

AALL Mentoring Program

How It Really Works

by Ruth Levor and Jessie Cranford

The reflections and thoughts shared by a mentor and her mentee show how the program helps strengthen AALL while benefitting both participants. Anyone interested in participating this year should visit http://www.aallnet.org/committee/mentoring/mentor_project.html or contact Dick Vaughan (rvaughan@indiana.edu; 812/855-4199).

What You Hoped for



Jessie: Though I had been fortunate to have wonderful mentoring from my colleagues at UALR and in MAALL, I thought I could still benefit from meeting someone new who had been in the profession for a while. It turns out, I couldn't have been more right.

Ruth: When I first volunteered to be an AALL mentor, I hoped that I would be able to expedite the process for a new law librarian or student member of getting in touch with the things that AALL and the profession have to offer. I remembered the people who had helped me take some important professional steps from the time I began my library school studies...the classmate who introduced me to her boss, Taylor Fitchett (the director of the law library at my alma mater, the University of Cincinnati College of Law)...Taylor's kindness and support in offering me my first job while I was still a library school student (after she made sure that I was not just an unhappy refugee from legal practice!)... how my colleague and convention roommate Cynthia Aninao helped me map out a program for navigating my first Annual Meeting...and I remembered how much I had learned at the CONELL program that year. After nine years as a law librarian, I finally felt I had sufficient knowledge and experience to "pass the torch" to a new colleague and thus carry on the fine tradition of collegial mentoring that had been so helpful to me.



Little did I know that the "torch" was already burning bright in my first mentee, the Arkansas fireball Jessie Cranford!

What You Actually Expected

Jessie: I wasn't really sure what to expect. One of my main goals was meeting someone new who would be a contact and someone else to learn from as I progressed in my career and in my professional involvement in AALL. I think gaining a variety of perspectives is always good.

Ruth: Quite frankly, my preconceived image was that I would meet a new

colleague attending his or her first Annual Meeting and overwhelmed and in need of some guidance and direction. I thought that she might not know many people and that she might be unaware of all that AALL could offer her. I thought that she might be confused about how to organize her time at the meeting and how to select programs that would be valuable to her. If she were shy, I thought that it might be comforting to her to have a newly familiar face and someone to make sure that she had a group to sit with at large events.

If all of this sounds patronizing, please consider that I was thinking about *myself* at the outset of my participation in the Association: how *I* felt, what *I* needed and what was helpful to *me*. Clearly, I didn't know Jessie Cranford!

What You Intended to Bring to the Relationship

Jessie: Lots of questions—and Ruth can tell you that she has received them! Also, an eagerness to learn as much as possible and maybe round myself out a little more.

Ruth: Jessie and I met at the 1998 Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California. I was involved in a lot of things at the Meeting between producing the daily newspaper and chairing committee meetings, and was willing to involve my mentee in these activities and to introduce her to colleagues who were similarly involved. I also expected to hear about her career so far and about her plans for professional development and to answer any questions that I could. I hoped my years of involvement in the profession and in AALL, my work in two academic law libraries, my administrative experience and my educational background would supply some useful information and common bonds of interest between us and would make me credible as an enthusiast for the profession and for the myriad joys and opportunities that a future in law librarianship could offer her.

I was, as always, nervous about meeting someone new and about being an effective mentor and spokesperson for the Association and for the profession. I didn't know whether we would "click" or whether I might scare her away forever! Little did I know how effervescent and indomitable

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was this person I was about to meet and how quickly and joyfully we would establish a lasting collegial bond and friendship!

What You Expected the Other Person to Bring to the Relationship

Jessie: Perspective, wisdom, and experience.

Ruth: Jessie and I had spoken on the phone and by e-mail a few times before we actually met, so I knew that she was bright, well-spoken and interesting. I expected that meeting her would expose me to the freshness of a new perspective on academic law librarianship and that talking to a new member of the profession and answering her questions would force me to think about my own experiences in new ways and to figure out how to make them relevant to her needs and interests.

What I *didn't* expect was a mentee who was wearing both a CONELL ribbon and a speaker's ribbon! My mentee was appearing in an SIS skit at her first Annual Meeting! My mentee (am I getting proprietary here?!) had already worked for five years at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock as a paraprofessional and left to run a small public library for a couple of years before returning as a full-fledged librarian to take the position as Circulation Librarian. My mentee was already talking about getting her law degree! My mentee was so active at the conference that I had trouble working myself into her busy schedule! My mentee was an absolute delight!

