_chapter_6.authcheckdam.pdf

support this scholarly depth and to support their curricular programs. Accordingly, accredited schools with specialized library collections should not have mirrored holdings as schools without deep focal areas. AALS member schools will also exhibit this depth when complying with Bylaw 6-8(a)(i) “A law library of a member school shall possess or have ready and reliable access to a physical collection, electronic resources or other information resources that substantially: (i) meet the research needs of its students, satisfy the demands of its curricular offerings, and facilitates the training of its students in various research methodologies.”¹⁴ These AALS standards for member schools reiterate and perhaps even surpass the less precise ABA Standards that currently exist.

Further, ABA Standard 605(b) solidifies the intended connection between an academic law library’s curricular obligations and its associated institutions by stating a “law school shall provide consistently sufficient financial resources to the law library to enable it to fulfill its responsibilities of support to the law school”.¹⁵ As a result, decisions must be made to facilitate access and open the gates to invite digital content.

Taken together, the current ABA, AALS, and local NECHE standards underscore the importance of a robust library collection for a successful law school. Flexibility within the standards should not be interpreted as diminished institutional role, but as recognition that academic law libraries must adapt their libraries’ collections to their individual institutions’ academic agendas using the contemporary range of collecting options and pricing models. As a result, library standards do not prescribe that standard libraries, with mirrored minimal collections, are the goal.

C. Methodology: Case Study Approach

In this section, the VLGS and UNH FP libraries are compared in areas such as Institutional Context and Mission; Specialty Collection Overview; Collection Development Strategies; Funding and Resource Allocation; Faculty and Community Engagement; Challenges and Solutions; and

¹⁴ *Supra* note 5

¹⁵ *Supra* note 4

Outcomes and Impact. Key takeaways consider how specialty collections can be leveraged to highlight each law school's unique foci and how each law library has an opportunity to meaningfully contribute, both to their organization and to the academy. In this time of upheaval to the legal research status quo, it is important to peer through the fog of uncertainty and build a collection that both preserves and serves as a foundation for future growth.

1. Vermont Law & Graduate School (Environmental Law)

Institutional Context and Mission

Vermont Law and Graduate School (VLGS), formerly Vermont Law School (VLS), was established in 1972, held its first classes in the summer of 1973, and is one of only 14 private independent law schools in the United States.¹⁶ Debuting in 1991 on the South Royalton village campus, the 35,000 square foot Julien and Virginia Cornell Library (VLGS Library) offers over 115,000 print and 375,000 electronic format volumes and more than 90 research databases amongst its holdings.¹⁷ As the sole law library in Vermont, this collection supports eight degree types covering Juris Doctor, LLM, and Master's degree programs in Law and Public Policy, with deep Restorative Justice and Environmental Law offerings, through residential, online, and hybrid degree programs. Roughly half of the 700 student population is enrolled in a residential campus program, with the rest electing an online route.¹⁸ The VLGS library is a < 1% Federal Depository Library Program participant and is open to the public for research during weekday business hours through a grant from the Vermont Department of Libraries.¹⁹

A strong library mission tied to its institutional mission²⁰ drives all VLGS collection decisions and all its internal and external justifications. The broad

¹⁶ <https://www.vermontlaw.edu/about>

¹⁷ <https://library.vermontlaw.edu/collections/>

¹⁸ <https://library.vermontlaw.edu>

¹⁹ <https://library.vermontlaw.edu/collections/>

²⁰ "To educate students in a diverse community that fosters personal growth and that enables them to attain outstanding professional skills and high ethical values with which to serve as lawyers and environmental and other professionals in an increasingly technological and interdependent global society' <https://www.vermontlaw.edu/about>

VLGS library mission covers its comprehensive charge, while concurrently encompassing programmatic or specialty obligations to its academic community.

“The mission of the Julien and Virginia Cornell Library is to collect, to educate, and to collaborate in a service oriented environment that balances research, innovation, community and study. To collect, we select, organize, maintain, evaluate and provide access to print and electronic library materials. We provide uninterrupted stewardship to insure the integrity of the collection...”²¹

Having an academic library mission that covers or requires a specialty collection is an essential foundation for solidifying any specialized collection initiative.

Specialty Collection Overview

The VLGS Library’s specialized environmental collection was established in 1984 to consolidate the school’s environmental materials in one location, making those materials easier for patrons to locate and browse. Housed on the library’s Loft Level, it is the first dedicated environmental collection at a United States law school and includes approximately 19,000 volumes, supporting the wide-ranging environmental programs offered through VLGS’ law and graduate schools.²²

Collection Development Strategies

In the early days, the VLGS library’s print format-heavy collection grew as a combination of new publications, select historical purchases, along with extensive discards from other libraries in an effort to bolster its volume count and associated prestige. Starting in 2021, the VLGS library revamped its weeding program to more methodically review the entire collection, even if

²¹ Vermont Law and Graduate School Library Collection Development Policy
<https://library.vermontlaw.edu/policies/#cd>

²² <https://library.vermontlaw.edu/collections/>

only at a cursory level, every five years. This manageable and refined method successfully generates space for fresh materials while better showcasing our highest quality items. The focused weeding work, in conjunction with a series of budget-driven subscription cancellations over the past 20 years, has pivoted the VLGS collection strategy from a volume-driven approach to a content precision approach.

Consistent with VLGS's content precision approach, multiple copies or multiple formats are only retained for high-demand items.²³ This strategy contains costs while preserving valuable and limited shelf space. Also consistent with the VLGS library mission, fleeting content, such as VLGS course textbooks, is not pursued because the associated financial and labor implications outweigh VLGS's collecting capacity.²⁴

Keeping up with evolving and contemporary delivery models, as well as maintaining expertise with evolving curricular focuses, is a critical part of law librarians' contribution to their schools. For example, the VLGS librarians have recently expanded their knowledge relating to broad topics such as Public Policy as well as narrower topics like Aquaculture. Likewise, VLGS uses a diverse set of selection tools, including ebook acquisition via on-demand catalog records (Demand Driven Acquisitions, also known as Patron Driven Acquisitions), librarian-selected single-user firm orders, and bundled simultaneous user academic packages.

