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"Perspectives" serves as a members' forum and features articles on issues of concern to the profession.

E-Development: Should Librarians Expand Their Online Learning Opportunities?

by Kristina L. Niedringhaus

What opportunities for professional development exist? Does it seem such junctures are limited to sitting quietly through a presentation at an AALL or regional association meeting? Don't misunderstand, Association meetings are an invaluable and irreplaceable tool for professional development. Unfortunately, this value may get overlooked amid growing budgetary concerns. Of course, someone who does nothing more at an Association meeting than sit in on presentations can find more to support his or her own development — e.g., Special Interest Sections, roundtables, committees.

But what about the rest of the year? Librarians peruse the professional literature to keep current. Yet reading all those articles and books can be very time-consuming, so many librarians wind up with a stack of items that haven't made it to the top of their priority lists. A variety of e-mail listservs also help spread current information and provide a vehicle for learning. The AALL Professional Development Listservs have sparked much creative thinking and interchange on a wide range of topics, such as cataloging electronic resources and serving pro se patrons. Librarians occasionally have the chance to take part in teleconference events that address timely topics, such as the satellite teleconference on the *USA PATRIOT Act* that AALL and its fellow library associations sponsored in December 2002.

These methods of continuing education should not be replaced. But what else can a librarian do to advance his or her professional development?

Here's a theoretical proposition for professional development opportunities. Think about "e-development." It's very trendy today to be e-something, but the online environment can be exploited to supplement professional development.

Many large organizations are using e-training to provide software instruction for their employees. I have even tested some e-training modules on sexual harassment and diversity training for human resources programs. The value of these modules lies in how well the material is presented and whether the technology is used appropriately to encourage learning.

The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction, which is located at http://www.cali.org, has successfully used the online environment for legal education. CALI is a nonprofit consortium of law schools that researches and develops computer-mediated legal instruction and supports institutions and individuals using technology in legal education. CALI lessons are supplemental learning aids for law students that teach doctrine, analysis and critical thinking skills. Some must be downloaded to a computer, but more and more of the lessons are designed to run online and provide interactive learning and testing in a specific area of law. Couldn't AALL apply the same concept to professional development?

Would such an endeavor be an effective use of resources? There is evidence that adult learners prefer interactive, hands-on learning. When used properly, the online environment can create these opportunities. Furthermore, one asset of e-training is that the modules can be designed in small pieces. A topic might encompass multiple modules or be capable of starting and stopping at the user's inclination. The lessons could be self-paced and organized so that an entire topic need not be completed in one sitting, making them much easier to fit into a typical work schedule. E-development could expand the opportunity to learn throughout the year, as needed, and on an individual's own schedule.

However e-training cannot supersede the advantages of traditional professional development. Meeting and networking with colleagues at continuing education events offers inherent value. Besides helping librarians find their next jobs, networking adds value to their current organizations. How many have found the crucial answer or magic document by calling on the assistance of someone they've met at an Annual Meeting or even on the Law-Lib listserv? Online modules

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announcements

Want Money???

AALL Will Give It to You!

Every year AALL awards thousands of dollars in scholarships to law school and library school students and AALL members.

The following scholarships will be awarded this year:

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- Type V — Law Librarians in Continuing Education Courses
- LexisNexis™ John R. Johnson Memorial Scholarship
- AALL and West George A. Strait Minority Scholarship
- James F. Connolly LexisNexis™ Academic and Library Solutions Scholarship

The application deadline for all scholarships is April 1. Check out the AALL Web site, AALLNET, for complete information, instructions and applications at http://www.aallnet.org/services/scholarships.asp. Spread the word to anyone who might be eligible!

For further information, contact AALL Scholarships Committee Chair Kim Clarke at 916/739-7183 or kclarke@uop.edu or AALL Headquarters at 312/939-4764, extension 10, or membership@aall.org.

announcements

2003 Ballot Schedule

Friday, Feb. 28
Deadline for receipt of petition candidates at AALL.

Monday, March 3
Ballots mailed to all voting members.

Friday, April 4
Deadline for receipt of ballots at AALL.

Monday, April 7
Ballots tabulated at AALL, and results of election announced immediately.

