



## Trading Places

### *SISs Seek to Create Law Librarian Exchange Program*

by Richard Leiter

Academics, ever wonder what the real world is like? Like what happens to your students after they leave law school or clerk at a firm for the summer? Have you ever wondered just who buys all those expensive online services we see in the exhibit hall? Privates, ever wonder what it would be like to work with students and faculty in an academic law library? Or why academics have so much trouble teaching students how to conduct basic research? AALL members may soon get their chance to experience other areas of law librarianship firsthand. A joint committee of the Private Law Libraries Special Interest Section (PLL-SIS) and the Academic Law Libraries Special Interest Section (ALL-SIS) of AALL is drafting guidelines to create an exchange program that allows academic law librarians to work in law firm libraries and their law firm counterparts to work in academic law libraries.

The idea for the exchange program came about two years ago when I was appointed to an ALL-SIS working group to explore and develop a system by which law librarians from academic libraries would visit law firms to gain “real life” experience, and law firm librarians would visit law school libraries to gain “ivory tower” experience.

Since most academic librarians have never worked in a firm, I assumed that they would jump at the chance to spend a few weeks working on a firm’s reference staff. Academics would benefit from seeing the law firm culture to which many of their students are headed and would therefore be better equipped to teach them the skills they will likely need to excel (survive?) in the law firm setting. But I also assumed that private

librarians would also benefit from visits to academic law libraries, probably during the academic year, after the craziness of working with summer associates has died down. Firm librarians would benefit from greater familiarity with the challenges and nature of the collection and services available at a major research library. Firm librarians also can bring to the academy all sorts of valuable experience and insight that will help better teach students. Ultimately, I envisioned the program becoming a regular exchange program that would match interested librarians, law schools, and, possibly, court libraries.

### Overcoming Logistical Problems

After spending a year calling to find willing participants in a pilot program, I encountered many logistical issues, such as who will pay for parking and whether a person will be covered for workers comp insurance! During the year, I tried and nearly succeeded in starting two pilot programs in Los Angeles. Irell and Manella and the University of California at Los Angeles and Latham and Watkins and Loyola University paired up. But neither program got off the ground, because there seemed to be too many unanswered questions, such as the length of the visits (days, weeks, or months) and who would pay for insurance and parking.

The main problem with implementing a new program such as this is determining what the program will look like. As I talked with colleagues about a pilot program, it became clear that the idea was shifting into a shape we had hitherto not imagined; it seemed to begin taking on a form and life of its own. Where I originally envisioned people going to work at another library for the summer, it seemed more practical in some situations for a person to simply visit a few days a week for a summer. Also, where I initially thought that ALL-SIS could help match people up on a national level, it became clear that local exchanges were much more practical—not to mention possible.

This summer, the committee conducted an informal e-survey through the PLL, ALL, and Research Instruction and Patron Services SIS listservs to determine how SIS members viewed the potential exchange program. Within two days, I received mostly positive responses from more than 80 people, including 15 academic law librarians, 65 private firm librarians, and a few court librarians. Many survey respondents suggested

how the program should be constructed. The committee initially conceived of a program that would match individuals and libraries across the country, but survey respondents indicated that local programs where individuals or chapters would facilitate the visits would have the greatest chance of success. The committee also considered long-term visits of perhaps as long as a month at a time, but the survey suggested that visits of a few days a week for longer periods of time may work better. Each visit would likely require its own unique guidelines, and some standards simply wouldn't work for everyone.

Only five or six survey respondents were skeptical and predicted that the program would not work. According to the skeptics, time would be a major problem with the program: How could a librarian ever get sufficient time off to work in another library, and who would pay his or her salary? Surprisingly, the most adamant concerns came from academic librarians, although there were a few negative opinions expressed by private firm librarians as well.

Three respondents asked the committee not to overlook court libraries as participants. Two of the three survey participants worked at court libraries and were interested in visiting either a firm or an academic library. The third person was from an academic library who wished to visit a court library.

### Conclusions for a Successful Exchange

This year the ALL-SIS and PLL-SIS will form a joint committee to develop a set of guidelines for the exchange program. After reviewing the responses to the informal poll, the committee has reached a few important conclusions:

1. The program will be helped if it has "official" sanction. In other words, if a librarian wishes to participate, requests for appropriate time off will be better received by the administration if it is an official program of AALL.
2. The program should be described as a professional development or

continuing education program. It clearly supports a number of the AALL Competencies of Law Librarianship.

3. AALL chapters should get involved in matching individuals with libraries.
4. Minimum standards should be established for programs that will facilitate the creation of visit opportunities. For example, standards could state that the visits should be for a prescribed number of hours, with a mentor in residence, the work should be primarily reference service, etc.
5. Successful visits should be awarded some sort of recognition, either with a certificate or appropriate hours of continuing education credit.
6. A joint committee of members from the ALL-SIS and the PLL-SIS should draft the minimum standards.

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7. The joint committee should convert to a standing committee to “approve” visits for appropriate recognition. The committee could be “sunset” after a period of time and functions could either be assumed by AALL headquarters or local chapters.

The joint committee will begin its work early in the fall. The first order of business is to draft the guidelines. The committee intends to circulate drafts of the guidelines over the course of the year. The guidelines will be brought to both the PLL-SIS and ALL-SIS executive boards for approval. The committee expects the guidelines to be approved next summer and then begin “accrediting” programs in the academic year 2005.

In the meantime, anyone with questions, suggestions, or comments should contact me.

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