Proactively keeping a tight collection, centered on library and institutional missions, including associated specialty areas, regularly demonstrates the value of librarian expertise to the administration and garners trust in its scholarly stewardship of funds. Over time, as the VLGS curriculum and scholarly publication options evolve, the VLGS library's "must have" print and electronic subscription list changes. Conducting an annual review process for these titles keeps the lineup fresh and manageable. Having distinct internal funding and collection location codes associated with VLGS' specialized collections allows easy segmentation for selection and evaluation

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

tasks.

Funding and Resource Allocation

Each academic year, VLGS librarian collection selectors review the subscription holdings against anticipated or actual curricular changes. Considerations for selecting publications and format include cost, usability, ownership structures, as well as faculty preferences. This annual process often yields savings that are either redirected for identified growth areas or applied to offset future library expenditures. Depending on the institutional curricular or financial situation at the time, the savings may enable a flat or reduced budget for the next cycle. As many libraries, including VLGS, have been trimming budgets for the last few decades, it has become more difficult to generate savings without interrupting the ability to meet accreditor and related library mission charges for supporting all academic programs.

Faculty and Community Engagement

The VLGS library maintains an active dialogue with its users to both promote its breadth of resources and to continually develop its resources. At the forefront, VLGS' Academic Outreach and Reference Librarian oversees multiple library collection engagement points for students as well as faculty.

On the other side of the spectrum, and without a crystal ball for scholars' exact needs, the VLGS library seeks the least detrimental cuts as a last resort. As significant collection decisions arise, the VLGS librarians utilize their Library Faculty Liaison program to confer with faculty experts relating to the considered collection changes. More general collection announcements are conveyed within bi-monthly reports to the faculty. At all times, the VLGS librarians welcome suggestions or dialogue about library content from individual faculty members.

Challenges and Solutions

As curricular programs are phased out, the VLGS library scales back collecting in the associated area to an overview level and evaluates the deeper, inevitably historic content through the regular weeding processes and criteria; retaining materials relevant for historic perspective and weeding materials as they become stale.

Holistically, the VLGS library integrates its specialized collections, such as its premier environmental collection, into its regular processes but designates this content area separately, which facilitates efficient management decisions. The VLGS environmental collection has unique budget allocations, unique location designations, and unique selectors who also prepare associated research guides. This structure results in efficient and smooth materials processing while amplifying and directing users to access the specialized content.

2. University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law (Intellectual Property)

Institutional Context and Mission

The University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law demonstrates the value of specialty collections through its Intellectual Property Library. The specialty IP Library grew out of Robert H. Rines' vision to create a practice-focused law school to train Patent attorneys.²⁵ The school's founders and first class were risk-takers who embraced the entrepreneurial spirit to shake up legal education.²⁶ That innovative spirit is still alive as evidenced in its various programs,²⁷ the Daniel Webster Scholars

²⁵ Dan Anthony Mauro, Franklin Pierce Law Keeps the Focus on Intellectual Property, *Bos. Bus. J.* (May 10, 2011), <http://www.bizjournals.com/boston/blog/mass-high-tech/2011/05/franklin-pierce-law-keeps-the-focus.html>, cited by Nicholas Mignanelli, *The Academic Law Library in the Age of Affiliations: A Case Study of the University of New Hampshire Law Library*, 109 *Law Libr. J.* 297, 301 (Spring 2017).

²⁶ Megan M. Carpenter, *Risk-Taking and Reform: Innovation for a Better Education*, 22 *U.N.H. L. Rev.* 141, 145-147 (2024).

²⁷ UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law offers JD concentrations in Sports and Entertainment Law, Health Law and Intellectual Property. It is the home of Warren B. Rudman Center for Justice, Leadership & Public Service. Today, it also provides LL.M.s and Master's degrees as part of its graduate programs in Intellectual Property, Commerce and

Honors program, a competency-based bar alternative program,²⁸ and the Intellectual Property Library. In 2014, Franklin Pierce Law Center finalized its integration with the University of New Hampshire to continue Rines' vision and his entrepreneurial legacy.²⁹

The IP Library: A Library Within a Library

The UNH Franklin Pierce Law Library is an umbrella for two large collections: the general law library and the IP Library. The general collections and the IP Library, numbering 188,465 total physical and e-book volumes, were built to support the curricular and scholarship needs and the UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law staff in their administrative needs.

The law school has grown from a purely residential program to embrace online learning in our Hybrid JD and Online Graduate programs while retaining the established residential programs. In doing so, the Law Library and the IP Library have transitioned from print-based collections to a digital-first collection strategy. Additionally to law-centric subscriptions, the Law Library also has full access to the UNH physical and digital collections following the UNH Libraries' integration of our collections and, together, migrated from III's Millennium to ExLibris ALMA with the Primo discovery interface.³⁰

Specialty Collection Overview

Creation of the Intellectual Property Library

The Intellectual Property Library (IP Library) is a department of the Law Library and is administered consistent with the overall Mission, Purpose, and

Technology, and International Criminal Law and Justice. See UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law, Graduate Admissions,

<https://law.unh.edu/admissions/graduate-admissions>

²⁸ Daniel Webster Scholars, UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law at <https://law.unh.edu/academics/daniel-webster-scholar-honors-program>

²⁹ A full history of the Franklin Pierce Law Library is described in Nicholas Mignanelli's *The Academic Law Library in the Age of Affiliations: A Case Study of the University of New Hampshire Law Library*, 109 Law Libr. J. 297 (Spring 2017).

