

Episode 14: Introducing Rebecca Chapman

Omar Brown

Welcome to Libraries Out Loud, a podcast produced by the University of Buffalo Libraries. I'm your host, Omar Brown, Education Technology Support Associate in Silverman Library on UB's North Campus. In each episode of Libraries Out Loud, we'll explore connections between the UB Libraries and the research, learning, teaching and creative activities of our faculty, students, and staff.

Denise Wolfe

Welcome to this episode of Libraries Out Loud. I'm Denise Wolfe and I'm a member of the UB Library's Communications Team. Today, I'd like to welcome Rebecca Chapman, the Undergraduate Law Program liaison, and the Indigenous Outreach Librarian in the Charles B. Sears Law Library. Rebecca joined the Libraries in November of 2020, and she's also the liaison to UB's new Department of Indigenous Studies. Hi, Rebecca.

Rebecca Chapman

Hey, Denise, it's great to be here.

Denise Wolfe

Could you tell us about your career path and how it brought you to the UB Law Library?

Rebecca Chapman

Well, I have to say it's a little bit like a Johnny Cash song. I've been everywhere. I graduated the University of Minnesota Law School in 2002. I immediately started practicing in Minnesota. I was taking clients in Minnesota and Wisconsin and Michigan. At that point, I got the offer to join the National Indian Gaming Commission, which is a gaming compliance Federal body that is part of the Department of the Interior. So, I was with their Office of General Counsel for a few years. I got the opportunity there to work with some wonderful tribes in Oklahoma and Texas. And then from there I moved back to Minnesota for a period where I was working with Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan tribes again. Got an offer to work with a private firm in California. So, I was representing California tribal clients, clients in Nevada and Arizona. And at that point, I received the offer from the Seneca nation to come out here to New York. So, I was on Haudenosaunee land in their tribal territories, working with them on employment issues and gaining compliance and a number of matters. But I have always loved the Libraries. This has been my special place. And I had always had in the back of my mind the thought that someday I was going to be a Librarian. I was going to do it and my husband actually, probably

just got sick of me always saying “someday”. And he was like, Why not now? And I just had a moment where I realized, I don't I don't have a comeback. I don't have an answer to that. Why not now? So, I had the wonderful opportunity to come to UB, to get my MLIS. And I am the most fortunate person in the world to have gotten the opportunity to stay at UB and to be at the Law Library. I am definitely the new kid on the block, but I'm excited and I'm absolutely honored.

Denise Wolfe

You have been everywhere

Rebecca Chapman

I have.

Denise Wolfe

So, could you tell me, how did you get interested in Indian law?

Rebecca Chapman

Well, it's a long story again. My mother was a Wyandotte woman. I'm not enrolled in any federally recognized tribe. But as a very young teen, I had a great grandmother passed away and we were cleaning out the materials of her attic and we came across what was an over two-hundred year old steamer trunk full of letters and scrapbooks and mementos. And they were full of stories of indigenous family members and their lives and what they were going through on a day-to-day basis. Some really wild stories. For example, I had a great-great grandmother who busted her husband out of jail the night before he was going to be hung for horse stealing.

Denise Wolfe

Wow.

Rebecca Chapman

But what had happened was that he was taking back his own horse that had been repossessed by the General Store manager who had overpriced everything and swindled them and claimed that they were in debt to him. And so he took the horse, and it's not an uncommon story throughout the Americas and throughout our history, it's depressingly unsurprising. And so these sorts of stories started to capture my every waking thought. And I decided that at some point I was going to go to Law School and I was going to be an ally in Indian Country and try to make a difference.

Denise Wolfe

Wow, that's really interesting, Rebecca. Your title is Undergraduate Law Program liaison and Indigenous Outreach Librarian. So, it sounds like you wear two hats. Let's talk about your role as Indigenous Outreach Librarian. What does it involve and are there specific areas you plan to focus on in this role?

Rebecca Chapman

I love talking about the new department, so I'm so glad you've asked. The new department, I can't say too much, but the overall vision is not just to create another Indigenous Studies Department like you might see at another University. It's to create an indigenous studies department that truly collaborates with and supports the Haudenosaunee and the surrounding tribal communities and nations to create and promote and support indigenous stories and indigenous scholarship. To give this department a way to collaborate with and support native voices. And so, the students that are coming in that are looking to do indigenous studies work are hopefully going to be as excited as I am about the opportunity to not just do what might have been seen as the standard indigenous studies work that you'd see at other universities, but to really center on and focus on native voices, native perspective, native scholarship, the voices that should be at the focal point or forefront of the entire department. So, what I am doing for them is as a liaison, I'm supporting in any way I can. I'm trying to help develop new databases for searching and getting new course materials and to support the professors in where they want to take the course work and finding the materials that are going to excite and energize the students. There's a lot of different subject matter that can be covered. There's a lot of discussion right now about boarding schools. There's a lot of discussion right now about missing and murdered indigenous women and how those narratives have been largely ignored or erased to the point where people are thinking generally that that's all in the past and it's not. These are stories happening today. It's important right now. And so, I think a lot of the curriculum is going to focus on some of those really important pieces. There's a lot of discussion about treaties and what the treaties mean and how they still impact sovereignty and all of Indian Country. There's a lot of potential discussion for the environmental work of native people and native voices in environmental discussions, environmental law, environmental regulation and compliance, and the department is looking to build at some point a way to outreach and collaborate with Haudenosaunee communities and their archives and their repositories, so that when a researcher or a scholar is looking to consider all the angles and all the voices to a story or an event, they're getting the opportunity to look at the native voices in particular and those positions. So, creating that collaborative space with the tribes would really enhance that ability.

