

# AALL Spectrum

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## Cover photo:

Students gather in the first floor commons area of Pennsylvania State University Dickinson School of Law's new Lewis Katz Building.  
*photo by Dyanna J. Stupar*

# from the editor

## Changing Perspective

**P**anic! Suddenly I realized that the hand I reached for was not daddy's.

It happened this way: I was four and in a downtown Topeka department store on one of those seemingly interminable shopping trips with my parents. I was short. Without craning my neck back, I saw only feet, legs, and barely the front edge of the display counters. In my boredom, I let go of daddy's hand and focused less on staying with him. A few moments later, when I found familiar shoes and pants, I began to reach for the hand and realized I had the *wrong shoes and pants*.

I managed to regain my four-year-old cool and changed my focus and point of view. I looked up across the aisles and display tops for his head. Relief! He was just down the aisle, barely six feet away.

The implications of point of view or perspective fascinate me, perhaps because the point of view from my current office differs so much from my old office: second floor versus the 44th floor. From the 44th floor, I could discern few details of pedestrians or cars, other than windshield wipers swiping back and forth, telling me I should bring my umbrella. On the 44th floor, the horizon and a swatch of the Rocky Mountains filled my view. Both changed subtly with varying light, like the great plains Robert Pirsig describes in *Zen & the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

On the second floor, however, the landscape of pedestrians and cars changes with each cycle of the traffic light: window-rattling bass booming from a car's sound system... wobbling stilettos... sturdy work boots... a long, white-grey hair and beard in dreadlocks. Seeing those strangers, I wonder what we could do to draw them into the library. Then, once in the library, how would they see us? How would they feel about the library? Short of asking each person, how can I answer these questions?

One approach: trying to put myself in their shoes. By imagining myself as a new visitor to the library, I see more readily from that

point of view and can ask pertinent questions. Do we place or remove barriers? Does the library make it easy and inviting to come in and ask for help? Are instructions and signage clear? Or do the signs detract from our message? Do the signs answer the implicit what, why, and how questions? What do we do that does not save the reader time and may even demean or embarrass them?

Another important role to play is as the decision maker for the library. How will they see this experience? Does it align with the strategic purposes of the organization or not? These efforts at seeing from administrative viewpoints parallel the challenge posed in Carl Yirka's July 2008 *Spectrum* article, "The



by Mark E. Estes

Yirka Question and Yirka's Answer," namely what are we doing well that should stop so that we can do something else? The decision makers also keep us focused on the future and increase the likelihood of our success.

By the way, the "The Yirka Question" won the article of the year award. It's still a good read.

This annual library architecture issue highlights three law firm projects and two academic ones (page 15). The architecture theme continues with the local arrangement committee's thumbnail descriptions of sites to see in Washington D.C., beginning with the National Building Museum, an example of innovative architecture constructed just after the Civil War (page 30). The PR column reminds us to look at what our colleagues in both law and other types of libraries do to promote themselves. Spend some time following the links Bret Christensen includes, and you're sure to find a smile and a new idea for promoting your library (page 10). Meg Butler reports on efforts to promote scholarship in the profession by the American Association of Law Schools Section of Libraries (page 28).

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