³⁰ The University of New Hampshire Selects Ex Libris Alma and Primo, Jun. 24, 2018 <https://exlibrisgroup.com/press-release/university-of-new-hampshire-selects-ex-libris-alma-and-primo/>

Policies of the Law Library.³¹ It serves faculty, staff, alumni, visiting scholars, members of the New Hampshire bench and bar, and citizens of New Hampshire who wish to use the Patent Trademark Resources Center.”³²

The IP Library was created in 1994 to support its pioneering practice-based IP program and the growing Intellectual Property curriculum in the Graduate Programs. This collection includes a unique mix of print and digital materials focused on patents, trademarks, copyrights, and related fields. The collection includes resources acquired through purchase, donations from WIPO and industry partners.³³ Additional unique materials were obtained in the development of the IP Mall, an expansive collection of digital materials that hopes to provide hard-to-find materials in an open-access environment. It tracks the history of Intellectual Property practice and FPLC’s role in IP’s development.³⁴

Collection Development Strategies

Collection Development

The Law Library Director and the IP Librarian are the primary selectors of materials for the main collection and the Intellectual Property (IP) collection, respectively. The IP Librarian focuses on the IP-based collections

³¹ UNH Franklin Pierce Law Library Mission - “The University of New Hampshire School of Law Librarians shall maintain a law library that is a central, active, responsive force in the educational life of the law school by teaching students and patrons to be successful, ethical information seekers; building and facilitating intellectual access to relevant collections vital to the law school’s academic and programmatic mission; delivering information services supporting teaching, research, and scholarship; fostering a culture of collaboration within the law school, the university, and the legal and law library communities; and providing welcoming space conducive to intellectual discovery. The Law Library supports the University and the Law School in achieving their strategic directions.” UNH Law Library webpage at <https://law.unh.libguides.com/home>

³² UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law, IP Library, Mission, <https://law.unh.libguides.com/IPLibrary>

³³ Donations to the IP Library’s nascent collection came from the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Polaroid, and practice-based collections donated by Professor Karl Jorda, former Chief IP Counsel and Director of the IP Department at Ciba-Geigy Corporation. Former Library Director Judy Gire worked with WIPO to ensure that the IP Library would receive WIPO depository materials.

³⁴ <https://ipmall.info/>

(copyright, patent, trademarks, trade secrets, and other neighboring rights), and the Law Library Director works to develop collections in other areas of faculty and curricular interest (health, constitutional law, contracts, civil rights, antitrust, business law, etc.). The collection development plan guides collection decisions that support our mission, informs our user community, and provides information on subject-level development, guidance on format, etc. Law Librarians, learn about faculty interests and curricular developments. These are shared with the primary selectors, who consult with faculty to provide resources in developing areas.

Selecting Strategy

The selectors' mechanisms for learning about new, available monographs, treatises, and databases vary based on available time and input from faculty. Presently, the tools include the ALMA marketplace and alerts from Rialto's Marketplace regarding new ebook and print offerings. Publishers' catalogs (print and digital) are also reviewed, along with participation in the ABA Silver program, providing discounts on ABA print publications. The Law Library is a founding member of NELLCO, the law library consortium³⁵, which provides group offerings and database discounts. Online and physical suggestion boxes are supplemented by the librarians periodically soliciting suggestions from faculty and students via email. Additionally, UNH Franklin Pierce Law Librarians regularly attend and participate in conferences, working groups, and associations, to learn of new releases, forthcoming titles, and new offers and products by publishers.

Library collection decisions for acquisition are made in response to law school administration information, library survey data, conversations with faculty, staff, and students, and other analytics such as ALMA Analytics. The library regularly collects assessment statistics, including reference statistics and usage statistics. Data from these efforts play an important role in library planning and decision-making. Communications with the faculty and students include ad hoc conversations and include surveys and other polling methods. The Law Library Liaison program has gone a long way to establish ongoing relationships between faculty, staff, and the librarians, and serves as

³⁵<https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.nellco.org/resource/resmgr/Files/ArtofOrgNELLCO.pdf>

a significant source of communication and feedback loop on library operations. Further, faculty and alumni contributions have notably added unique or historical titles to the IP Library collection.

Funding and Resource Allocation

Funding the IP Library

Funding to maintain and sustain a specialty collection is an essential part of its success.³⁶ While much of the original IP Library collection was based on donations, a library collection must be able to selectively acquire materials that match its collection development criteria and can keep up to date with the development of a topical area. Funding is provided to the Law Library from the Law School. The acquisition budget is divided between the IP Library and the general law collections with new books and ebooks typically split 65% to the general law collection and 35% earmarked to the IP Library.

Challenges and Solutions

Where budgets are shrinking, and all libraries are being asked to do more with less, opportunities are seized and leveraged to provide the most access to the greatest number of people.

Digital Preferred Initiative

The library initially moved to a digital preferred model of collecting for program equity. It also saw benefits in terms of budgeting, space repurposing, and making do with fewer staff. In 2019, the Law Library joined with other UNH libraries in moving to a new Integrated Library System, ALMA, which allows Law Library users to access multidisciplinary print and digital collections in addition to legal materials.

Collaborations with UNH University Libraries

This move to the shared integrated library system was the gateway to additional collaborations for shared ebook and database contracts. The library could divert funds on general resources already accessible via the University and invest in developing our legal and IP collections. A cost share arrangement was developed with the University Library to fairly contribute

³⁶ *Supra* note 2.

to the cost of these general materials.

Reimagining Collections

There is a famous adage for making the best of a bad situation such as, “[i]f life hands you a lemon, make lemonade.” Dallas Morning News, 4 Oct. 1972.³⁷

When faced with a challenging financial environment, the librarians sought to first do right by the students. Librarians identified those areas that were the least impactful to students, such as cancelling multiple copies, moving to only one format, or cancelling subscriptions in areas no longer taught. Any patron visible cuts were made with care to maintain the core of the collection and to cut shallowly and on the periphery of subjects. Historically, this careful approach successfully maintained the integrity of the IP Library, a valued asset of the law school

As the law school flexed its entrepreneurial muscle and created the Hybrid JD program with a focus on IP. The librarians had to reimagine the IP Library and the Law Library’s collections to reach this new cohort. An aggressive shift to digital materials ensured that hybrid students could fully participate in the academic experience.³⁸

The ABA variance from Standard 306 (online education), granted in 2018,³⁹ authorized UNH Franklin Pierce’s hybrid program. The librarians worked to create an experience for the hybrid student that was substantially similar to that of residential program students in terms of offerings and opportunities. In response, the Law Librarians modernized the collection development policy, prioritizing digital resources to support learners regardless of geography. By redirecting funds and leveraging new collaborations with the University Library, the team significantly expanded ebook offerings through platforms such as EBSCO and ProQuest. Rather than adopting pre-packaged collections, selectors curated a bespoke ebook

³⁷ Modern Proverbs 48, The New Yale Book of Quotations (Frederick R. Shapiro, ed. 2021).

³⁸ The librarians also started a “scan and deliver” service where we would provide reasonable scans to students from our print collections upon request.

