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A World of Collaboration: AALL's 97th Annual Meeting and Conference Took on Global Issues of Law Librarianship

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A World of Collaboration

AALL’s 97th Annual Meeting and Conference takes on global issues of law librarianship

by Stephanie Davidson and Colleen C. Williams

photos by Brant Bender.
Marked by themes of publishing and collaboration, along with a general international flavor that tied the week’s programs and events together, more than 2,400 people attended the 97th AALL Annual Meeting and Conference, held in Boston July 10-14. Effectively building on this year’s theme, “From Boston to Mumbai: The World of Legal Information,” AALL’s Foreign, Comparative, and International Law Special Interest Section sponsored six programs on topics from treaty-making to serving foreign patrons, in addition to sponsoring a workshop on acquiring international trade materials. This global theme was expressed in technology trends as well, as knowledge management, digital publishing, and blogging were explored as practical means of bringing the world to our fingertips.

“This was one of the strongest meetings in years,” says Kim Clarke, acting library director at the University of Pacific McGeorge School of Law. She particularly appreciated the programs aimed at new and future managers and was energized by programs featuring library surveys. Erika Wayne, reference and Internet services librarian and lecturer in law at Stanford University’s Robert Crown Law Library, noted a strong publishing thread throughout the conference—from the award-winning Publication Project of the Law Librarians Association of Wisconsin Inc. to Monday’s program on marketing library services to the world (see page 22).

Featured Speakers

This year’s first plenary session featured Siva Vaidhyanathan, director of communication studies in culture and communication at New York University. His speech, “The Anarchist in the Library: The Future of Global Information Politics,” focused on the importance of libraries and librarians. “One of the several ‘ah ha’ moments of Siva Vaidhyanathan’s amazing keynote was Siva’s celebration of the fact that we ‘information warriors’—librarians, teachers, lawyers, programmers, musicians, filmmakers, preachers, propagandists, bloggers—are learning to code-switch [i.e., move between different cultures] across our respective disciplines as never before,” writes Glenn Otis Brown on the Creative Commons Web log (http://creativecommons.org/weblog).

Vaidhyanathan also discussed challenges to the free flow of information. “[Vaidhyanathan] spoke with passion about the drastic actions that were taken without debate [by the U.S. government after September 11, 2001],” notes Diane M. Urley, reference/Web services librarian at Southern Illinois University Law Library on the AALL conference blog (www.aallnet.org/events/local04/blog.htm). Tese actions include increased surveillance, open source intelligence (the Terrorism Information and Prevention System program), the USA PATRIOT Act, and restrictions on scientific and academic freedom.

Regarding corporate copyright holders, Vaidhyanathan encouraged the audience to check out the children’s pages on the Recording Industry Association of America and Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Web sites to see the corporations’ efforts to mold future consumers’ views on the ownership of information. For example, the MPAA site includes a downloadable poster that reads, “You can click but you can’t hide. Illegal downloading inappropriate for all ages.”


Marc Rotenberg, executive director of Electronic Privacy Information Center, and Michael Vatis, attorney and terrorism consultant, discussed the implications of various types of computer and network intrusion, from personal to national security issues. Tey shared the second plenary session on Wednesday in a session coordinated and moderated by Barbara Yuill, managing editor of BNA’s Privacy & Security Law Report.

“They alerted the audience to both their rights concerning access to information and new concerns for security and protection given the proliferation of technological advancements,” says Nicole Evans, electronic services and reference librarian at the University of Houston O’Quinn Law Library. “In a time when both personal and national security issues are a daily concern, the ability of individuals from high school students to terrorists to access and manipulate confidential information and the actions undertaken to combat those actions is a topic that all information users and providers should be aware of.”

Katherine Coolidge, law librarian at Bulkley Richardson and Gelinas, adds that Rotenberg’s quick departure at the end of his talk may have limited the questions from the audience. BNA prepared a special Global Privacy and Security Law Report for the conference, in conjunction with its coordination of this program.

