Partnering with Decision Makers in Your Institution

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from the president

Partnering with Decision Makers in Your Institution

In the course of my presidential activities this year, I attend many meetings. Most recently I went to the ABA Council of the Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar meeting in San Diego in December and the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) meeting in Washington, D.C., in January. While engaging in conversations with lawyers, judges, and professors, I make a point of asking them whether they have asked their librarians for assistance on the issues they are involved in. I am always elated when they comment on how good the service is. Sometimes, they say that they have not thought of asking their librarians for help, even though they know that they should.

Recently, a lawyer from Miami asked me about knowledge management in law firms, and a law professor asked me about international resources on law and aging. I encouraged them to ask their librarians to do background research. I emphasized how knowledgeable librarians are in any area of inquiry and that if they don’t know the answer, or have the materials onsite, they will know where to find it or who to ask for an answer.

My question to you for today is what if we all made a big effort to partner with decision makers? What if we made ourselves indispensable to our parent organizations and their leaders, whether they be judges in court, lawyers in law firms, or faculty and students in law schools, as well as administrators and other staff in these entities? We have terrific services to offer and special skills to meet their needs. But we should be proactive and reach out to them, since they may not know all that we can do for them. One way to do that is to engage in informal, social conversations in the hallway, at meetings, or at every opportunity so that very naturally they will think of asking us a question about Google or about their research issues of the day.

Another way might be to invite a decision maker to lunch, as an equal partner, so that we become colleagues with our institutional decision makers. I would love to receive your success stories, as well as challenges, so that they can be shared with others. Please send them to cgermain@aall.org.

AALS in Washington, D.C., January 2006

I represented AALL at the recent AALS meeting in Washington, and I would like to share my impressions with you as to the impact of the discussions on our work as law librarians and on our profession.

The AALS annual meeting was relocated to Washington, D.C., this year, from the original location in New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina struck in September. Many references were made to the 1,000 or so New Orleans law students who were hosted by law schools nationwide.

Empirical Scholarship, Theme of Conference. The general theme of the conference was “Empirical Scholarship,” a relatively new area of research, which uncovers and analyzes facts and draws conclusions based on particular methodologies appropriate to the specific inquiry. Many of the sessions presented different ranges of ideas, methodologies, and projects involving different types of empirical research, with the hope that law faculty would be encouraged to add an empirical component to its own scholarly agenda. Some methods include exploiting underused or difficult-to-access databases, making creative use of social science methods, and communicating the results of empirical studies effectively to a broader community. Some exemplary empirical projects mentioned investigating the effects of caps on damage awards, documenting patterns of black land law, comprehending crime trends, and studying judges and juries.

I attended the plenary luncheon on behalf of AALL at the head table and had the pleasure to listen to a brilliant lecture by Judge Guido Calabresi on “The Lawyer as Institutional Empiricist: the Case of Law and Economics.”

Kudos to Virginia Law Librarians

Kudos to all the law librarians who wrote most of the December 2005 Virginia Lawyer issue, the official publication of the Virginia State Bar. This great accomplishment features a photo of Gail Warren, state law librarian, on the cover of the issue with the Honorable Leroy R. Hassell, Sr., chief justice of the Virginia Supreme Court. Congratulations to Paul Barron, Hazel Johnson, Kent Olson, Jennifer Sekula, Lyn Warmath, Gail Warren, and Gail Zvirner for a wonderful job that reflects so well on our profession and that can be emulated in the other 49 states! The issue is available online at www.vsb.org.

Transnational Law in U.S. Law Schools Workshop. As many of you know, I have published a book, Transnational Law Research: a Guide for Attorneys, in loose-leaf form since 1991 (2006 update soon to be released) at a time when “transnational” was the buzzword. Other terms then came into vogue, particularly “global,” to refer to the internationalization of law practice and world economies. It pleases me that “transnational” has reappeared as the preferred term and that a whole day’s workshop was devoted to it during the AALS meeting.

With the globalization of activities, students will inevitably confront transnational legal issues and challenges in legal practice. Any informed national discussion of important policy issues also includes transnational law. This has led to the new focus of introducing transnational perspectives in the first-year curriculum, rather than in specialized upper-class courses, and has made transnational law an integral, rather than peripheral, part of legal education. U.S. lawyers addressed the new roles they play in a multinational legal world—the way in which foreign and international law routinely affect the practice of law today and the importance of knowing about other legal systems so that U.S. lawyers know how to deal with foreign lawyers.

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Applications for both AALL Grants Programs must be received at the Association's Headquarters by April 1.
Submitted by Joan Stringfellow.

Mentoring Committee Announces Quick Mentor Program
Do you need short-term professional guidance on a specific issue? Have you exhausted your available confidants or want to obtain advice anonymously? The Mentoring Committee's new Quick Mentor service can help. Submit your question at www.aallnet.org/committee/mentoring, and a committee member will find an expert law librarian to answer your question.

