

FINAL REPORT OF THE AALL SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FOSTERING LEGAL RESEARCH AS A SUBJECT SPECIALTY

February 2006

INTRODUCTION: This special committee was appointed for a one year term beginning July, 2005, to develop and promote the expertise of law librarians as legal research experts. Specifically, its charge is “To promote collaboration and team work between the academic and practitioner worlds of librarianship, to improve the research competencies of law students, new lawyers and judges, and to develop and promote tools for effective and efficient legal research.” Further, the committee was asked to focus on (1) fostering the expertise of law librarians in providing a core competency for their institutions; and (2) promoting the teaching role of the law librarian as a faculty member in the law school, or equivalent (instructor, trainer) in law firms, courts, and other law library settings.

The committee’s nine members and board liaison mirror the law library profession, with membership drawn from the academic, private, and public sectors, as well as the publishing world. Members share a wealth of experience teaching legal research and are recognized as legal research experts in their respective settings.

The committee was asked to prepare an interim report, which was submitted to the AALL Executive Board, in October, 2005, this final report, and a members’ briefing for publication in the *AALL Spectrum*, in June 2006.

COMMITTEE’S FOCUS: At its initial meeting, in July 2005, the committee reviewed its charge and compared it to the work of a similar AALL committee, appointed in 2001: “The Special Committee to Promote Law Librarians as Research Trainers,” which focused its recommendations on marketing. See report at 94 *Law Libr. J.* 796 (2002). We noted that unlike the earlier committee our emphasis should be on promoting collaboration and improving research instruction skills rather than marketing. The latter will naturally flow from taking steps that truly improve collaboration and competencies as legal researchers and instructors.

Subsequently, the committee fleshed out the elements of its charge and divided the work into two subcommittees. It submitted an interim report to the Executive Board, in October 2005, reflecting the progress of the committee and continued work throughout the year via email and conference calls.

The early report of the committee focused on four areas for further work, which over the course of the year we were able to collapse into two main categories: (1) collaborating and (2) communicating.

One of the most fruitful developments over the course of the year was a warm reception from the National Conference of Bar Examiners regarding testing for legal research skills on the bar exam. Challenges remain as to how to develop this idea, but such a test would go a long way in furthering the charge of this committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Collaboration

- Work with the National Conference of Bar Examiners in testing for research skills
- Develop models (such as Bridge the Gap programs for legal research) and best practices (such as recommended exit courses in legal research)
- Encourage law schools to utilize non-academics for a portion of legal research training
- Work with CALI to improve training programs on the web
- Challenge chapters to provide model programs for improving the research skills of students, lawyers and the public

2. Communication

- Develop a legal research instruction blog
- Develop a column for Spectrum on teaching legal research
- Populate AALLNet with model teaching materials and a current listing of programs and materials pertaining to how to teach and how students learn

IMPLEMENTATION: The AALL's Executive Board could implement most of these recommendations by assigning responsibility to appropriate groups within the organization. In particular, the Executive Board may wish to focus on the following:

1. Identify a group to work with the National Conference of Bar Examiners in developing model bar exam questions. Perhaps a member of the Executive Board (consulting with committee members) could be assigned this responsibility. The NCBE's current President, Erica Moeser, has noted two issues needing study: (a) identifying the universe of minimum legal research knowledge new lawyers should have for admission to the bar; and (b) determining the feasibility of testing for this knowledge. A meeting with the NCBE to flesh these issues out could take place this Spring, but follow-up may be necessary next year.
2. Assign responsibility for writing a regular column in The Spectrum. Perhaps volunteer editors could be solicited by the Executive Board or the Spectrum's current Editor. The column could be used to help generate ideas for model bridge the gap programs, provide information about how students learn,

encourage communication between those in the academic and private sectors and otherwise churn ideas for improving legal research instruction.

3. Assign responsibility for developing the legal research component of AALLNet. This site would be the logical nexus for uploading syllabi, teaching materials, PowerPoint slides and other materials related to teaching legal research. The site needs to be designed and populated and may require an AALL staff person and member volunteers to develop it.
4. Assign responsibility for creating a legal research blog. To make the blog useful and keep it current, it will take more than just a single person. It seems like a logical project for a group such as Research, Instruction and Public Services Special Interest Section, perhaps working jointly with the Computing Services SIS.
5. Encourage more AALL programming focused on improving research skills. For example, consider inviting CALI to host a program on partnering to improve research instruction.

The Executive Board also may wish to continue this committee for another year to complete working on those parts of these recommendations it is not able to assign to other appropriate bodies within the AALL, in addition to any new related assignments the Board considers appropriate. Should the committee continue, the Executive Board may wish to add new members, with additional ideas and energy, but it should retain some of the current membership in the interest of continuity.

*Committee members are:

Alison Alifano
Kelly Browne
Linda Defendeifer
Beth Edinger
Blair Kauffman (Chair)
Darcy Kirk (Board Liaison)
John Nann
Gayle Lynn-Nelson
Roy Mersky (of counsel)
Mark Schwartz
Maureen Well