Opportunities to Learn

In addition to the meetings, workshops, and other events, the conference offered 67
programs in 11 timeslots. Sunday through Wednesday morning brought a mix of 60- and 90-minute programs, and Wednesday afternoon featured three slots of 30-minute programs.

Erika Wayne expressed a sense of renewed optimism for gaining control over networks in presentations such as "The (Under)world of Legal Information: Protecting Networks from Hackers, Worms and Malicious Exploitation," and in general she found the presenters very adept at informing the diverse crowd. She also noted the fantastic humor of the "Negotiating the Bizarre" program on dealing with strange reference questions (see page 20 for a full review). "Comedy Central, look out—the law librarians are coming," she says.

This year's Annual Meeting featured two Hot Topic programs: Tuesday morning's "Baghdad Biblio-Files: Tales From a Librarian at Large," and Tuesday afternoon's "Same-Sex Marriage: The Legal Issues." Traditionally one 60-minute slot is reserved for a late-breaking or timely issue that hasn't been treated by one of the programs already selected. This year, a second Hot Topic presentation was added in June.

Nancy McMurrer, faculty instructional services coordinator at the University of Washington Gallagher Law Library, especially liked both hot topics and was pleased that Annual Meeting organizers were able to squeeze in the same-sex marriage program. "Many of my favorite Hot Topics have been about recent or pending cases," she says.

New this year, program handouts and materials were posted online instead of printing and handed out at registration. Meeting attendees had the option of printing the handouts before leaving for Boston or at dedicated computer terminals located near the Exhibit Hall. "I loved being able to print out the handouts," says Adrienne Cobb, instructional services/reference librarian at the University of Houston O'Quinn Law Library, citing the quick disappearance of handouts available in the programs' rooms. McMurrer, however, missed the old system because she liked to keep all of the handouts, not just those of programs she attended.

Looking ahead to future meetings, some members suggest making the Internet more professional work grows more and more dependent on electronic resources. He noted, however, the tension between this growing need and the high cost it would entail in commercial venues like the convention center.

Members Respond
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Association Business
AALL Business Meetings are open to all attendees and provide an opportunity for members to observe some of the general business of the Association. Business Meeting I was relatively brief, with an official announcement of the new board members, addresses from presidents and other representatives of foreign library associations, and the introduction of a resolution from the Social Responsibilities Special Interest Section (SR-SIS) opposing any federal or state constitutional amendment that would define marriage as solely between a man and a woman.

In comparison, Business Meeting II on Tuesday was busy, with a reading of an overview of the financial report, an address from incoming President Victoria Trotta, and a vote passing the SR-SIS resolution.

Elvira Ember-Herbert, circulation librarian at the University of Minnesota Law Library, was happy to see support for the SR-SIS resolution. "I'm happy to see that for many it was more of a stance against the original resolution. When I realized that for many it was more of a stance against the original resolution. When I realized that for many it was more of a stance against the original resolution.

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Looking ahead to future meetings, some members suggest making the Internet more accessible to presenters. Mark Engberg, librarian for foreign and international law at Yale Law School's Lillian Goldman Library, coordinated a pre-conference workshop at Suffolk and a program in the convention center. He expressed a pressing need for Internet access in conference venues, as the
Affairs Office. In other comments, Bob Oakley, director of the law library and professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center and AALL Washington affairs representative, urged the continuance of globalization-themed programs, and Carol Billings, director of the law library at the Law Library of Louisiana, solicited ideas for the upcoming AALL centennial.

“Many of these issues, such as marketing and PR efforts, furthering the support of the Washington Affairs Office, and communicating with other types of special libraries, have been, and are continuing to be, addressed by the board through various initiatives, but more work and attention is always needed,” says James Duggan, director of information technology and professor at Southern Illinois University School of Law and past member of the AALL Executive Board.

Local Support
The Local Advisory Committee (LAC) is responsible for much of the work in putting together a successful Annual Meeting. This year’s committee consisted of 17 members from 13 court, firm, and law school libraries representing Boston, Hartford, and the surrounding area. Preparations began with assembly of the committee in 2002, and work continued throughout the meeting itself.

