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Visit to Puerto Rico

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Visit to Puerto Rico

Continuing Professional Education

I traveled to Puerto Rico on behalf of AALL, February 26-March 2, to participate in various activities related to law libraries and library education. My major activity was a presentation on March 1 at the University of Puerto Rico Law School to a group of more than 40 law librarians, library science students, library directors (University of Puerto Rico Library System), and presidents of local library organizations.

The title of the presentation was “Un Conversatorio acerca de *El Rol de las Organizaciones Profesionales en el Desarrollo Profesional de los Bibliotecarios*.” Conversatorio is a colloquy (the word conversatorio was used because it has a more intimate meaning versus conference). The subject, *El Rol*, means the role that professional organizations play in the professional development and continuing education of librarians. The dean of the law school, Dr. Efrén Rivera Ramos, introduced the meeting. I spoke in English, since most librarians understand English, and there were a few questions and statements in Spanish as well.

I talked about the role of AALL in continuing professional education, following the three Strategic Directions of leadership, education, and advocacy as the framework for our efforts. I then discussed the work of the four special committees appointed this year and the standing committees, particularly the Committees on Mentoring, Recruitment and Retention, and Diversity. I showed the new Web site prepared by the Graduate

Education for Law Librarianship Committee that points out law librarianship courses offered by the various library schools throughout the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (whose inhabitants are U.S. citizens). I mentioned the Education Summit held in September 2005 and the current efforts to develop a coherent continuing professional education

program, geared to supplement the Annual Meeting programs and to be developed with a large role given to the chapters and special interest sections.

The presentation was well received and elicited several questions on subjects such as AALL's stance on various issues like the *USA PATRIOT Act*. I was pleased to show the audience AALL's resolution about the act on AALLNET. Other comments related to the need for the public education system to teach children how to use government information at an earlier age. A question was raised on how AALL is planning to strengthen the connection with library schools. Other questions were on what accounts for the effectiveness and success of AALL as an organization and on certification for law librarians.

There is a strong local law librarians' association. As a result of my visit, several members expressed a willingness to join AALL, and there is a possibility that the group will want to form an AALL chapter at some point in the future. Members mentioned their concerns about AALL membership fees and the costs of attending the Annual Meeting, which starts with an expensive plane fare and a long journey from the island of

Puerto Rico. I reiterated the crucial need for continuing professional education in this rapidly evolving legal information landscape, as well as the importance for law schools, law firms, governments, and courts—the institutions where we work—to pay for AALL membership and provide funding to attend professional meetings. The membership pays for itself because it

allows the librarians to do their jobs better, gain cutting-edge skills, and add more value to their institutions through better training and expertise.

Library Visits

I visited the law library of the University of Puerto Rico. I met with Law School Dean Dr. Efrén Rivera Ramos and with University Chancellor Dra. Gladys Escalona de Mota, who happened to be at the law school on that day.

In the afternoon, we went to the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico, which was celebrating the 50th anniversary of its building, a nice modern structure, surrounded by a pool and park area. It was designed by two Puerto Rican architects who

graduated from U.S. universities, Osvaldo Toro (Columbia 1937) and Miguel Ferrer (Cornell 1938) (www.periferia.org/architecture/tf.html). For an explanation of the architecture of the Supreme Court, visit www.periferia.org/architecture/tf5.html.

During the law library tour, we ran into Chief Justice Hon. Federico Hernández Denton. We also had an extended conversation with one of the two women justices, Hon. Liana Fiol Matta. For more information on the court, visit www.tribunalpr.org.

Another highlight of the day was a visit to the Legislative Library, led by Juan Carlos Ortega, and the tour of the elegant Capitol Building. I then went to Ponce, in the Southern part of the island, and visited the Pontificia Universidad Católica Law School. I met with Law School Dean Dr. Angel Gonzalez Roman. Director of the Law Library Noelia Padua Flores and her staff gave me a tour of the law library.

Overall, I was struck by the professionalism, competence, and extreme friendliness of all the librarians. Puerto Rico has a mixed legal system, with civil law influences from its Spanish heritage. Every library has a strong collection of Spanish law. For more information on the Puerto Rico legal system, visit <http://welcome.topuertorico.org/government.shtml>.

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From left: Ivette Torres, Evelyn Ortiz, Lizette Lopez, Betsaida Velez, Honorable Fiol Matta, Claire Germain, and Pedro Padilla gather in the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico Chambers.

About Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico serves as a natural bridge in North America for trade and issues that might involve common law and civil law. Law librarians from Puerto Rico add real value to the Association because of their comparative law insights into a hybrid legal system and their bilingual—Spanish and English—culture. They reflect our future.

For a guide to getting Puerto Rico law, see Maria Otero's Web guide at <http://library.law.unc.edu/cosell/pr-1.htm>.

I would like to thank all the librarians from Puerto Rico who provided the warm welcome and thoughtful questions and thank particularly the following law librarians:

- Pedro Padilla, head of the University of Puerto Rico Law Library Foreign and International Law Department and law librarian at Fiddler Gonzalez Rodriguez PSC. An active AALL member, Padilla is the incoming president of the Association of Caribbean University, Research, and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) (<http://acuril.rrp.upr.edu/conse.htm>). This year he was awarded the Vilma Bayron Award by the Asociacion de Bibliotecarios de Derecho de Puerto Rico.
- Lisette Lopez, head of the University of Puerto Rico Law Library Acquisitions Department, who organized the Latin

American Caucus at the July 2005 AALL San Antonio Meeting.

- Maria Otero, director of the University of Puerto Rico Law Library.
- Ivette Torres, director of the Supreme Court Library.
- Juan Carlos Ortega, director of the Biblioteca Legislativa de Puerto Rico Tomas Bonilla.
- Betsaida Velez, professor in the University of Puerto Rico Graduate School of Information Sciences and Technologies and law librarian at McConnell Valdes.
- Noelia Padua Flores, director of the Pontificia Universidad Católica Law School Law Library.

I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity to network on behalf of AALL with this important constituency, especially as we refine our continuing professional education offerings. ■