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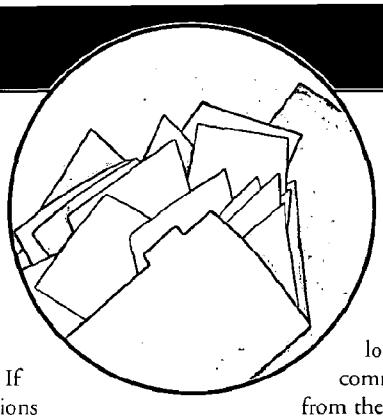
How CRIV Reverse Site Visits Work



The Committee on Relations with Information Vendors instituted reverse site visits in May 2000 as low-budget alternatives to full site visits, bringing librarians and publishers together on the librarians' home turf. As with full site visits, the goal is improved communication and understanding.

Initiating the Visit

Vendors or the CRIV may initiate a reverse site visit. So far, vendors have most often contacted the CRIV chair to suggest that a visit would be mutually beneficial to libraries near a vendor installation.

After the CRIV chair agrees to the proposed visit, the site visit subcommittee chair plans the meeting and local arrangements. Ideally a CRIV member helps prepare the local logistics of the visit, such as meals and transportation, and attends the meeting. Leaders and members of local AALL chapters may also participate in arrangements. The vendor and the CRIV should ensure that the appropriate people are included in the visit. Usually no more than three vendor representatives at the management level should attend the reverse site visit. They should have the experience and knowledge to elicit necessary information from the librarians and the authority to make decisions about possible future directions. Library presenters should be limited to those librarians who have hands-on experience with the business processes of interest to the vendor.

Soliciting Questions

Vendor concerns drive the meeting agenda in a reverse site visit. For a full site visit, the CRIV solicits issues and questions about a particular vendor from AALL's members and forwards them to the vendor to address during the visit. In contrast, at a reverse site visit, the librarians should be prepared to respond to the vendor's questions.

When a vendor visits a library during a reverse site visit, the library should treat the vendor as a guest in all respects and not target the vendor for any kind of criticism or verbal attack. If the vendor wants to answer questions from the membership, an atmosphere of civility, cooperation and mutual respect should prevail.

Meeting Proceedings

Vendors are usually interested in the insider perspective of law library technical services, systems and functions. Visits may focus on how a library processes information products — from initial receipt in the mailroom to how the library patron uses the products. The publisher may also observe a library's acquisition system, payment and claiming, recording, cataloging and processing, and online access to materials. Each visit should be adapted to the interests of the participating library and vendor.

A vendor can conveniently visit two libraries in a single day: one in the morning, followed by a lunch with participants, and one in the afternoon. If more than two libraries are on the agenda, another day will be necessary.

Practical Matters

During a full site visit, the CRIV is the guest of the vendor, who covers most costs for attendance. By contrast, local AALL members are responsible for most expenses of a reverse site visit, including related meals and snack breaks. The CRIV or the host institution finances the travel costs, including transportation between libraries and parking.

Reporting the Visit

The CRIV or AALL participants should be assigned to write articles about the event: what was discussed, any decisions reached and any suggestions about possible improvements. Authors may be CRIV participants, members of the local arrangements committee or librarians from the participating libraries. Because these reports are some of the most valuable outcomes of a reverse site visit, articles should reflect a spirit of cooperation and a desire to improve communication. They should be submitted to the CRIV preferably no later than 10 days after the visit. Vendors generally receive copies of the reports and are given an opportunity to contribute their own reports.

Seller Beware

Smaller entities, such as individual libraries or regional AALL organizations, are welcome to invite publisher representatives to visit their libraries and hold meetings with their members, but such meetings should not be represented as organized or sanctioned by the CRIV. A vendor, the CRIV chair and a member of the CRIV site visit subcommittee plan an official CRIV reverse site visit. Even if a CRIV member cannot attend, the committee will be intimately involved in the planning and will enlist local AALL members to orchestrate the actual event following the steps outlined above. Vendors should be wary of any reverse site visit proposed by an entity other than the CRIV.

Vendors interested in scheduling a reverse site visit should contact CRIV Chair Carol N. Rogers at carol.rogers@lw.com.

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will never supplant that aspect of professional development.

Another drawback — or benefit — to e-development is that it requires large-scale organizational skills. Economies of scale suggest that creating modules that would provide learning opportunities to AALL's large and diverse membership would be best handled on a national level. AALL's membership has experts who can create learning opportunities on various topics of law librarianship. That expertise can be taped and shared with the rest of the national membership, providing interactive learning that is not limited by any meeting's time or place.

The details of this theoretical e-development proposition have yet to be fully worked out. The extent of such a project may seem overwhelming at this time, but just imagine the possibilities.

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