³⁹ ABA, Notices of Public Variances - https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/accreditation/news/public-notices/variances/

selection tailored directly to curricular needs in IP and beyond. This resulted in a more flexible, cost-effective, and user-centered approach.

To further support hybrid students, the law library provided guides to their 1L courses, promoted CALI lessons, and licensed the West Academic online study aids package, complementing the robust print study aids available to residential students. These decisions ensured that all learners had access to high-quality academic support tools.

Outcomes and Impact

The IP Library has helped build the law school's reputation, contributing to its place in the IP academy as one of the top IP law programs. The collection supports specialized curricula, faculty scholarship, and external researchers. Its vast resources are regularly used in academic and professional collaborations. UNH FP Law Library will continue to build upon the IP Library's collection to enhance its digital footprint, ensuring that all students and faculty, whether residential or online, are served. Librarians will continue to support the physical monograph collection that provides a functional, inclusive physical library space as one of the chambers of the "heart of the law school" for students, staff, and faculty.

II. Prioritizing Specialized Collections Using Small Academic Law Libraries' Strategies

Even though the VLGS and UNH FP specialty collections are seen as unique assets of smaller libraries,⁴⁰ these specialized collections have been recognized internally and externally as "treasures of the legal academy that should be maintained not only to meet the immediate needs of patrons at those institutions but also to safeguard access to legal knowledge and make the creation of new legal knowledge possible for succeeding generations."⁴¹ While challenges surrounding necessary staffing, access, and budgets to yield

⁴⁰ Describing small libraries as having between 0 and 250,000 volumes. See Leslie A. Street & Amanda M. Runyon in 102 L.Lib.J. 399 at 423 (2010).

⁴¹ Nicholas Mignanelli, "Whither the Monograph?: Changes to the ABA Standards on Library and Information Resources and Their Unintended Consequences for Legal Scholarship," 2 *Northwestern Law Journal des Refusés*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 1, at 9.

<https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/nljr/vol2/iss1/1/>

these collections' greater benefits persist, these hurdles are not insurmountable when the required commitment for these hallmark collections is acknowledged and prioritized. Academic law libraries of all sizes may face similar constraints, but can work around these barriers to develop specialized collections for their communities. Some law libraries have already been working toward this end. The NELLCO Acquisition and Collection Development Interest Group (IG) members circulated a survey to NELLCO members relating to areas of collection strength and have created a visual depiction of the survey results in their Collection Strength Map.⁴²

A. Specialty collections are possible despite library hurdles

This section reviews how specialty collections are worth investing despite contemporary hurdles.

1. Lean Staff

Juggling multiple responsibilities is de rigor for law library staff in today's environment. Small staffed libraries such as VLGS and UNH FP⁴³ have workers who wear many hats. Our specialty collection selectors, however, are subject matter experts tasked with curating active, meaningful collections that bolster their respective academic programs. Both libraries have invested in developing deep expertise in the collection subject areas to best understand the complexities of the topic and how it is developing over time. This is not just a short term investment but it spans many years. Succession planning should be considered as part of this long term strategy.

Starting in 2024, in conjunction with the Environmental Law Librarian's retirement, the VLGS library split selection oversight between two librarian selectors with environmental expertise. As the breadth of VLGS's

⁴² Diving into Collection Development: Library Collection Strengths Map at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/43b9227d810f4ee7a342b8a87978e5e9/> (it should be noted that VLGS is featured in the map. UNH FP hopes to participate in future iterations of the survey.

⁴³ UNH Franklin Pierce has 4.5 Library staff. Four of those are Librarians with only the director having both an MLS and JD. The IP Librarian has a JD and LLM in IP.

VLGS has 9 Full Time Equivalent library staff across 10 staff members. Four staff members have a JD and MLS along with staff having MLS or other master's and bachelor's degree combinations.

environmental curriculum grows, this division spreads the labor and provides additional perspectives.

UNH FP is following similar succession transitions as it prepares for the retirement of the founding Intellectual Property (IP) Librarian and is developing a succession plan for maintaining the IP Library collection and services currently offered.

2. Keeping up with Faculty Interests for Curriculum and Scholarship

Each library has its own methodology and practice for collection development, but by and large, speaking with scholars on the topic and getting their feedback is a valuable part of the strategy. Working directly with faculty is often a boon to a small law school where faculty are often in close physical or virtual proximity to the library.

The UNH FP's IP Librarian works closely with fellow IP Faculty to learn about their scholarly interests, their curricular needs, and teaching plans. This close relationship builds rapport and support for the IP Library. It also facilitates direct communication with the faculty when policies or subscriptions are changing and that may affect curricular and scholarly activities.

VLGS librarians also utilize a Library Faculty Liaison program as a partial mechanism for collection decisions. Because the VLGS environmental collection work is so vast, it is spread beyond one librarian. In many cases, environmental faculty are assigned to an environmental selector librarian to benefit from their deeper expertise. However, some environmental faculty holding additional duties, such as clinicians, may be paired with another reference liaison librarian. Because the entire reference team fields questions for the entire collection, the VLGS librarians can evenly serve all their faculty constituents while offsetting each other's particular expertise as needed.

3. Overcoming Contemporary Accessibility Challenges

Making a specialty collection accessible and known to the law students and faculty is the first step in establishing its value. Providing a universally accessible format or a mix of formats or making those materials accessible with the least barrier for a reasonable price, is the goal.

VLGS and UNH FP selectors consider format and platform options when evaluating materials for their expansive communities, including residential and remote researchers. For many materials, the print format costs significantly less and offers copyright flexibility of the First Sale Doctrine.⁴⁴ Electronic content, especially for simultaneous users, is often expensive and restrictive in terms of digital rights management (DRM) constraints. For a largely residential campus, the convenience of electronic content is appealing but the budget to subscribe to these services is not always present. Frequently, academic law libraries must choose between price and accessibility and need to evaluate each resource to determine its suitability for the collection. At times, alternative methods are required for bringing our print collections to online students. VLGS, for instance, will mail physical items with a pre-paid return label to online students when scanning is not an option due to copyright, labor, or other limitations.

