

**AI and the Post-Custodial Future:
Implications for Law Library Collection Development
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Today's law libraries face a paradox. Legal information is more abundant and accessible than ever, yet it is increasingly fragmented, impermanent, and difficult to manage. As primary and secondary sources proliferate across platforms and publishers (often governed by restrictive licenses or removed without notice) traditional collection models are no longer adequate. Law libraries must navigate shrinking physical space, access instability, rising costs, and declining financial support, all while preserving digital and print materials of enduring legal and historical value.

This paper proposes a framework for AI-supported, collaborative collection development tailored to law libraries. It promotes shared stewardship across academic, court, and government institutions operating in a post-custodial environment, where materials are frequently maintained or hosted externally. Drawing on advances in machine learning, metadata enrichment, and natural language processing, the paper explores how AI can unify collection efforts by identifying content overlaps and coverage gaps, and by supporting cooperative acquisition and preservation efforts.

Key applications include:

- AI-driven legal metadata mapping across institutions with differing classification schemes, enabling comparative analysis and federated access.
- Predictive tools that flag at-risk legal websites and born-digital documents based on update frequency, access restrictions, and link decay.
- Entity recognition and semantic clustering to reveal underrepresented legal topics or regional content.
- Shared AI dashboards that visualize collection strengths and deficiencies across participating libraries.

The paper also evaluates current initiatives such as the End of Term Web Archive, the Legal Information Archive, and PALMPrint, illustrating how AI can enhance these projects by minimizing duplication, broadening access, and enabling more strategic collaboration. It addresses ethical and operational considerations, including transparency in AI-assisted decisions, copyright implications, and maintaining institutional autonomy in shared environments.

By integrating AI into collaborative, post-custodial collection development, law libraries can move from reactive acquisition toward proactive, coordinated preservation. This will strengthen long-term access to legal information, particularly for at-risk and historically significant materials.