Denise Wolfe

Rebecca, could you tell us about some of the materials here at UB that would support the Department of Indigenous Studies?

Rebecca Chapman

I'm so glad you asked. We have some really wonderful materials and some really important Special Collections that are very helpful to the researcher. So, right now we have the Haas collection and the Berman collection that are housed at the Law Library. And the Berman Collection in particular are not only the collected materials of Howard Berman, who was a wonderful Indian rights attorney, but also some of his research, some of his work, some of his advocacy with respect to some of the greater issues related to the Haudenosaunee and related to other tribes as well. So, if a researcher wants to look at some of the issues regarding land loss of the New York tribes or the environmental fights that they were having with some of the corporations in Niagara Falls. The Love Canal debacle and the Haudenosaunee's perspective on that those materials are in the Berman Collection. There are some really wonderful stuff there related to that. And as for the Haas collection, there's some really great materials not only related to Haudenosaunee culture and Haudenosaunee perspectives on land loss, but how the Haudenosaunee were treated by some of the governments in their dealings with the treaties and the land. There's some discussion about local perspectives. What did the city of Salamanca try to do at some points? What were local townspeople doing in Salamanca? What was their perspective on it? Edward Vreeland was a well-known New York politician. What was Vreeland doing in some of his attempts to take Haudenosaunee land? And what were the federal government's responses to some of this? So, there's a really great set of materials that are really helpful to a researcher to get more of a 360 perspective. But there's also some really wonderful special pieces in the collection that provide, I guess, a greater individual perspective of different Haudenosaunee people.

Denise Wolfe

So, if I heard you correctly that these materials will be available for researchers to access?

Rebecca Chapman

Absolutely. They're, they're available right now in print. You have to come to us and make a special appointment to work with the Archives. But they're absolutely available. And I really can't stress enough how useful they can be in reminding us of the fact that these issues are ongoing and that the perspective of the Haudenosaunee people is so incredibly important to understanding why things are happening now, what's happened in the past and how we can learn from it in moving forward.

Denise Wolfe

Great now. Now let's turn to your other role; Undergraduate Law Program liaison. What can you tell us about that?

Rebecca Chapman

Well, that is a fantastic new program. As you may already know, the Law School is hoping to excite undergraduates and promote the Law School and convince them to start thinking about Law. And hopefully, UB Law as their choice. So, to that end, it's really important to give these undergraduates a good, solid foundation before they decide, yes, I want to go to law school and I'm going to walk in the doors with absolutely nothing starting from zero. The Undergraduate Law Program makes sure you're not in that space. You're 10 steps ahead of the competition. So, one of the things that I'm doing is I'm teaching an undergraduate law course and I'm teaching legal research. I am going to be working with these students a little bit on legal reasoning. How do you look at a statute or a case when you first get it? It's 60 pages of gobbledygook, maybe. What are what are you supposed to understand out of it? Why is it important and how are you supposed to use it? That's part of what I'll be working with the students on. I'll also be working with them on specific databases that help with legal research. If you decide you want to go and work for the summer at a firm or work for a judge, and they say, pull the case of the thorns for me and you're sitting there going, What's the case of the thorns? I have no idea. We will teach you what databases to use, how you're going to look for that case, how you're going to pull it fast, how you're going to read it and analyze it fast, how you're going to put together the summary that shows your judge or your firm. I know what I'm doing and I am ready and I am 10 steps ahead of everyone else so that when I start Law School, it's not scary. It's not overwhelming. I know I'm where I want to be and where I need to be, and I can get started and run smoothly.

Denise Wolfe

So along with the assistance that you're giving students, are there any special projects that you have planned for this course?

Rebecca Chapman

We do have a number of projects. A lot of what I want the students to be working with are going to be hypotheticals because a lot of what they're going to be doing in law school is training on a hypothetical. You're going to get a fact pattern and the professor is going to ask you, what's the issue or the problem in this hypothetical that you, as the attorney need to solve? What's the rule, statutory or case wise that applies to this problem? And go find it for me. Then they're going to ask you to analyze that rule and how it applies to the facts you've been given. And ultimately, what's your conclusion as supported by all that analysis? So, we're not going to do quite the same heavy deep dive that you would get in the Law School. I'm going to give them later hypotheticals to work with, but I want them to be doing roughly the same thing. I want them by the end of the course to be able to look at a hypo and say, OK, I know exactly what the problem is here. If I don't know the rule off the top of my head, I know where to go and find it. I can go pull it. I can read it. I can understand it. Basically, I can work with it within the facts so that I'm analyzing it correctly and I can come to a conclusion. Very basically, there's going to be a number of times that we're going to do that throughout the course so that by the end, the students feel really comfortable doing that.

Denise Wolfe

That sounds great. Rebecca, if anyone would like to learn more about any of the collections you've described or projects you've mentioned on this podcast, what's the best way for them to contact you?

Rebecca Chapman

I am available in the Law Library. I am available by phone, by email, I have a Slack channel. I encourage you to track me down all of those ways. If you don't mind, I can give my email and phone number. Right now, I'm rc82@buffalo.edu Email me anytime. My phone is 716-645-3832. Please call me stop by the Law Library at any time. I'm there and I'm ready to talk about all of these things and more. I'm just excited to take the questions.

Denise Wolfe

Well, thanks for taking the time to speak with me today, Rebecca. I really appreciate it.

Rebecca Chapman

It was my pleasure. Thank you, Denise.

Omar Brown

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Libraries Out Loud and stay tuned for our next look at the UB Libraries on campus.