“I learned a lot about Boston, met many great librarians at the Hospitality Desk, and got closer to many of my local colleagues,” says committee member Raquel Ortiz, head of reference services at Boston University Pappas Law Library. “If you are ever asked to participate in a [Local Advisory Committee] for a conference, say yes. You’ll work hard, but you’ll love it!”

A good LAC can make or break an Annual Meeting. “[S]electing good people, creating a positive and creative environment, and constant communication were critical,” says LAC Co-Chair Catherine Breen.

LAC members and other law librarians from the Boston area staffed the Hospitality Desk, where they recommended sights and restaurants. Many activities were available to Annual Meeting attendees, including Boston Duck Tours, whale watching, and a twilight tour of Salem, Massachusetts.

Hospitality extended beyond recommending sights and restaurants to attendees unfamiliar with Boston. “One experience I really enjoyed this year was hosting a foreign law librarian, Louise Hamill from New Zealand,” says LAC member Stephanie Burke, senior reference librarian at Boston University Pappas Law Library. “I learned so much from her and the other law librarians at the FCIL/AMPC-sponsored panel of foreign law librarians. There were many differences, but also so many common themes. It really brought the conference theme home to me.”

Burke and Michelle Pearse, bibliographer of Anglo-American law at Harvard Law School Library, were co-editors of The HUB, the conference daily newspaper. New this year, they added a Web log (or blog) for late-breaking news and announcements during the conference. The blog featured a daily schedule of programs and events, reminders about upcoming events, and reports from attendees “in the field.”

Welcoming our Newer Colleagues
This year’s Conference of Newer Law Librarians (CONELL) unofficially began the evening before Saturday’s events with a new feature called “Dutch-treat Dinners.” Each member of the AALL Mentoring Committee took a group of about eight CONELL attendees to restaurants near the convention center. Fifty of the 90 registered CONELL participants attended the dinner. “We tried to spread the experience out over the entire conference, not just the Saturday activities,” says CONELL Subcommittee of the AALL Mentoring Committee Chair Carol Bredemeyer, assistant director for reference and research services at Northern Kentucky University Salmon P. Chase College of Law Library.

Michele Kristakis, faculty services librarian at the University of Pittsburgh Barco Law Library, particularly enjoyed the dinner. “The dine-around was fantastic,” she says. “Not only did I get a chance to enjoy a local restaurant, but I was able to have a great conversation with the six other CONELL members at my table. We found that we all had a lot in common. Throughout the rest of the conference, I enjoyed running into my new friends and sharing our experiences during the conference as well as tips acquired along the way.”

The CONELL program included another new feature: speed networking. CONELL participants spent brief amounts of time meeting fellow attendees before switching tables to meet more attendees. In addition to speed networking, participants had break-out sessions where they met in small groups with AALL Executive Board
members; an “ask the experts” session where participants could speak to veteran law librarians who concentrate in various subject areas and types of law librarianship; and the “AALL Marketplace,” where participants could go to tables sponsored by various AALL special interest sections and chapters.

M entoring Committee member Kristy M oon, reference librarian at Boston University Pappas Law Library, discussed AALL volunteer opportunities, while Erika Wayne and Mariene Gebauer, New York Research Center manager at Greenberg Traurig LL P, gave a comic presentation with audience participation on “how to conference.” In the last session, participants were treated to a sketch that compared law librarianship in the 1950s to the present day. After lunch, participants took a bus tour of Boston, with stops at the U.S. Constitution and Old North Church. “I want to say that CONELL is one of the best programs in the meeting,” says Qian Cui, catalog librarian at Georgia State University College of Law Library. “It was well-planned, giving time for new librarians to know each other and to ask ... questions.”