Quick Mentor differs from the Mentor Project in two ways. Quick Mentor matches you with an expert for one-time advice on a specific issue whereas the Mentor Project matches you with a mentor for an ongoing relationship. Second, Quick Mentor is designed for all AALL members whereas the Mentor Project tends to be utilized by newer members.

Sooner or later, all law librarians can benefit from an outside perspective or guidance. So give this service a try the next time you need a second opinion. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer expert, contact Mentoring Committee member Terry Long, assistant law librarian/government documents librarian at the Virginia State Law Library in Richmond, at tlong@courts.state.va.us.
Submitted by Kristy Moon.

AALL/LexisNexis Research Grants Available
The Research Committee is accepting applications through April 1 for research grants from the AALL/LexisNexis Research Fund Grants Program, totaling up to $5,000.

The committee will award one or more grants to library professionals who wish to conduct research that supports the research/scholarly agenda of librarianship. The grants program funds small or large research projects that create, disseminate, or otherwise use legal and law-related information as its focus. Projects may range from the historical (indexes, legislative histories, bibliographies, biographies, or directories) to the theoretical (trends in cataloging or publishing or new service models in libraries) to the practical (implementation models for collection, personnel, or infrastructure management).

The AALL Research Agenda offers suggestions for possible research projects that cover a wide segment of professional interest, including the profession of law librarianship, law library patrons, law library services, legal research and bibliography, legal information resources, and law library facilities. However, projects are not limited to those described in the agenda, and the committee will consider all applications and research projects. To review AALL's Research Agenda, visit www.aallnet.org/committee/research/agenda.asp.

The AALL/LexisNexis Publishers Research Fund Grant Program was established in 2000 with a generous contribution of $100,000 from LexisNexis. The Research Fund will provide grants to library professionals who seek to conduct research that is critical to the profession. The Research Fund provides a secure financial base, enabling the AALL Research Committee to carry out the Association's Research Agenda.

To apply for the grants, all applicants must provide resumes and statements of their qualifications for carrying out their projects. The applications should demonstrate experience with research projects and an understanding of the dissemination and use of legal and law-related information. Priority will be given to practicing law librarians and AALL members, working individually or in partnership with other information professionals. The grant application and complete guidelines are available at www.aallnet.org/about/grant_application.asp.

Grant applications must be postmarked no later than April 1. Grants will be awarded and announced in May. Allocation of the research grants will be at the sole discretion of the AALL Research Committee.

For more information about the grants, please contact Eloise Vondruska, chair of the AALL Research Committee, at e-vondruska@law.northwestern.edu. The members of the AALL Research Committee are Vondruska, Northwestern University; Duncan Alford, Georgetown University; Karen Beck, Boston College; Jean Callihan, Cornell University; Carol Collins, University of Tennessee; Joel Fishman, Duquesne University/Allegheny County Law Library; and Jeanne Frazier Price, University of Texas.
Submitted by Eloise Vondruska.

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I also attended a specialized session on integrating transnational law in the first-year civil procedure course. What is transnational law? I have an elaborate definition in my book in Chapter 1, at section 1.01.3. It involves public international law, private international law, comparative law, and the domestic law of foreign countries. There are practical library applications to this phenomenon. The library literature is expanding with transationally-oriented books. West is starting a series of supplements with a transnational focus, geared for use with U.S. textbooks, e.g., a forthcoming 200-page book by Thomas Main on “Global Issues in Civil Procedure: Cases and Materials,” intended to supplement any first-year civil procedure casebook.

Dialogue between Law Deans and Law Library Directors. The Section on Law Libraries co-sponsored a program with the Section for the Law School Dean, which turned out to be most successful, with more than 200 people attending—many of them deans. Titled, “How I see it: A Dialogue between Deans and Law Library Directors,” the program was quite lively, with each speaker speaking for five minutes on a topic, using the point and counterpoint technique, and then opening the floor for discussion with the audience. The three topics were “Space and Collections,” “Faculty Status for Law Library Directors,” and “Oversight of Information Technology in Law Schools.”

The three librarian speakers were excellent, eloquent, and persuasive: Penny Hazelton (University of Washington), Barbara Bintliff (University of Colorado), and Billie Jo Kaufman (American University). The law deans included Kenneth Starr (Pepperdine), who moderated the panel; David van Zandt (Northwestern); Nancy Rogers (Ohio State); and John Garvey (Boston College). Many thanks to Filippa Anzalone (Boston College), who organized the panel as chair elect of the AALS Section on Law Libraries. It was very constructive to hear how deans talk about libraries and their respect for the work done by librarians. This first dialogue was continued at the ABA Midwinter meeting in Chicago in February at a deans’ workshop focusing on the library in the law school, with Chris Simoni (Northwestern) and Keith Ann Stiverson (Chicago-Kent) representing the law library perspective.