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The Price of Admission

A Proposal to Reduce Student Fees for the AALL Annual Meeting

by Jill Duffy

Having concluded my days as a student not terribly long ago, I feel the need to write about a topic that affects many aspiring law librarians: the high registration fee to attend the AALL Annual Meeting. By putting such an expensive price tag on the Annual Meeting, AALL may unknowingly be discouraging recruitment of new members to the profession.

"Early bird" student registration for the AALL Annual Meeting is \$310. To get this rate, students must also be members of AALL; otherwise, it costs \$359 — that is, of course, assuming that the students are particularly diligent in planning to attend the conference and register early. Many times, I would suspect, students are not quite sure what their summer plans may be. Do they stay in town and work? Do they go to an internship out of town? Do they take summer school courses? If they want that cheap registration rate, they will need to send in the registration form no later than June 1. If they register later than that, it will cost \$410; \$459 if they are not members. For this example, though, assume that the student is particularly diligent with planning and is a member of AALL.

Beyond the conference itself, AALL encourages new members of the profession to attend the Conference of Newer Law Librarians workshop. The \$100 registration fee for CONELL brings the total up to \$410 for the conscientious student who planned in advance. That fee just reserves the space for the student. Now, of course, come some of the basics: getting there, finding a place to stay, and having a meal or two.

Transportation is difficult to estimate, given varying travel distances. The student may luck out and find the conference within driving distance. For instance, I was particularly fortunate when the Annual Meeting was held in Baltimore in 1997 and Washington, D.C., in 1999 while I was a student interning in the district. It is always easier when the event comes to the attendee. Other attendees may have to fly, drive or take some form of public transportation. Assuming a variety of travel situations, let's take \$200 as an average travel fare. An additional \$25 allows the student to take a taxi from the airport or other transportation during the week if need

be. Of course, this price may be a little underestimated for someone from Berkeley, Calif., who traveled to Orlando, Fla., in 2002. But you get the idea.

Continuing to use the 2002 conference as an example, the cheapest conference hotel option was \$76 per night for a single or a double room at the Castle Doubletree. Although a student may be able to get a better deal at another non-conference hotel, he or she would probably want to be near the action at one of the conference hubs. A student conscientious enough to plan in advance is also likely to find a friend to share the hotel room — or, really in tune to things, solicits a roommate on the law-lib listserv. Staying for the whole conference for six nights, including an extra night's stay to attend CONELL, will cost \$228 in hotel bills. Hefty hotel taxes will probably bring the total bill up to about \$270 just for one half of the room.

So far, we have calculated about \$905 of student expenses to be able to get to the conference, get in the door, attend a workshop, and stay for six nights. Now, what to eat? Anyone who has been to an Annual Meeting knows that there are tons of vendor parties and many other receptions in which students could easily fill up on free food and beverages. So the food budget will not have to be particularly large. A "meal deal" from the sandwich shop Subway for an average lunch will run about \$5.50 for a 6" sandwich, chips and a drink. Of course, some meals will be pricier than others. Breakfast at a restaurant with table service will probably cost more than that "meal deal" at Subway. Conservatively, let's estimate \$100 worth of food over the course of the trip. That brings us to \$1,005 in total expenses.

Now \$1,005 can be double the cost of a student's monthly rent. For example, the University of Michigan Off-Campus Housing Program estimated that a one-bedroom apartment in Ann Arbor, Mich., cost \$682 per month in 2000. The Student Housing Affairs Office at the University of Washington approximated a one-bedroom apartment in Seattle would run \$600–\$750. Even less expensive was the \$495 monthly rent quote provided by the Pittsburgh Housing Resource Center for a one-bedroom apartment in Pittsburgh. Many students share housing while in school, sometimes reducing the cost of their portion of the rent to about \$250–\$300, depending upon the city.

Faced with such a hefty price tag, I think it unlikely that many students would go to the trouble of attending the AALL Annual Meeting. As I contemplated writing this article, I began to ask a few of my law librarian friends, fairly new to the profession, whether they attended conferences as students. They said that they did not attend their first Annual Meeting until after they began their professional positions.

Does it have to be this way? No. In fact, it is not this way for most library school students. When I was in library school, I noticed how many of my friends made the ritualistic trip to the American Library Association each year, sometimes even for the mid-year conference. How much could this be bankrupting them, I thought? Well, it turns out that it costs only \$35 to register for the ALA conference as a student.

For other similar professional associations, the range for student registration for their annual conferences is \$35 to \$100. The table below reflects the early registration for students at selected organizations of interest to prospective librarians. I have also included the American Bar Association because law librarianship students may find it relevant to their studies. The table shows that every association offers a significantly lower student registration rate than AALL. The

Society of American Archivists and the Special Libraries Association top out at the next highest fees at \$100. The American Library Association offers the cheapest conference for students at \$35. The ABA and the Medical Library Association each charges their students \$50. Conservation students can pay \$75 to attend the American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, while it costs art librarianship students \$80 to attend the Art Libraries Society of North America conference.

