

Research Agenda Furthers Librarianship

The AALL Research Agenda and AALL Research Grants

by Kevin Butterfield

The AALL Research Agenda

In 1999, then-AALL President Margaret Axtmann charged the AALL Research Committee with reviewing and updating the 1993 AALL Research Agenda. The revision of the AALL Research Agenda was conducted "top down." The Research Committee first looked at the major headings. After some discussion, the committee decided that the existing Research Agenda was organized into major headings that did not provide enough flexibility, concentrating only on several specific functions performed in law libraries.

After significant discussion, the Research Committee concluded that the headings of the revised Research Agenda should be based on deeper facets or principles of law librarianship. The committee reasoned that the resulting document should remain focused on who we are and why we do what we do, while allowing for flexibility in describing how we do it. We hope that the major headings will serve as a stable framework for future revisions.

The Research Committee then engaged in two processes to identify individual research topics. First, after reviewing current periodicals in librarianship, computing and research, the committee identified trends, issues and concerns that could be subjects for research topics. These were developed into various research topics and fit into the major headings. Finally, a methodical review of the existing Research Agenda eliminated some topics that were already well researched, outdated or no longer of interest, and incorporated those that retained strong vitality. In the fall of 2000, the revised agenda was formally released. It has proved to be an excellent source for research projects and proposals. Many research grant applicants have derived their ideas from the agenda and quoted it heavily in their proposals. The Research Committee encourages anyone thinking

about a project or considering applying for a grant to consult the Research Agenda for ideas. Please contact a member of the Research Committee to discuss ideas for proposals. We are here to help you take advantage of the Research Grant program.

AALL Research Fund: An Endowment Founded by LexisNexis™

On July 17, 2000, AALL announced the formation of the AALL Research Fund, an endowment established with a \$100,000 pledge from LexisNexis™. The fund provides a secure financial base, enabling the AALL Research Committee to carry out the Association's Research Agenda. The committee awards \$5,000 to \$10,000 in grants from this fund annually. The application deadline is May 1. Application materials and criteria are available at http://www.aallnet.org/about/grant_application.asp.

The AALL Research Committee funded two projects for 2001–2002 from the AALL Research Fund.

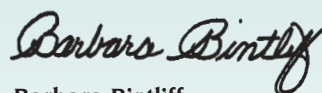
- "Web-based Distance Learning of Principles of American Legal Bibliography" aims to use modern technology to further the understanding of American legal bibliography and principles of research in American law in a worldwide setting. The reach of the World Wide Web has already transformed much thinking about knowledge transfer, particularly under the rubric of "distance learning." This project plans to exploit this technological revolution to make information and instruction in legal bibliography and research in American law available to a domestic as well as a worldwide population. Models will be developed for self-instructional and monitored instructional use of

Research is the day that each of us doesn't spend time puzzling out a computer problem, working on a research guide, updating a staff manual, answering a reference question or otherwise "looking something up" — for ourselves or others. The final outcome might be anything from a telephone message to a listserv reply to an extensive document, but one thing these activities have in common is research.

While it is easy to assume that *real* researchers are intellectual eccentrics with wild hair and profound thoughts, the truth of the matter is we are all *real* researchers, whatever our specific job may be. We research a lot, and we are good at it. The actual difference between the intellectual eccentrics and us — whether we are having a bad hair day or not — is that they make their research available to others in their field, and we, more often than not, don't.

But we should make a greater effort to share our research. Instead of filing our results away, we should communicate them with others who can benefit from them, too. We can publish shorter research results in a chapter or Special Interest Section newsletter; newsletter editors could even add a column in their publications sharing tips and techniques. We can write journal articles; I'll bet there is not a single editor out there in Law Library Land who isn't on the prowl for useful submissions. Sometimes it is enough to post an item on a listserv. If you don't have time to write, offer to speak at a chapter meeting. How we share our research isn't as important as the sharing itself. Don't underestimate what you have to offer! Let your friends and colleagues benefit from your professional expertise. Research produces new knowledge, an essential ingredient in maintaining professional competence.