What You Did at the Conference

Jessie: We had trouble fitting into each other's busy schedules. Ruth was very active at the conference. Through the encouragement of my UALR colleagues and my friend Kelly Browne (who will always be my favorite intern!), I also was involved in a program and quite busy. We successfully met before the Opening Reception and attended that together. Ruth introduced me to colleagues from Cincinnati and San Diego, and we ran into several of my Arkansas friends, as well as people I had gotten to know while attending my first MAALL conference the previous October.

She surprised and amazed me by writing an article about our experience in the *Anaheim Animator*. How many people are lucky enough to get the conference newspaper editor as their mentor? That turned out to be fortuitous in more ways than one. I love to write, but probably would not have volunteered myself to do things at a national level. After all, who would care what someone from a tiny state school in Arkansas had to say? Ruth and Peter Beck, whom I met through Ruth, encouraged me to submit work to *AALL Spectrum*, which I did. It has been so rewarding to do that; thinking about my work and my profession for the purposes of writing about it has really contributed to my personal and professional growth.

Ruth: The trickiest part about the first meeting between mentor and mentee at an Annual Meeting is finding each other. It's not easy to find someone you don't know in a place where you've never been before and where you don't know exactly what the set-up will be. Between busy schedules and missed messages, it's easy to

miss each other. Jessie and I were very lucky, because not only did we find each other before the Opening Reception, but we also kept running into each other throughout the conference. We spent a short time getting to know each other and then met up with Jessie's wonderfully zany pals from Arkansas and had a great time at the party. After that, we saw each other at the Hein Fun Run and at other events. As editor of the *Anaheim Animator*, the convention newspaper, I put an article about her and about our participation in the mentoring program in the Tuesday edition of the paper. We were able to get to know quite a bit about each other, both personally and professionally, in a very informal way. We found that we really enjoyed each other's company and that we shared a lot of common values. We left Anaheim knowing that we would stay in contact.

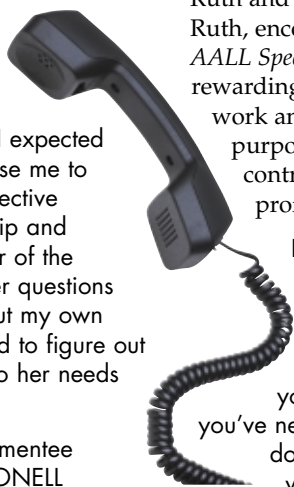
What You Did After the Conference

Jessie: Ruth and I stayed in contact via the occasional e-mail after the conference, and we made sure to look for each other and find a time to visit at conference the following year.

Ruth: As much fun as it was to be a mentor at the Annual Meeting, the truly rewarding part for me of my participation in the mentoring program was that it was the beginning of a wonderful professional friendship. Jessie and I kept in touch throughout the following year, mostly by e-mail, and we began to look forward to seeing each other again at the next conference in D.C. There, a year after our official participation in the mentoring program, we hooked up again as old buddies. I got to see most of Jessie's excellent performance in the program on motivating student workers, which drew a huge crowd and was subsequently featured in an *AALL Spectrum* cover story. We sat together at the President's luncheon and enjoyed the dancing at the Closing Banquet. Once again, we kept running into each other in the hallways throughout the meeting and at the Hein Fun Run. As busy as we both were, we had time to catch up on each other's jobs and families.

How the Relationship Has Developed Since the Initial Contact

Jessie: I have come to rely on Ruth for advice on a variety of professional issues. She was in the list of "experts" I called on via e-mail when a faculty member asked me to change our carrel policy, and I wanted a quick sense of what other libraries do. While I know that postings to lawlib or other lists provide useful information, I find it invaluable to be able to ask questions of people who already know my temperament and management style when it comes to giving advice on particular problems. She is one of my many friends in the profession who have nurtured my desire to go on to law school. She's also heard a lot from me lately because at this writing, I am faced with a decision between two very desirable career opportunities.



I've also ended up with a lifelong friend. We talk not only about work, but about our families and our social lives. She's a grandmother now. It's so exciting. She also gets to hear stories about my 8-year old daughter, Guinte, who is the center of the universe (though I will confess to possible bias).

Ruth: Over time and distance, my relationship with Jessie has developed far beyond that of mentor and mentee. I am now also more in touch not only with another colleague but also with another region of our organization. I am also more aware of what is happening these days in the realm of career development through Jessie's experiences as she plans for law school and considers various job possibilities. She has occasionally contacted me for advice on job issues and career decisions. I don't know that I was a font of wisdom, but at least I was able to provide a good listening ear and as much encouragement and support as I could.

Of course, as with any developing friendship, we've gotten to know about each other's personal lives and families as well. I hope that someday I'll have the chance to meet Jessie's wonderful daughter, Guinte, and to introduce her to my kids and grandkids.