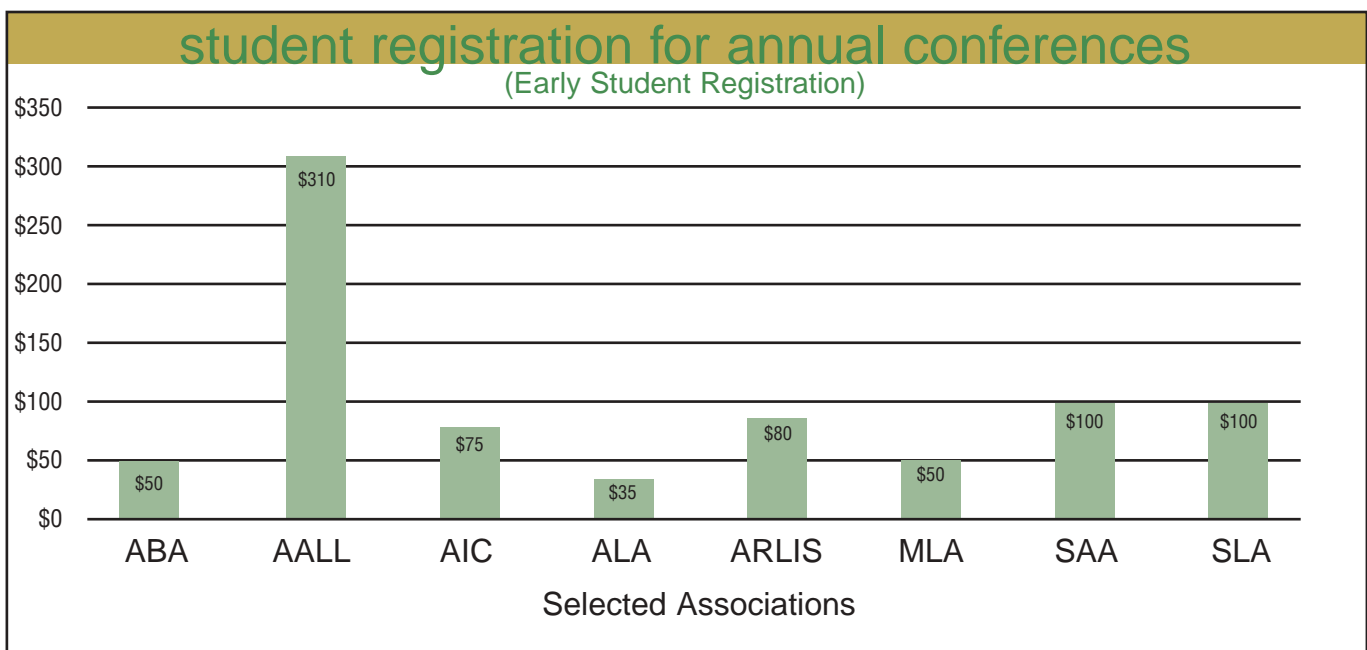
Interestingly, AALL is the only association that assigns designations for student registration. There are four categories for students: early AALL student member registration (\$310), late or on-site AALL student member (\$410), early nonmember (\$359), and late nonmember (\$459). MLA charges the same \$50 whether or not a student member registers in advance or at the last minute. MLA requires its students to be members to get a discount, but student membership dues are only \$30 per year.

Unlike student Annual Meeting registration, AALL student membership dues are competitive with similar associations. AALL's student dues are just \$36 annually. If students are attending the conference, it makes sense for them to become members so they can register for the meeting at the less expensive member

rate. The chart on page 21 shows annual student dues at similar associations ranging from \$20 to \$55. The ABA and ALA are the cheapest associations for students at rates of \$20 and \$25, respectively. In this case, AALL appears to have analyzed costs and priced its membership at \$36, just one dollar more than the SLA student membership for \$35. Art librarianship students pay \$40 per year for ARLIS, while archivists and conservators pay \$55 per year for student membership to SAA and AIC. Overall, AALL appears to be in line with prices for student.

Then we must ask: Don't we want to encourage students to attend the Annual Meeting to network, to learn about the law librarianship profession, to look for jobs? Programs such as CONELL, mentoring programs, and the AALL/LexisNexis™ Call for Papers competition show that we are trying to reach out to students, but the prohibitive price of registration seems to discourage them from attending. Of course, there are grant opportunities available to cover the registration costs (see www.aallnet.org/services/grants.asp for a list of sources), but not everyone who applies receives one. We should be examining the costs for students across the board, not just a select few. Along the same vein, many law librarianship students are also working in libraries part time

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while pursuing their graduate degrees. Such a job would be a modest source of income but is unlikely to provide funding to help defray the cost of attending an Annual Meeting. Although an employer may be willing to fund the AALL Annual Meeting for a professional, full-time librarian, such benefits are not likely available to the student employee.

In the winter 2001 issue of *Law Library Journal*, Beatrice Tice wrote that students may be choosing not to attend meetings, stating that the “number of applicants submitting resumes at AALL Annual Meetings has indeed seen a steep decline.” Similarly, she observed that “it may well be

that a large number of applicants are finding jobs in ways unrelated to the meetings.” Perhaps the students deem that the enormous cost of attending the Annual Meeting is not worth the effort. Yet students who take this virtual approach to job hunting through AALL will miss out on the other benefits of the Annual Meeting: to meet other law librarians and to learn from our fellow colleagues. Not only that, but we in the Association will miss out on the chance for fresh ideas and input from students unless we seek to encourage their attendance.

I propose that AALL reduce the Annual Meeting costs for students. I also suggest that the Membership and Retention Committee and/or the Recruitment to Law Librarianship Committee in particular examine the current state of affairs and recommend ways that we can restructure the AALL Annual Meeting fee scale to accommodate future law librarians.

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