Enhancing our professional expertise is the key to career success. This Members' Briefing explains the ways AALL encourages and supports research for the advancement of the profession and its practitioners. The Association has an ambitious Research Agenda and provides significant assistance for research activities. It is another way in which your Association is working for you.



Barbara Bintliff
AALL President, 2001-2002

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Web-based material and scenarios and will simultaneously be developed as a teaching module in Chinese for students abroad. The researchers will also focus on making this instructional module available in other languages, such as Spanish.

The project will be conducted by Xia Chen, reference librarian, and Frederick E. Smith, librarian emeritus and senior librarian for graduate and reference services, of the Hugh & Hazel Darling Law Library of the University of California at Los Angeles School of Law.

- “How Lawyers Do Legal Research” continues the work of Morris Cohen, Penny A. Hazelton and Patricia DeGeorges to create a core set of data on how lawyers, new or experienced, think about all aspects of legal research — specifically approach and planning, format preferences, secondary source use and preferences, evaluative criteria employed, amount of time spent, and general awareness and familiarity with currently available resources.

Kris Gilliland, director of the law library and assistant professor of law at the University of Mississippi Law Library, will conduct the project.

AALL/Aspen Law & Business Grant Program

The AALL Research Committee also administers the AALL/Aspen Law & Business Grant Program. The committee will award \$13,000 in grants in 2001 and 2002. Aspen Law & Business considers its contribution as an investment in research that will provide a prospective look at the role of librarians, researchers and legal information providers and will yield results to which publishers can respond. The goal is to sponsor research that will have a practical impact on our profession and inspire products and changes in the marketplace. The application deadline is Dec. 1. The application materials and criteria are available at http://www.aallnet.org/about/aspnet_grant_application.asp.

The Research Committee awarded two Aspen Law & Business Research Grants in 2001.

- The AALL Government Relations Committee will use its research grant to carry out a project called “Permanent Public Access of State Government Information: A State-by-State Compilation and Resource Guide.” With the assistance of the AALL Washington Affairs Office, the project aims to create a publication that features state-by-state analysis of laws pertaining to permanent public access to state government information. The publication will also serve as a finding tool, indicating which states have enacted and currently enforce permanent public access laws.
- “Feasibility and Viability of a Digital Law Library in 2002” will examine the present and future state of digital libraries in private law firms. It will identify the threshold technology and the human and financial resources needed to create a digital library in a private law firm. The research will also ascertain the extent to which digital libraries are already a reality in the legal community. Catherine Sanders Reach and David Whelan of the American Bar Association’s Legal Technology Research Center will coordinate the project.

Both grants support projects of value to a large segment of those professions that create, disseminate or use legal and law-related information. Projects may range from the historical (indexes, legislative histories, bibliographies, biographies, directories), to the theoretical (trends in cataloging, publishing or new service models in libraries), to the practical (implementation models for collection, personnel or infrastructure management). The revised AALL Research Agenda is one source for project ideas. It is available at <http://www.aallnet.org/committee/research/agenda.asp>.

These grants may be used to assist in small or large research projects; all applications will be considered. Funding research assistants, photocopying, data entry and research-related travel are possible uses for these grants. The grants not only serve to promote research within our profession but also to remove obstacles to project completion caused by tight operating budgets.

Some Broad Considerations When Applying for Research Grants

The grant process is a competitive procedure and, as such, is a comparative one. Last year the AALL Research Committee received 15 proposals and distributed two grants. This year we will likely receive more proposals than we can fund and must therefore weigh the proposals’ relative merits.

The selection process is part of a larger purpose, which involves supporting, improving and building upon research in law librarianship and the use of legal information.

Tips on making your proposal one of the best

Prepare. Read these tips, the request for proposals, the AALL Research Agenda and descriptions of last year’s winners to better understand the grant programs’ purpose.

Organize. Follow carefully the organization set forth in the criteria in the application. Proofread the application and proposal before submitting it to make sure that all required information is included and presented clearly.

Remember your colleagues. Explain how the proposed project will benefit the law library community and its clients.

