

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



What opportunities for professional development exist? Does it seem such junctures are limited to sitting quietly through a presentation at an AALL or regional association meeting? Don't misunderstand, Association meetings are an invaluable and irreplaceable tool for professional development. Unfortunately, this value may get overlooked amid growing budgetary

concerns. Of course, someone who does nothing more at an Association meeting than sit in on presentations can find more to support his or her own development — e.g., Special Interest Sections, roundtables, committees.

But what about the rest of the year? Librarians peruse the professional literature to keep current. Yet reading all those articles and books can be very time-consuming, so many librarians wind up with a stack of items that haven't made it to the top of their priority lists. A variety of e-mail listservs also help spread current information and provide a vehicle for learning. The AALL Professional Development Listservs have sparked much creative thinking and interchange on a wide range of topics, such as cataloging electronic resources and serving pro se patrons. Librarians occasionally have the chance to take part in teleconference events that address timely topics, such as the satellite teleconference on the *USA PATRIOT Act* that AALL and its fellow library associations sponsored in December 2002.

These methods of continuing education should not be replaced. But what else can a librarian do to advance his or her professional development?

Here's a theoretical proposition for professional development opportunities. Think about "e-development." It's very trendy today to be e-something, but the online environment can be exploited to supplement professional development.

Many large organizations are using e-training to provide software instruction for their employees. I have even tested some e-training modules on sexual harassment and diversity training for human resources programs. The value of these modules lies in how well the material is presented and whether the technology is used appropriately to encourage learning.

The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction, which is located at <http://www.cali.org>, has successfully used the online environment for legal education. CALI is a nonprofit consortium of law schools that researches and develops computer-mediated legal instruction and supports institutions and individuals using technology in legal education. CALI lessons are supplemental learning aids for law students that teach doctrine, analysis and critical thinking skills. Some must be downloaded to a computer, but more and more of the lessons are designed to run online and provide interactive learning and testing in a specific area of law. Couldn't AALL apply the same concept to professional development?

Would such an endeavor be an effective use of resources? There is evidence that adult learners prefer interactive, hands-on learning. When used properly, the online environment can create these opportunities. Furthermore, one asset of e-training is that the modules can be designed in small pieces. A topic might encompass multiple modules or be capable of starting and stopping at the user's inclination. The lessons could be self-paced and organized so that an entire topic need not be completed in one sitting, making them much easier to fit into a typical work schedule. E-development could expand the opportunity to learn throughout the year, as needed, and on an individual's own schedule.

However e-training cannot supersede the advantages of traditional professional development. Meeting and networking with colleagues at continuing education events offers inherent value. Besides helping librarians find their next jobs, networking adds value to their current organizations. How many have found the crucial answer or magic document by calling on the assistance of someone they've met at an Annual Meeting or even on the Law-Lib listserv? Online modules

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E-Development: Should Librarians Expand Their Online Learning Opportunities?

by Kristina L. Niedringhaus

will never supplant that aspect of professional development.

Another drawback — or benefit — to e-development is that it requires large-scale organizational skills. Economies of scale suggest that creating modules that would provide learning opportunities to AALL's large and diverse membership would be best

handled on a national level. AALL's membership has experts who can create learning opportunities on various topics of law librarianship. That expertise can be taped and shared with the rest of the national membership, providing interactive learning that is not limited by any meeting's time or place.

The details of this theoretical e-development proposition have yet to be fully worked out. The extent of such a project may seem overwhelming at this time, but just imagine the possibilities.

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