

AALL Spectrum

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2007–2008 Law Library Journal and AALL Spectrum

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AALL Spectrum (ISSN: 1089-8689) is published monthly except January and August with combined September/October by the American Association of Law Libraries, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 940, Chicago, IL 60604. Telephone: 312/939-4764, fax: 312/431-1097, e-mail: aallhq@aall.org. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *AALL Spectrum*, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 940, Chicago, IL 60604.

Writers wanted — contribute to your Association's magazine. For guidelines, visit www.aallnet.org/products/pub_spectrum.asp or contact Editorial Director Mark E. Estes at mark.estes@hro.com.

AALL Spectrum Deadlines

Articles are due on the following dates:

2008	Issue	Deadline
Vol. 12 No. 7	May	February 21
No. 8	June	March 20
No. 9	July	April 17

Copy sent through a columnist or guest editor should be submitted to him or her well in advance of the monthly deadline.

AALLNET: www.aallnet.org

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Vision: We Go Where We Look

by Mark E. Estes, mark.estes@hro.com

Most days I ride my bicycle to work. It burns calories and saves on parking or bus or light rail fares so that I can consume calories cautiously. One bright, sunny wintry morning, snow and ice covered parts of the bicycle path. I sped along enjoying the sun, thinking that the snow and ice had melted on the path. It had...except on a little bridge over a stream. Crossing the bridge faster than I should have, I feared making the left-hand turn at the other side, and I looked at the concrete retaining wall along the far side of the path instead of the path itself.

By looking at the wall, I really was looking for a place to crash—and I did—a scraping, sliding sideways broadside into the wall, propelling myself onto the grass above the wall. The damage: a scraped fork, torn tights, a scraped ankle and knee, and a bruised ego. I knew I had caused my own crash. First, by going faster than I should. Second, and more importantly, because I looked at the wall instead of looking where I wanted to go—on the clear bicycle path.

Humans, especially when we're on bicycles or motorcycles, tend to go where we look. So, when a cyclist sees a pothole, instead of looking at the hole, she looks at the smooth pavement and avoids the hole. If we focus on the hole, we almost certainly will hit the hole. If instead we scan quickly for the safe route, then our body follows our eyes and we safely pass the hole.

Law librarians tend to go where they focus too. We often have to re-focus many times throughout the workday because of interruptions. Some interruptions seem unavoidable—a key user, client, customer, or staff member contacts us directly seeking help on an urgent matter. Our long-term success depends on refocusing on our vision of where we personally and professionally want to go and where our employer wants to go strategically.

Further, many of the key people who make financial decisions related to our work try to frame financial decisions within the strategic vision of the organization. When we, as law librarians, keep that strategic vision in mind, we tend to act in accordance with it. For example, we should invest time in important activities like measuring how our users employ our services instead of immediate and non-urgent activities.

How do we find and keep our vision? A key component of a law librarian's vision should be the mission and vision of AALL and Ranganathan's rules. That requires tracking the ever-changing needs of our users and customers. If key customers aren't using us, ask why they aren't. Did they change and we didn't pay attention? What can we do to make their lives easier?

Helping us focus and sustain our vision, the authors in this issue of *AALL Spectrum* explore our evolving roles—from an energizing discovery in a special collection (page 10) to an exploration of access and ownership of digital content (page 30). From PR campaigns that piggy-back on the American Library Association @ your library® campaign (page 14) and the Social Law Library's outreach efforts (page 16) to the personal PR of a librarian's choice to list his or her educational degrees on business cards (page 26). From finding and shaping the vision of key decision makers in your organization (page 24) to a brief history of the Joint Study Institute (page 21). ■