Choose a focus. The AALL Research Agenda lists areas AALL has identified for further research. Target the proposal to meet the criteria described in one or more of these areas. If the proposal does not specifically address an AALL Research Agenda topic, describe how it would explore preservation, access, education or management issues vital to law librarianship.

Cost. Make the budget consistent with the project description. The budget should cover only those costs directly related to the project. While the Research Committee recognizes that specialized equipment may be necessary for the successful completion of projects, the budget should not consist solely of equipment purchases.

Longevity. Proposals that received substantial consideration described projects that had a life beyond the one-year grant period.

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Perspectives on the Research Agenda

An Academic's Perspective

by Marian F. Parker

When I was contacted by Kevin Butterfield to contribute to this briefing, my first question was, "Why me?" Then I reflected that I now have AALL geezer status, as I have been active in this profession for 23 years! I have also worked in both the academic sector and legal publishing, both print and online. Now I guess I have a perspective about what research has meant over the years and what it may mean to our future.

As I reread the AALL Research Agenda in preparation for this briefing, I was overwhelmed at the enormity of the task that we, as a profession, have laid before ourselves. The number of issues we must master and their complexity are astounding. The AALL Research Committee conducted a great deal of research in determining this agenda. Answers to questions posed in the agenda may very well establish where and how our profession defines not only itself, but also the world of legal information. The task is daunting, yet I have no question that we can and will pursue the answers and develop more questions over the years. Why am I so confident? Because our profession has been posing relevant questions and developing research to answer those questions all through the years. In fact, the clarion call for publishing our research was sounded in 1982, when Don Dunn wrote "The Law Librarians' Obligation to Publish" for the 75th Anniversary Symposium of the *Law Library Journal*. Dunn reminds us that we have an obligation to publish, even if our institutions do not require us to do so, because publishing is a contribution to our profession.

In fact, as I pondered the question that was put to me by Butterfield — why research, writing and publication are important to the continued growth and enrichment of our profession, especially from an academic perspective — I first thought about how research is the very lifeblood of a law school, for both faculty and students. Then I began to think about how I could have performed my job without others' research. I also thought about how important it is for academic law librarians

to explore and investigate the issues posed by the Research Agenda. Often we are required by our schools to contribute to our profession as part of our jobs.

Keeping the Research Agenda topics in mind, I reviewed the articles I've relied on for the last 25 years to refresh my memory and to get a renewed perspective of what has been published over that period. I went to the print indexes because I wanted a visual affirmation of the body of literature related to our profession. As I looked through the publications from years past, I was stunned to see just how much has been published on the subjects that continue to be important issues in our Research Agenda. I found articles on all aspects of the new agenda: the profession, patrons, services, research and bibliography, information resources and facilities.

At this point, I could refer you to many more articles that cover the whole spectrum of the work of our libraries, but then this would turn into an index of our colleagues' research, writing and publishing. Suffice it to say that much has been done that has helped all of us learn about the world outside our own libraries. I have benefited from all that has gone before and anticipate continuing to learn from all who will answer the call to take part in AALL's research and publishing agenda. I predict that with the AALL Research Agenda I will have many more fruitful years of reading and learning.

I hope that many of you are already on your own mission to conduct the research identified in the AALL Research Agenda and to publish your results so that all of us may learn from you ... that you produce as much useful information as your colleagues have in the past ... that you will think of new ways that we need to approach information and teaching ... that you will challenge the status quo. We all can learn, given the tools. The AALL Research Agenda lays out what we need to know. I hope many of you take up the challenge of finding the answers.

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A Firm Librarian's Perspective

by Denise Ramsburg Stanley

Libraries' needs depend upon their missions. Private law firms vary from a shelf on a wall to vast collections rivaling law school libraries. Some firms have gone completely virtual, relying wholly on online research products, such as LexisNexis, WESTLAW or LoisLaw. As the number of attorneys and practice areas in a firm increases, so do its library needs. Likewise, benefits derived from professional research increase as members of the library profession explore its many aspects and share their findings.