While newer members of AALL benefit from CONELL’s introduction to American law librarianship’s largest professional organization, law librarianship itself also benefits. “What we tried to do was to put a very human face on AALL,” says M entoring Committee Chair Joyce M arina Janto, deputy director of the law library at the University of Richmond School of Law Library. “This is because we depend on the newer members of the next generation of leadership. Plus, people are more likely to be involved in professional activities ... if they have a personal connection to the organization.”

Role Models
This year, participants in the mentorship program had the opportunity to meet at two events: first at a reception at the convention center and again at the Academic Law Librarians Special Interest Section (ALL-SIS) reception at H avard Law Library. Mentors and mentees were matched by several criteria, including the type of law library in which they work, geographic area, and professional interests.

Robert Mead, head of public and faculty services at the University of Kansas Heat Law Library, chose to become a mentor to share his enthusiasm for our profession. “I absolutely love being a law librarian, and I wanted to take the opportunity to help a new librarian make connections within AALL and explore possible writing projects and presentations,” he says. “The M entor Program and CONELL are great ways to engage new librarians in the activities and projects of the Association.”

Janto encouraged veteran law librarians to consider mentorship. “It’s an incredibly important responsibility for an experienced librarian,” she says. “We should all think hard about passing along the experiences we have in the field.”

The Conference of Newer Academic Law Librarians (CONALL), met in Pound Hall at Harvard University before the ALL-SIS reception. At this event, CONALL organizers presented a series of brief sketches about typical interactions with a range of difficult patron types. After each sketch, M arian Parker, associate dean for information services and director of the Professional Center Library at Wake Forest University, led a discussion among the newer librarians about how they should act in those situations. Then she solicited comments from the mentors in attendance.

Following CONALL, participants headed to the ALL-SIS reception at the law library where they were treated to a dinner buffet and had the opportunity to see the library’s rare book rooms. The reception included a ceremony that recognized Timothy Coggins, director and professor of law at the University of Richmond School of Law Library, who received the 2004 Frederick Charles Hicks Award for Contributions to Academic Law Librarianship.

Fun Events
It wouldn’t be an Annual M eting without receptions, parties, and other social events, and this year was no exception. The Hein Company’s Annual Fun Walk and Run early Sunday morning “was indeed fun,” says Scott M atheson, reference and government documents librarian at Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Library. Walkers and runners assembled in the Sheraton Boston Hotel lobby beginning at 5 a.m. for an energizing and entertaining walk or run along the Charles River before the day’s programs.

This year’s 6th Annual Children’s Book Drive theme, “M ake Way!” was inspired by Boston’s beloved Children’s Book, M ake Way for D ukkings, by Robert C olley. Book Drive Coordinator Annette D emers, reference librarian for international, foreign, and comparative law at Harvard Law School Library, calls the book drive “a resounding success.” The drive, co-sponsored by the SR-SIS and the Association Luncheon Committee, is estimated to have brought in 555 books and $1,721. “AALL members rose to the occasion to donate three times as many books and five times as much money as they had in the prior year,” D emers says.

The book drive, which sought books with multicultural themes written at a kindergarten through third grade reading level, benefited the ReadBoston program.

In-between the LexisNexis-sponsored Opening Reception on Sunday, the West-sponsored Customer Appreciation Event on Monday, and the Gala Dinner on Wednesday, many special interest sections, library schools, and other groups held receptions in and around the convention area. On Tuesday night, Harvard played host to a triptych of receptions: the BNA-sponsored ALL-SIS and CONALL receptions and the FCIL-SIS reception.

At the Gala Dinner, attention turned to AALL’s immediate future. Diners’ place settings included a variety of colorful Southwestern/M exican-style metal ornaments in anticipation of next year’s Annual M eting in San Antonio. Toward the end of the banquet, the leadership torch was passed to 2004-2005 AALL President Victoria Trotta. After she officially adjourned the 2004 Annual M eting, banquet attendees could choose to listen to a jazz trio in one room, dance to pop music in another room, or converse in either of two quiet areas.

As the meeting came to a close, many thanks went out to all AALL members who made this year’s Annual M eting such a success. Congratulations!”

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