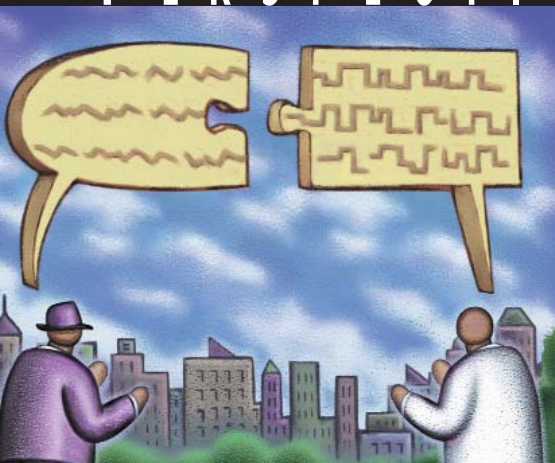


PERSPECTIVES: A Members' Forum



"Perspectives" serves as a members' forum and features articles on issues of concern to the profession.

Reorganize AALL's Membership Structure for More Effective Representation of Members

by Richard Leiter

The present structure of AALL and Special Interest Section memberships does not serve the interests of all members effectively. Instead, AALL members should be placed into one of five primary sections — Academic; Private; State, Court and County; Independent; and Affiliate/Publisher — in addition to offering individual SIS memberships. That way the Association would better represent the concerns and needs of its members.

The Special Interest Sections under the present organizational structure do not have adequate authority to represent their constituents and do not provide certain members with SIS memberships at all. For example, the Academic Law Libraries, the Private Law Libraries, and State, Court and County Law Libraries SISs do not accurately represent their constituents, because not all librarians practicing in these areas are members of the SISs. In addition, members who are employed by publishers or vendors or are independent librarians don't easily fit

into any of the current 13 SISs and therefore have no sufficient representation within AALL.

A proposal to change the membership structure has been kicking around the Executive Board and SIS Council over the past year. However, there has not been much public discussion of the issue, and I have not seen a copy of the proposal that is under discussion. What's more, some parties have said that the issue has already been discussed, decided and discarded. Others have told me that the issue is still very much alive.

A Proposal for Improvement: Introduction

The proposal that I developed for changing the membership structure could have a potentially dramatic impact on the Association. Should the proposal be adopted, five primary sections — Academic; Private; State, Court and County; Independent; and Affiliate/Publisher — would automatically represent the concerns and needs of their entire memberships and thus would more accurately reflect the opinions of librarians working in their practice areas. Collectively, the sections could function as a sort of parliament that would speak with the authority of the entire AALL membership. The SISs would then be able to clearly voice the needs of their constituents and address the narrower issues of concern to those particular interests. At present, for example, there is no one body for AALL leadership to turn to when it needs representatives for academic law librarians because they are found in any number of SISs. The ALL SIS has long been considered a "directors" SIS; that has been changing, but only a fraction of academic law librarians are members of the ALL SIS. This same situation exists in each area of practice. What's more, librarians who work for vendors may find that their desirable affiliation is in the PLL SIS or the ALL SIS, but ALL or PLL can't logically represent their concerns.

I. Summary

This proposal for change in membership section affiliations for AALL would alter the structure of membership applications and renewals by automatically assigning every

member to a primary section. Every member would then have the opportunity to select additional sections or Special Interest Sections. This proposal would also change the designation of some existing SISs to the status of sections.

II. Proposed Changes of Sections and Special Interest Sections

At present every member is able to join AALL and not join any one of the 13 SISs that represent various types of libraries and specialty fields within the profession. Having every member automatically join one of the five following sections would ensure that each member is represented by the section that best represents his or her interests. It would also strengthen and unify sections and the various communities within the profession.

A. The Sections. This proposal would create five broad sections from among some existing SISs that would classify all members by type of practice. This proposal envisions the creation of two new sections: Independent and Affiliate/Publisher. These new sections are proposed in order to provide section "homes" for every member, including those not formally employed by a particular library. The sections proposed would be:

- Academic Law Libraries
- Private Law Firms
- State, Court and County Libraries
- Independent Law Libraries
- Affiliate/Publisher

Every member would automatically have to choose from one of these sections when they register or renew their memberships.

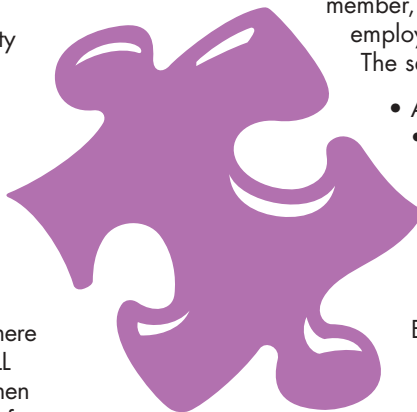
This section would become the member's "home" or primary section.

Every member would have the option of joining additional sections.

B. The Special Interest Sections.

Once every member is enrolled in a section, each may then elect to join one of 10 Special Interest Sections:

- Computing Services
- Foreign, Comparative and International Law
- Government Documents
- Legal History and Rare Books
- Legal Information Services to the Public



- Micrographics/Audio-Visual
- Online Bibliographic Services
- Research Instruction and Patron Services
- Social Responsibilities
- Technical Services

The types of professional activities represented by these SISs represent interests that cross library types. By freeing these SISs from the responsibility of representing their members professional interests, they will be able to focus more on the details of their types of practices, such as formation and deliberation of new cataloging rules, responses to technological innovations, and exchanging of information about teaching techniques. Sections would then be charged with the broader political issues that the Association and the profession face, such as voting rights and job security. This system of organization may suggest that there is a need for additional SISs within the Association, such as an SIS for administrators.

Two things should also be pointed out before considering the proposal. First, nothing in the proposal should discourage members of one section from joining another in addition to their own. A better

question may be whether, say, a private firm librarian who chooses to also join the vendor's or academic's group will have a representative vote in that second section. Perhaps any second affiliation outside a primary area of practice should be a nonvoting affiliation.

Second, the issue of how dues would be distributed is challenging. Since such a structure as proposed will have a significant effect on the demographics of SISs, it would be wise to assign a nominal amount of each membership fee to the primary sections and keep the regular SIS membership fee at the current rate. In any case, adopting the proposal should not materially affect the amount of dues paid by members. I think that I speak for all when I say that any proposal that increases dues should be cautiously considered. I feel strongly that this proposal can be carried out with no fiscal effect.

A third issue that I have not considered thoroughly, and I will leave it to smarter minds than mine to determine, would be the material effect on how AALL is governed. For example, the leadership of each section elected by its constituents

would, as a whole, be a group with a powerful representative mandate. It could serve as a "legislative" body for certain types of issues. The Executive Board could serve as a cabinet with another type of mandate. The SIS Council, too, would have a more clearly defined representative role that may differ from what it is now. Perhaps there would be no need to change anything with regard to governance of the Association. I don't know, and as I said, I think that smarter minds can do a better job than I in sorting this issue out. It does raise some interesting possibilities.

This reorganization would greatly benefit AALL. It provides a greater political voice for the various practice types within the organization and allows AALL to better represent the interests of its members. I strongly urge the Executive Board and leadership of AALL to consider this proposal and put it to the membership for a vote.

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