Resources such as AALL and its local chapters provide a forum for communication among law librarians. Yet the librarians who need the information most do not attend the AALL Annual Meetings because they do not regard the conferences as helpful for their small- to mid-size libraries. This misperception sometimes causes academic and large firm librarians to be overrepresented in the group, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates the misperception. The overrepresentation also translates into a disproportionate amount of professional research that helps academic librarians but is of little or no direct use to librarians involved in private practice. The solution requires more research directed toward the needs of private law librarians — research that can best be identified and undertaken by librarians in the private firm trenches.

Time is of primary concern when considering whether to take on a research project. Law libraries require considerable and constant attention. Where firm management does not grasp the range of benefits offered by librarians, understaffing may preclude librarians from spending time on professional development. Librarians must make time for these pursuits.

Time is limited, but how it is used is bound only by the imagination — and the need for sleep. Librarians constantly add projects to their busy schedules when they are dictated by firm needs. Similarly, they can "make time" to further their careers. Another way to fit professional research into busy schedules is collaboration. A team approach allows participants to

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share the workload. It also enhances the exchange of ideas among team members. And it might be fun.

Delegation is another useful technique. Academic librarians often have student resources to assist with their research. Why not private firm librarians? Universities offering library and information science curricula encourage internships. The labor is free, except for the time it takes to fill out the paperwork. Students of statistics and research — whether scientific, health, economic or other topics — may also be interested in assisting with a research project as interns or volunteers. Pre-law students and possibly others may also provide assistance in exchange for the experience and the resume value.

Financial limitations can also prevent librarians from undertaking ambitious research projects. Education about available **grants** and other information about how to fund a research project need to be disseminated to encourage research. The LexisNexis gift to AALL last year for research is one solution to this hurdle. Other grants for library research projects are available from the government and nonprofit foundations. Legal professional organizations, such as the American Bar Association, may be willing to sponsor research projects.

Clearly, the challenges of professional research can be met. Financial assistance is available and there are ways to fit projects into busy schedules. Attorneys are not trained to manage firms or handle human resources issues and may not recognize the benefits of development and growth of their librarians. Nevertheless, they can be educated about the nature of the librarian profession and the benefits of professional development. In many cases,

the only way to persuade a firm of these benefits is to demonstrate their impact on the bottom line. Research and publication by private firm librarians would help to dispel attorney misperceptions about the value of their libraries while also illustrating the need and benefits of supporting professional development in the field.

The **benefits** of professional research are legion. The AALL Research Committee's Research Agenda provides many seeds to germinate research projects of benefit to private firms. Projects formulated to address particular challenges faced by librarians would help colleagues who still struggle with the same issues. Sharing results of time-consuming projects prevents colleagues from "reinventing the wheel."

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Specific examples include development of a method to quantitatively evaluate the librarian's contribution to the firm's bottom line, which would go a long way to erode the myth that libraries are a profit drain. Projects that educate attorneys, administrators, clients and the public about the value of law librarians and their contribution to firm productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness enhance the firm law library's value as a selling point in marketing the firm and shrink misconceptions. Research to identify and explore methods that maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness would benefit the entire field and facilitate further innovation. A model collection

development plan and other written policies that could easily be adapted by firms to their particular needs would facilitate a more widespread use of this important tool. Librarians could share their studies evaluating competing products or the advisability and timeliness of changing from a particular print resources to a digital format.

Projects to increase efficiency in legal research benefit all researchers, not just librarians. The AALL Research Committee recently approved a grant for a project investigating how lawyers conduct legal research. Research methods used by attorneys have evolved rapidly in recent years. More reliance on online research means that the "peripheral vision" derived from researching books has been sacrificed. This peripheral vision is often the source of creative inspiration in legal argument. The need to screen overabundant information available electronically also distracts from the creative process. Attorneys and judges alike have lamented the deficiencies in research by recent law school graduates, who are not proficient or may be ignorant of traditional research sources. This research project is the first step toward articulating the roots of this issue and improving the quality of digital legal research.

Research projects significantly enhance the law librarian's image. They demonstrate, increase and articulate law librarians' proactive contributions to firm productivity. Professional research by private law firm librarians is vital. Academic librarians also have a role, but the momentum must come from the private sector. Private firm law librarians are in the best position to challenge misperceptions and reap the reputations and rewards they deserve.

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