UNH has adopted the digital-first collection development strategy for serving its primary constituents. The investment in digital content has made scholarly resources accessible to all students, including Hybrid JD and online Graduate students. Priority is given to ebooks that offer at least three simultaneous users, with additional considerations to DRM-free sources. In some cases, a single user is approved for a lower demand item that may be unique. There are, however, historic and print-only resources in the IP Library that are used by both faculty and students for papers and other scholarly works. Similarly to VLGS's practice, librarians will mail these physical items to students as well as offer a "scan and deliver" service. Additionally, the ebook collections are shared with the university at large, resulting in the law school's collections contributing to the larger University's scholarly assets.

⁴⁴ 17 U.S.C. 109(a)

Neither VLGS nor UNH FP libraries are considering Controlled Digital Lending as originally presented by Michelle Wu in her article⁴⁵ and in the recent white paper by Kyle Courtney.⁴⁶ The holding of the *Hachette Book Group, Inc. v. Internet Archive* case raises additional barriers in evaluating whether this practice is within copyright.⁴⁷ As best practices surrounding Controlled Digital lending emerge, both UNH FP and VLGS will consider integrating this option into their collection plans. With the prevalence and need for electronic research content growing, mechanisms for connecting library users with essential research content will be necessary. Solutions like Controlled Digital Lending are examples of cost-effective and scalable strategies that are suited to the constraints of the Higher Education market.

4. Navigating Small Budgets and Inconsistent Institutional Support

Lack of earmarked funds to quickly build a collection can be perceived as a barrier to quickly establishing a specialty collection. However, libraries can employ a long-view approach for collection building, whereas a mix of donations, gift funds, and institutional support can be used to slowly and methodically establish and grow a specialty collection.

The UNH FP IP Library's budget is a dedicated portion of the Law Library's budget. The Law Library is largely funded by the Law School's University allotment from the University. In the past several years, funding has been either flat or reduced and occasionally supplemented by small donations or gifts. The Law Library gifts can be used to fund small, one-time-only purchases for the collections or can be spent on improvements to the physical space or to improve the student experience. Librarians have used gift funds and gifts in kind to add to the IP Library collection. Additionally, librarians are working with our development partners to explore overall development opportunities for the Law Library by building off the IP Library's past targeted marketing, fundraising, and giving opportunities.

⁴⁵ Michelle M. Wu, *Building a Collaborative Digital Collection: A Necessary Evolution in Libraries*, 103 *Law Libr. J.* 527, 529 (2011),

⁴⁶ Kyle K. Courtney & David R. Hansen, *A White Paper on Controlled Digital Lending of Library Books*. DASH @ Harvard. 2018. <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/42664235>

⁴⁷ Ropes & Gray, Inc., *Controlled Digital Lending After Hachette Book Group, Inc. v. Internet Archive*, Nov. 12, 2024, <https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/controlled-digital-lending-after-1734921/>

Even with occasional funding setbacks, specialty collections can still be cultivated little by little, over time.

Aside from the grant funding supporting the non-academic side of the VLGS library's operations, the VLGS library does not rely on any regular external funding. The VLGS library has received smaller endowments and grants over the years for historic materials, Canadian materials, Chinese materials, and archived materials, along with occasional supplemental database support in conjunction with a larger institutional grant. However, for the most part, creating, maintaining, and growing its specialty environmental collection is part of the library's operational charge and achieved through regular mission-driven collecting strategies. Along with a series of carefully budget-driven subscription cancellations over the past 20 years, the VLGS collection strategy has pivoted from a volume-driven approach to a content precision approach, resulting in a tight and fresh set of materials supporting our constituents' research needs. On the fortuitous occasions when additional funds become available, through donations or otherwise, the VLGS library is eager to review its content wish lists and enhance its mission-driven offerings.

Strategies

Small libraries, while engaging in annual evaluation activities to determine if collections are keeping up to date, adopt deeper cost-effective strategies such as entering multiyear contracts for seminal tools. These multi-year agreements spread limited dollars across more content by minimizing compounded inflation and may provide a vendor discount over the life of the contract. These contracts are used to contain costs and allow for the savings to be used to cover other resources. For one example, the VLGS library works with vendors such as E & E News to deliver an appropriate lineup of their environmental content for our users.

Additionally, multiyear contracts can also preserve a database when cancellation decisions must be made. Most public state institutions, like UNH, are often conservative in using multi-year contracts. They may be used if there are significant savings and the database is considered one of our core services. Business reasons can justify entering multi-year contracts if the

library can effectively cancel the service without a significant impact on the integrity of the collection and the service to users.

Like all academic law libraries, small libraries reliant on tuition-driven operating budgets must be cautious when trimming any subscription-based resource to meet budget goals. These items are often tied to discrete purchasing cycles, are labor-intensive to implement and disable, and can be difficult to retroactively resume. Instead, small libraries like UNH FP and VLGS consider both long and short-term implications when designing their offerings within assigned budget constraints. Having an active dialogue with institutional administrators about the tradeoffs associated with diminished budgets is key to preventing unintended harms for current and future researchers, as well as risking compliance with accreditation standards, and could weaken their institutional reputation as subject matter leaders.

B. Specialty Collections Benefits

A specialty collection can bolster faculty and student recruitment. It helps to highlight the strengths of the law school and can be used as a lure for new faculty to show that they will be supported in their scholarly work as well as curricular development. Students can also use the specialty collection as proof of the institution's dedication to supporting their interests and know that there are resources and scholars with similar interests. A specialty collection, if publicized and made available to scholars, can help cement the reputation of the school. They are a symbol of a found community.

Specialized collections support specialized curricula. Specifically, highly cultivated topical collections, such as UNH FP and VLGS, offer tailored resources that align with an institution's specific programs. They can serve as the foundation for specialized degree programs such as LLM degrees or graduate programs. They can be used as the basis for concentrations or certificate programs. At the most basic level, they can be used to build upon the foundational JD coursework within the range of elective courses.

Specialized collections can enhance an institution's reputation, which in turn helps with recruiting and retaining faculty and admitting students. For example, the VLGS library has prominently dedicated displays for new

environmental content in the library lobby, demonstrating the school's deep commitment to environmental law to all who enter, including prospective and new students or faculty. The separate environmental collection, dedicated environmental reading room, and associated electronic content are also showpieces confirming the deeper available resources. The VLGS community regularly features these expanded scholarly resources when engaging with prospective visitors and guests.

