

# Connect with Library Schools to Ensure the Future of the Profession

by Sue Burch

I have a serious question. Have you looked at AALL's Strategic Plan lately? Be honest. If you haven't, you might be surprised to find it's really worth reading — especially if public relations and the perpetuation of the profession are important to you. Public relations opportunities can be found everywhere — even in a strategic plan. The AALL Strategic Plan outlines initiatives that, among other things, endorse the value of law librarians to their institutions; advance law librarians as legal information experts as well as premier legal research trainers; and promote law librarians as leaders involved in fair and equitable access to legal and government information.

One of the initiatives is particularly important to the future of our profession: Strategic Direction #2, Outcome B, Initiative #4. "Publicize and promote law librarianship in schools of library and information science," the initiative states. In 12 words it provides an excellent way not only to spread the word about the value of law libraries but also to secure the future of our profession. Partnering with the 49 graduate library school programs across the country will enable law librarians to educate library school faculties and administrators about the advantages of pursuing a law library career — putting us in a proactive position of ensuring the future of law librarianship.

How do law librarians and AALL chapters do this?

**Volunteer to serve as the contact person for law library activities with the library school in your state.** Write, and if possible, visit the dean or director of the program. Let library school administrators know that your chapter has an interest in mentoring students. Stay connected with these administrators. They're interested in helping their students network with professionals and eventually land jobs. Law libraries are interested in finding the best and brightest librarians. It's a natural collaboration that benefits everyone.

**Establish a letter-writing campaign to the deans and directors.** Send them information three or four times during the school year touting the value of law librarians and explaining your chapter's interest in promoting law librarianship. Give the school's administrators literature or membership brochures about AALL and your chapter. The brochures should

emphasize the low costs incurred and extensive benefits gained when students join your chapter. Include information on AALL and chapter scholarships for library science students. Let the deans know that AALL and your chapter can help their students — financially while they're in school and after graduation with jobs.

**Offer students internships.** They receive credit; you coordinate their learning contract in your library. If the library school doesn't have internships, create one. Get documents from library schools that have these programs. Many library science students have never worked in a library. An internship gives them an opportunity to see what happens day in and day out. It also allows you to promote the value and worth of working in a specialized library — so you're molding potential law librarians.

**Offer to teach a law librarianship, reference or cataloging class.** You don't have to reinvent the wheel when you teach. Seek help from your colleagues. Talk to others who have taught law library classes. Send a message to the electronic discussion board Law-Lib for some teaching tips. The Conference of Law Library Educators meets at the AALL Annual Meetings to share their library school teaching experiences, as well as their syllabi. Check out the group's Web site for law librarians who teach in library schools and copies of their syllabi: <http://courses.unt.edu/chandler/CONFERENCELAWLIB/aallconeducators.htm>.

"Teaching in library school is fun! Library school students work hard and appreciate the sophisticated research tools of the law," says Penny Hazelton, chair of the Conference of Law Library Educators.

**Provide a list of speakers for library school classes or special events.** Recruit volunteers from your chapter who are available to speak at a career day at the library school. Send that list to the dean. Then make sure someone shows up at these events.

**Become familiar with library school student groups.** Maintain contact with student officers. Attend their meetings and talk about your work as a law librarian — most library science students have no idea what law librarians do.

**Invite student groups to hold meetings in your library.** Ask your

law school dean, managing partner/attorney or judge to stop by and chat with them before the meeting starts. Let your bosses know it's OK for them to brag about you and your job a bit to the students. Tell them about careers in law librarianship and the value of professional associations. Student groups, like all groups, are looking for program ideas and agenda-fillers. So offer to provide a program for one of their meetings. Help the officers look good.

**Take advantage of the students' interest and the schools' need to form partnerships with their alumni and/or library professionals.** During National Library Week, give tours to library science students, hold a reception for them, and invite the library school dean and/or faculty. We have a captive audience with library schools and their students.

**Drop off snacks and goodies during finals.** Make sure they know these treats are from your AALL chapter or your law library. Food is the way to everyone's heart. Let the students know you're interested in getting to know them and that you want them to succeed.

**Invite library science students to professional library meetings in your city.** Let them attend the meetings at a discount or for free. Enlist them as volunteers at your meeting. Mentor them during the meeting. Help them network with other attendees.

**Write articles for library school and student groups' newsletters.** In an opinion piece, describe why law librarianship is an excellent career choice. Write a feature article about what you enjoy most about your job. Discuss the top 10 interview tips for law librarian applicants. Highlight benefits and services of your chapter: publications, scholarships, grants, professional meetings, networking opportunities and educational seminars. Send job openings to the library school to post or to include in their newsletters. If nothing else, place an ad in the library school newsletter inviting students to your next chapter meeting — and make those who do come feel welcome.

**Promote the value of networking and professional association membership by creating a student group within your AALL chapter.**

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Make these students a part of your chapter's meetings and special events. Invite vendors to provide free samples for the student meetings. Introduce the students to the world of corporate sponsorship. If organizing a student group within your chapter isn't possible, create a mentoring program for the chapter. Pair up library science students with chapter members willing to show them all that law librarianship has to offer.

You and your chapter may not be able to try all these approaches, but any of these

PR methods will spark the interest of library school students, deans, admissions directors or faculty members in the field of law librarianship and AALL. By partnering with library students and administrators, law librarianship will catch the attention of library schools and discover new, productive members to safeguard the profession and strengthen AALL. Our challenge is to continue devising and carrying out PR campaigns like these — promotional activities that are both fun and professional in which everyone involved benefits from the relationship.

Opportunities for public relations often arise when we least expect them. Exert your influence. Be innovative. We can affect our profession's future through effective PR and the AALL Strategic Plan. Interesting PR experiences await chapters and have the potential to bring astounding outcomes to our profession.

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