

# The Economics and Management of Legal Information

## Reporting the Results of the 1997 AALL/Aspen Law & Business Research Grant

by Betty Taylor

**O**n May 20, 1997, the American Association of Law Libraries awarded the 1997 AALL-Aspen Law & Business Research Grant for research on the Economics and Management of Legal Information. The project's goals were stimulate research, encourage the collection of badly needed data, and promote the economic analysis of library operations and services.

As libraries continue to move into the new age of electronic communication and technological information, data on the costs of old systems and new ones are necessary for planning and budgeting. Yet limited information on the costs of traditional library services is available. For electronic library services, such information is even harder to find. As a result, libraries and other information providers are moving into the future without the information necessary to make effective decisions. Kathie J. Sullivan's article, "A Law Firm Librarian's Response to Climbing Prices" (*The CRIV Sheet*, *AALL Spectrum* 2/97: page 3 of centerfold), well illustrates the frustrations law librarians feel in dealing with rising costs, alternative formats and users' expectations without adequate information or guidelines for applying that limited knowledge to specific situations.

The current research will not resolve specific questions, such as whether to cancel a paper publication without purchasing an electronic replacement. Librarians should consult the excellent discussions on these specific questions in the audiotape "Information Economics: Choosing Sources and Formats," (Parts 1 and 2; Moderator, Kit Kreilick, Associate Law Librarian for Technology, Fordham University Law Library, New York, NY; American Association of Law Libraries 91st Annual Meeting, July 1998). This research will, however, hopefully sensitize all of us to the complexity of the new, emerging acquisitions process and the importance of remaining flexible in decision-making. Secondly, these findings constitute a practical first step in creating a more usable and comprehensive statistical database for self-education, staff training, ultimately the resolution of day-to-day specific acquisitions' problems and justification for the direction of greater financial resources into law libraries.

The project focused on the current status of statistical data on old and new information systems, proposed a new statistical database that allows interpretive analyses, and makes other recommendations to AALL, the American Bar Association, and the Association of American Law Schools for the improvement of data collection and analysis.

There were two survey instruments: one for academic law libraries and one for non-academic law libraries. Each survey instrument was structured around four areas of interest: services and subscriptions; policies about law library purchases; recent purchase trends; and, staff salaries.

The investigators focused on drafting and revising of the survey instruments and pretested both instruments with selected academic and non-academic law librarians. The non-academic survey was completed by directors of court, law firm, corporate, and county law libraries with more than 30,000 volumes as listed in the current *AALL Directory*. The academic survey was completed by directors of law school libraries in the *AALL Directory*. Eighty-four of the 179 academic libraries and 94 of the 334 non-academic libraries returned completed surveys. (The survey instruments garnered information not available in ABA statistics. Information already available in the ABA reports had already been input into a database managed by Dr. Ferguson.)

### Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

Some results within and between types of law libraries were as expected in light of our experiences as law librarians and researchers. Some, however, were surprising.

The trend toward **steady and increasing growth of both hard copy publications and computer information services** is evident in both academic and non-academic libraries. Not surprisingly, non-academic libraries spend more on digital systems and less on monographs, treatises, and serials. Despite the predictions of many "experts" that computers, the Internet, and networks would soon replace books and make traditional law libraries and law librarians obsolete, this survey clearly indicates that both hard copy and computer services will

be strong component parts of academic and non-academic law libraries for some time in the future.

**Access to Web-based sites** is having an effect on some law librarians' **decisions not to purchase** the same information in hard copy.

The large majority of both library types have **adequate budgets** though a significant number do not have adequate funds to support new programs.

The investigators also expected to find that the majority of law libraries had **written policies on acquisitions**, that the majority had not calculated the cost per book and that there had been an increase in positions devoted to computer services. It turned out that a significant number of law libraries have a written policy on the acquisition of research materials in electronic format. The majority of non-academic law libraries did not have written policies on acquisitions and the majority had not calculated the cost per book.

The investigators were somewhat surprised to learn that more positions had not been shifted to the computer services department because of the increased automation. The investigators were not surprised to determine, however, that **non-academic law libraries spend less on technical services salaries** and have transferred fewer positions to computer services.

Regardless of the validity and reliability of specific responses, the significant conclusion of the study is the value of long-term data collection and analysis in coordination with the American Bar Association and the Association of American Law Schools.

*Editor's Note: Text of the complete report will be published in a forthcoming Law Library Journal. Until then, copies of the report are available from AALL Executive Director Roger Parent at 312/939-4764 or rparent@aall.org.*

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