Specialty collections are an efficient tool for faculty research support programs. Rather than a faculty member needing to identify sources dispersed throughout the library or other campus libraries, the majority of the resources are available in one locale. This saves the faculty member time and increases their efficiency and productivity. Additionally, a specialty collection supplies the faculty member and their students with inspiration and an opportunity to explore topics both familiar and unfamiliar in formal scholarship and to unlock additional curricular pathways in both doctrinal and skills courses.⁴⁸

Specialty collections enhance institutional identity and distinguish them from other law schools. UNH FP is a leader in IP, while VLGS is a leader in Environmental Law, and their specialty collections contribute to these recognitions by helping the school's overall reputation in terms of specialty rankings by US News and other organizations that publish rankings based upon a proprietary set of criteria.

UNH Franklin Pierce's IP Library has been a significant asset to the law school and larger legal community, as it is the only academic IP Library in the United States.⁴⁹ This long-standing reputation has contributed to the name recognition and reputation criteria of the U.S. News Rankings. While UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law left the US News Rankings in 2023,⁵⁰ the

⁴⁸ See Margaret A. Leary, "Library Support for Faculty Research." 53 J. Legal Educ. 192, 193-194 (2003), available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/articles/1715>

⁴⁹ UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law, IP Mall <https://ipmall.info/>; UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law, IP Library, <https://law.unh.libguides.com/IPLibrary>; See UNH Law Alumni Magazine, Winter 2009, p. 9 https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=alumni_mag

⁵⁰ David Brooks, UNH law school said "no thanks" to US News rankings, but it was ranked anyway, NH Bus. Rev. May 18, 2023

school is still ranked using limited publicly available data. Additionally, UNH has, for 30 years, been in the top 10 of top IP law schools.⁵¹ Likewise, VLGS has a long history of securing a top 5 U.S. New Ranking for its environmental program.⁵²

Separately from the direct benefit specialty collections provide their primary constituents, academic law libraries supporting specialty programs are often relied upon by external scholars pursuing these fields, creating even more value for the specialty collection. Specialty collections and their expert selectors can leverage the topical expertise developed in building to collection to foster cross-disciplinary work between academic departments both within a university and to extend the law school's relationships to bridge academic disciplines to different universities. This work affirms the greater impact of specialized library collections and adds pressure to preserve the content for the larger, indirect community of global scholars. Coincidentally, this sentiment aligns with VLGS' motto of *Lex Pro Urbe et Orb* or "Law for the Community and the World".⁵³

An example of this relationship-building and academic exposure created by the specialty collection is demonstrated by its permanent displays. Particularly, through the "Homer and Jean Blair Collection of United States Patent Models". This collection of patent models has pride of place as a permanent display in the IP Library. Prior to 1880, inventors were required to submit a physical model of their invention along with their patent application. The "Blair Collection" includes a model of the "sad iron"⁵⁴ as an example of American innovation. Professor Kevin McCartney, an antique

⁵¹ UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law, Blog, UNH Franklin Pierce School of Law Takes the #4 Spot for Intellectual Property Law Programs in US News and World Report Rankings, March 30, 2021, <https://law.unh.edu/blog/2021/03/unh-franklin-pierce-school-law-takes-4-spot-intellectual-property-law-programs-us-news-world-report#:~:text=UNH%20Franklin%20Pierce%20School%20of,Franklin%20Pierce%20School%20of%20Law>

⁵² <https://www.vermontlaw.edu/#>

⁵³ <https://www.vermontlaw.edu/about>

⁵⁴ A sad iron is a heavy piece of cast iron that was heated on a wood stove to press clothes. Mary Florence Potts's patent improved on this household tool with a removable wooden handle, a double-pointed shape, and internal insulation for better heat distribution. See *Sad Iron Trivet*, National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium <https://www.rivermuseum.org/collection/sad-iron-trivet#:~:text=Mary%20patented%20her%20invention%20in,Back%20to%20Collections>

iron collector and emeritus professor of geology at the University of Maine, Presque Isle, uses the IP Library's "sad iron" for his research and has filmed some episodes of his YouTube videos in the IP Library.⁵⁵ As he explains, "[A]s a scientist, my interest is in the early evolution of things, where an organism came from, what were the advantages that allowed it to survive for as long as it did — it's the same with irons...My study of irons in such great detail gives a better understanding of the essence of technological development."⁵⁶

Overall, when small academic law libraries and their institutional administrations are proactively attentive to library staffing, budget, and access implications, they can yield the long-term benefits of cultivating library resources, including specialized collections, that serve generations of researchers while enhancing their institutional position over time.

III. Accreditation Standards Expect Specialty Collections

A. Alignment with Curricular Needs and Academic Programs

While most institutions rightly prioritize the core collection standards for academic accreditation, many accreditors explicitly anticipate that resources beyond the core materials will be necessary when there are deep or unique curricular areas. Accordingly, developing specialty collections is not an extravagant endeavor, but evidence of compliance with, and commitment to, required standards.

Both VLGS and UNH FP's collections are reflective of the universe of sources for each topical area and provide a collection of the requisite formats. For instance, VLGS's library's obligation to provide a collection supporting the institution's unique curriculum, prevents sole reliance on online leased and bundled content packages to meet its community's academic needs and

⁵⁵ *Kevin Talks Irons*, YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@kevintalksirons>, see episode #61 as an example.

⁵⁶ Sara Anne Donnelly, *Caribou's Kevin McCartney Presses His Case for Elevating a Humble Household Tool*, DownEast, April 2025, <https://downeast.com/history/caribou-kevin-mccartney-presses-his-case-for-elevating-a-humble-household-tool/>

assure ABA standard 604 accreditation compliance. However, at UNH, ensuring community access to all its students, both residential and hybrid, is expanding the ability for students' success in their studies and acquire practical skills. While ownership of materials is preferred, the commitment to leased digital content allows for a nimbler, if risky, strategy. UNH's position is nimble because it can shift funds to a new "hot topic" without worrying about outdated print materials on the shelf. Law Librarians from both schools need to consider the tradeoffs of print versus electronic format and how each format can best serve their own communities.

