

AALL Spectrum

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from the editor

Threats and Opportunities

Threats lurk everywhere. For me, on either my bicycle or motorcycle, automobiles pose the greatest danger. Like many dangers, they are outside my control but not beyond my influence. I influence those dangers by riding as if I am invisible. Namely, I expect no one to see me despite all my bright clothing and lights, so I constantly scan for hazards and escape routes and ride in the place where I am most likely to be seen.



by Mark E. Estes

At work the threats include competition from many sources, budget cuts, etc. At work we also seek visibility and opportunities to demonstrate our value to decision makers.

Opportunities are everywhere, too—often at the edges of how it has always been done, sometimes just beyond the obvious, sometimes clearly. On a bicycle a clear opportunity to accelerate is when someone passes me and I can catch his or her slipstream and save energy. On my motorcycle an opportunity comes as a small blue line on a map that I've overlooked before leads me to curvy roads and a wonderful view.

After more than 28 years I found another path in law librarianship. I have changed employers and am now the law library director for Alameda County Law Library in Oakland, California, succeeding the retiring director, Cossette Sun.

This change gives me the opportunity to more directly participate in a key element of law librarianship's mission: to ensure that the public has access to the legal information necessary for a just and fair society, to build on the outstanding library built by Cossette and the board of trustees, and to adapt the services provided to a greatly changed client/customer/user base.

County law libraries face budget issues, but so do law firm libraries and academic law libraries.

At Alameda County Law Library I will play a much more direct role in increasing the revenue stream for the library than most law firm library directors can ever hope to play.

Much has changed during my career in law librarianship: from teaching secretaries how to decipher a cryptic citation to making a photocopy of the case to creating electronic retrieval systems so that secretaries can retrieve and print the opinion from their desktops; from predominantly

legal research to non-legal research. In the public sector the mix of users has changed from predominantly lawyers to now predominantly self-represented litigants.

This change impacts all types of law libraries. It changes the expectations of what law libraries open to the public should be doing. It changes the public's perception of all lawyers—whether judges, partners, associates, or students. Law librarians must all recognize that change. As law librarians we can either view ourselves as victims who are underpaid, undervalued, and underappreciated, or we can acknowledge that we work in a profession that toils in the background providing support and information required to do the big deals, to write the new treatises, and to decide the legal dispute. We should work in joy while we exploit our strengths, recognize our weaknesses, and find opportunity in threats.

In a public law library I should be able to more directly respond to those changes—a tremendous and exciting challenge.

Oh yes, in Oakland we will also be a day's drive closer to our granddaughter in San Diego. ■

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