What You Expect to Come out of the Experience

Jessie: I expect to remain in contact with Ruth wherever my law library career may lead me. I know she will be among the friends I call on for help and advice as I continue to grow professionally. I also imagine we may collaborate on programs or articles in the future due to our shared interests and the fact that we enjoy working together. I have been so fortunate already in my career. I have worked with and for many excellent librarians who taught me valuable lessons about my profession and who showed me how exciting and fulfilling librarianship can be. I am happy to have added Ruth to that group of colleagues and teachers through the AALL mentoring program. When I am confounded, there is a wealth of knowledge available to me just by picking up the phone or sending an e-mail.

Ruth: Meeting Jessie through the mentoring program has put me in close touch with the future of law librarianship. I expect to remain in contact with Jessie and through that contact together to forge

a chain of tradition that passes on past experience and keeps adding shiny new links that strengthen the relevancy of current professional practice. I hope that some of what I've learned over the years will be valuable to her, and I know that seeing her progress will be a wonderful learning experience for me. I have no doubt that Jessie will make a positive mark on our profession, and that I'll be proud to be able to say "I knew her when..."

Suggestions for Future Participants

Jessie: Even if you are confident about your career and happy with your network of professional friends, you should consider participating in the program. There is always more to learn; meeting other law librarians and gaining the benefit of their perspective and experience is very enriching. I met someone from a totally different part of the country and discovered we weren't so different. One thing this has done for me over the course of the past couple of years is help me to realize I could survive (and maybe even still enjoy myself) should I decide to pursue professional opportunities outside of Arkansas.

If you are not confident about your career and your network, DEFINITELY participate in the mentoring program. Meeting another person who is turned on by our profession is invigorating and inspiring. A mentor can give you suggestions about rewarding SIS or Committee involvement, introduce you to people they know who share your areas of interest, and just be a familiar, friendly face as you're finding your way around at your first Annual Meeting.

Most important, you reap what you sow. If you bring high expectations and a willingness to invest a little of yourself to the relationship, you can reap huge returns. If I remember correctly, the application form gives you a chance to really specify your interests and what you are looking for in a mentor. Initially, you have to take the time and go through the frustration of hooking up with a person you've never met at a very busy, crowded conference.

Ruth: I hope that we've convinced you to volunteer to participate in the mentoring program this year. Widespread participation would be a wonderful

way to energize the Association, and the experience is mutually beneficial to mentor and mentee. Librarians often express concern about the future of the profession and the challenges of keeping up with change in the nature of the profession. What better way to address these concerns than to form one-on-one alliances between members of successive generations of law librarians! How could we better preserve the traditions of legal bibliography while translating them to incorporate technological advances than by individually sharing our knowledge of the old and the new!



Once you've decided to volunteer, here are a few tips to make the experience a successful one:

- Contact your partner as soon as you find out his or her name. You might want to send an e-mail first and then follow up with a phone call.
- Mentors should welcome questions or requests for advice from their mentees even before going to the Annual Meeting. The questions might be as simple as what kind of clothing to bring to the conference or more complex, like how to interview effectively.
- Find out where your partner is staying. If at all possible, arrange to meet at a coffee shop or bar before you get busy with conference activities, so that you can talk quietly and get to know each other. Be punctual when you plan to meet. *Don't stand your partner up!* If you can't make the meeting and you can't reach your partner, try to send a colleague in your place.
- Mentees should think about what kind of assistance they would like from their mentor. Would you like to attend some programs together? Would you like help planning your conference activities? Would you like a buddy at a social event?
- Mentors should find out what their partner needs. Is there someone you think he or she would benefit from meeting? Are you a member of a committee or other special group that is having a meeting he or she might attend?

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- Follow through. Keep in touch after the meeting. Tell your mentee how much you enjoyed meeting him or her, and check in to see what kind of progress he or she is making. If your mentor gave you some advice that turned out to be helpful or introduced you to someone with common interests, let him or her know and express your thanks.
- Not every pair in the mentoring program is successful. If you don't click with your partner, don't be discouraged. Make every effort to do what you can to have a positive

experience. Give the program at least one more try the following year.

Suggestions for the Program

Ruth: The mentoring program is such a worthwhile experience that I'm surprised that everyone doesn't participate! To enhance the program's appeal and effectiveness, we suggest that it be integrated with the range of CONELL programmatic activities. Perhaps there could be an event at CONELL where mentors and mentees were introduced, both to each other and to all of the CONELL participants. In this way, partners

would not have to hunt each other down at crowded Annual Meeting functions in unfamiliar surroundings where there is no way to prearrange a meeting spot, especially for meeting with a stranger. The CONELL event might also be a good marketing tool for the program.

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