Both VLGS and UNH FP's approaches apply the current ABA, AALS, and local NECHE standards' necessity for a strong library collection as a critical component of a successful law school. Flexibility within the standards should not be interpreted as diminished institutional role, but as recognition that academic law libraries must adapt their libraries' collections to their individual institutions' academic agendas using the contemporary range of collecting options and pricing models.

B. Commonalities and contrasts of case study libraries yield effective methods for specialty collections

VLGS and UNH FP build upon and deliver their successful specialty collections from many common perspectives. First, both libraries offer separate specialized collections, with UNH FP's IP collection having its own physical library and a dedicated librarian who is responsible for the collection and works closely with the Law Library Director on strategic directions and goals. VLGS's environmental collection is incorporated within the VLGS library with its own location code and otherwise follows regular library processes.

Further, both libraries have integrated home state collections plus other curricular-focused sections. For example, UNH FP has elevated Public Interest, Practice-oriented, and international content, while VLGS has elevated Public Policy and Restorative Justice content. Many academic law libraries in the United States have similar specialty foci, which may serve as starting points for solidifying their specialized collection potential. These specialty collections keep individual libraries relevant by containing and

preserving pockets of niche materials that are not in the regular platform lineups. They help to distinguish one law school from another and demonstrate why purely standardized collections would be a disservice to researchers and institutional value.

Additionally, both libraries formally serve external communities, with VLGS serving the general public through its grant with the state of Vermont to assume some responsibilities of the former Vermont Law Library.⁵⁷ UNH FP serves select communities, including the Bar, NHTI, and UNH. UNH is also a member of the USPTO's Patent Trademark Resource Center community, which serves the UNH community as well as the NH business and inventor communities. Both libraries serve the informal scholarly communities by building and maintaining these topical collections and sharing them through free content, interlibrary loan, and reference services as much as possible.

Finally, both libraries use deliberate format criteria to collect a combination of print and electronic content. However, the amount and approach differ. VLGS purposely splits these formats as well as licensed versus owned content. UNH FP favors electronic materials and licensed products but supplements with select print format and owned items. UNH splits its acquisitions budget between the IP Library and the main collection. The percentage split is 35.5% to the IP Library for print and ebooks and 64.47% to the general collection for print and ebooks.

Both libraries carefully select and emphasize the highest priority content for their specialty areas and users, while balancing cost, audience, and delivery constraints. Utilizing a variety of vendors and delivery mechanisms can yield cost-effective breadth of content while minimizing continuity disruptions as vendors exit or change their content offerings.

Because VLGS and UNH FPs' specialty collections exist as essential support for their institutional curriculum and mission, both libraries rely on their operational budgets as their primary source of fiscal support. Donations

⁵⁷ See https://ljfo.vermont.gov/assets/docs/appropriations/fy_2018/FY2018-Department-Budgets/f52f78429a/FY2018-Libraries-Budget-VLS-Progress-Report-to-State-Library-January-2017.pdf

and other occasional fund infusions are supplements, but do not provide the long term consistency required to maintain these collections' stature.

Using shared or less immediate content for more irregular needs can expand available funds toward unique specialty collections content, whether it's jurisdictionally specialized or topically specialized. Examples of this second cost-saving strategy include participation in shared, low-demand but valuable content, through collaborations like NELLCO's PALMPrint (Preserving America's Legal Materials in Print) program.⁵⁸ While there may be a short convenience delay with shared collections, the irregular need provides balance and alleviates intense budget drivers. In another example, rather than subscribing to the full Internet Protocol (IP) authenticated Science Direct database, the VLGS library purchases unlimited discounted articles, via Document Delivery service, on demand for its users. VLGS further reciprocates materials sharing through a variety of ILL networks, including local, regional and national groups, alliances, and consortia such as NELLCO's expanded ILL program.⁵⁹ In a typical year, the VLGS library lends between 300-400 items to other libraries while receiving between 300 and 400 items from other libraries.

Differences

VLGS and UNH FP demonstrate variations and qualities that can be adopted for successful specialty collections. First, UNH FP and VLGS are covering different subject areas, which require different resources and expenditure allocations. Further, UNH FP accesses the broader UNH library system for multidisciplinary materials. UNH FP also has some tasks, such as many day-to-day operations for the online catalog, that are handled by the main library. While this takes some of the burden and responsibility off the law library staff, it sometimes causes problems due to lack of extreme familiarity or lack of timely communication. Because VLGS does not have any university affiliation, the VLGS library maintains limited interdisciplinary content that is not commonly found in law libraries connected to a parent institution.

⁵⁸ NELLCO Law Library Consortium, PalmPrint, <https://www.nellco.org/page/palmprint>

⁵⁹ NELLCO Law Library Consortium, NELLCO Expanded ILL Pilot Program (NLEX), <https://www.nellco.org/page/ill>

Additionally, while both libraries have small staff, the UNH FP law library has very experienced staff who have been there for multiple decades. They are comfortable in their roles and have been able to absorb additional work and pick up additional roles as needed. VLGS balances the benefits and efficiency of long-term staff experience by incorporating cross-training into the roles and designing positions that are adaptable for career arcs. The staffing differences between UNH FP and VLGS reveal the impact of overarching administrative philosophies relating to continuity of service structures.

Finally, UNH FP and VLGS' specialty collections diverge in their contribution as publisher versus curator to the legal academy on their respective topics. UNH FP's specialized library IP division maintains and provides the IP Mall, which "offers unique content not available on these other Websites." In addition to its regular research guides, VLGS collates web content via the Environmental Law Research Sources (ELRS) collection of public websites on specific environmental topics.⁶⁰ Additionally, both libraries build their specialty collection through their day-to-day operations. For example, the UNH FP Law Library maintains its slice of the University's Institutional Repository, posting faculty scholarship, the Alumni Magazine, and historical content from the Gire Archives on the school's founding. The VLGS library does not have an online Institutional Repository beyond content on SSRN⁶¹ and the VLGS library's print format archives, which contain some faculty scholarship.

C. Expanding small library specialty collection practices into more academic law libraries

This article presents two small academic law libraries as examples of how to leverage specialty collections to bolster their law school's work. Their work on building and maintaining specialty collections reveals these

⁶⁰ <https://environmentalresearch.vermontlaw.edu/>

⁶¹ https://hq.ssrn.com/rankings/Ranking_display.cfm?RequestTimeout=5000&TMY_gID=2&TRN_gID=13&runid=78184

collections' roles as anchors to their larger collection development program. By sharing strategies that require limited resources to grow the collections, these efforts can then be adopted or adapted to other libraries interested in highlighting and investing in their own specialty collection. Further developing or formalizing even small specialty collections, academic law libraries would overtly emphasize their institutional contribution while assisting with the collective effort to retain the broad availability of scholarly information. Small actions as a collective can make large impacts, benefiting the academy and the legal profession at large.

UNH FP and VLGS specifically offer approaches for both public and private structures as well as university and independent law school organizations. At a maximal approach, academic law libraries could designate a whole collection location for a specialty collection, emulating either the VLGS or UNH FP method. At a minimal level, academic law libraries can showcase a specialty collection through featured promotion such as a dedicated space on the library's website, a subcollection discovery layer gallery, or research guides.

No matter the mechanism for presenting specialty collections, libraries must first determine their noteworthy strengths. Suitable strengths should naturally be consistent with a school's distinct mission, geographic locale, or intellectual expertise. For very little investment, libraries could formally incorporate these strengths into the collection development plans as specialty collections. Many law libraries will already have research guides covering their deep holdings in these areas. These guides, in turn, can serve as their specialty collection(s) base with the potential for expansion. Taken a step further, the specialized resources can serve as the basis for focused Advanced Legal Research courses. In addition to its regular Advanced Legal Research course, VLGS offers an Advanced Environmental Legal Research course. This focused course utilizes, promotes, and is made possible by this specialized collection

Once established, each specialty collection's value is enhanced by its exposure to the scholarly community. The more the collection is promoted for its direct library constituents, as well as the broader academic community, the more value it contributes. Promoting specialty collections can be

incorporated into a library's regular marketing activities and will likely garner increased attention due to their unique content. Further, the academic library community can spread the word through its collective sharing channels. These channels include everyday tools relating to collection development and interlibrary loan as well as dedicated tools like NELLCO's Library Collections Strengths Map.⁶²

Growing and preserving academic law library collections through multiple providers and ownership models retains libraries' abilities to design and share their collections. Libraries could inadvertently relinquish their professional and fiduciary expertise when content is concentrated through one or a few vendors. Rather than steering users to "one stop shopping" publisher platforms or bundles, libraries can use technical catalog integrations to deliver a streamlined user experience with robust specialty content, along with high-demand regular materials.

Elevating specialty collections as part of contemporary collection development practices is a pragmatic and manageable way for academic law libraries to achieve their role within the varied constraints they currently face. Larger law libraries could expand the example of smaller entities that have demonstrated success with a specialty collections model. The academic law library community could use this approach to affirm its critical role in scholarly output while spreading the resource leadership across a wider range of institutions.

IV. Conclusion

Academic law libraries, whether small or large, can use diverse and targeted strategies to efficiently support and grow specialty collections. UNH FP and VLGS are examples of these efforts' success and the varied paths available for this objective.

Many academic law libraries already have specialized state-specific holdings, which could be fostered into a specialty collection. Other academic law libraries may collect in niche subject areas relating to their institutions'

⁶² <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/43b9227d810f4ee7a342b8a87978e5e9/>

curriculum beyond their core JD program. Deliberately tending to these materials as specialty collections in the short term could be pivotal for long-term access to this content and scholarly work.

By offering focused, specialized content, libraries serve their direct constituents and missions while distinguishing themselves and filling this space for present and future researchers. In particular, academic law library specialty collections contain and retain content, often in owned print format, that is scarce elsewhere. Sharing these materials through varied ILL networks, including local, regional, and national groups, alliances, and consortia such as NELLCO's expanded ILL program,⁶³ maximizes the intellectual impact of the investment in these items.

Further, these deep scholarly offerings distinguish and demonstrate their parent institutions' specializations while also serving as a beacon for aspiring and active professionals working in the associated arenas.

The continued investment in specialty library collections is advantageous because it retains control over essential content for its students' and scholars' endeavors. Aside from accreditor requirements for sufficient funding,⁶⁴ consistent and adequate funding allows librarians to effectively steward collections for the long term by deliberately contemplating how to best balance and grow their collections in tandem with their institutional missions. Erratic funding can cause negative consequences over time, as sacrifices and choices often create permanent limitations for the collections' utility. Annually adjusting library budget allocations with attention to cost, format and usability can deter specialty collection neglect and foster long term strength.

Future Directions and Recommendations

⁶³ NELLCO Law Library Consortium, NELLCO Expanded ILL Pilot Program (NLEX), <https://www.nellco.org/page/ill>

⁶⁴ Am. Bar Ass'n, Standards and Rules of Procedures for Approval of Law Schools, Chapter 6, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2025-2026/2025-2026-standards-chapter-6.pdf; Standard 605(b) "law school shall provide on a consistent basis sufficient financial resources to the law library to enable it to fulfill its responsibilities of support to the law school"

Both VLGS and UNH FP will continue to maintain and grow their specialized collections for their primary users, providing students with access to materials that drive their interests as well as facilitating faculty's scholarly work. Most importantly, these collections fuel VLGS and UNH FP's curricular engines. Going forward, direct outreach ensures the appreciation and use of these academically relevant collections. Internally, the Library Liaison programs provide a mechanism for expert selectors to work closely with subject faculty regarding specialty collections decisions, as well as optimizing faculty referrals for library materials to their students. This not only instills the importance of the library but prepares students for the rigors of legal practice, as well as providing foundational skills building that may be tested in the NextGen Bar. VLGS' outreach program creates multiple library collection engagement points for students as well as faculty. Close communication within the institutional community builds interest in specialty collections and helps libraries identify interested users and introduce them to a prime law school asset. This interest can fuel collaboration with development folks who can, in turn, use the specialty collection to inspire institutional donors.

Academic law library specialty collections have historically served crucial roles for their scholarly community and scholarship pursuits. In the future, these collections' importance will increase by serving as stable sources of content that are not readily available in common research tools and collections. With the proliferation of and trend toward bundled online content as the primary legal research mechanism, academic law libraries with specialty collections will retain their vitality by filling the necessary gaps for their institutions' curriculum and flagship programs, while also serving as a resource for global scholars.