

So You Want to Be AALL President?

Being president of AALL is generally a fun job. I say this to reassure potential nominees when they are asked to sacrifice the next three years of their lives for a major professional service position. The job does, however, require incredible organizational skills, understanding family members and work colleagues, and, to be perfectly honest, a huge sense of humor. On page 34 of this issue of *AALL Spectrum* you'll find an article about how former AALL presidents have handled the demands of the job. Here's how I've been coping.

I'm the first to admit that perhaps my timing could have been better. Two years ago, when I was elected AALL vice president/president-elect, I had no idea that I would subsequently leave my job of nearly 20 years at Southern Illinois University to become law library director at Tulane, while at the same time beginning my term as AALL president. Obviously, I could have said no when either opportunity became available, but sometimes you just have to take the plunge and move forward. Both positions had been career goals...I just didn't think they would happen at the same time!

The good news is that, while vice president, you get to learn about the job while watching the president during his or her year. I had an outstanding mentor in Ann Fessenden, who not only showed incredible foresight (and good taste!) back in 1985 by hiring me for my first law library job as a law student at the University of Mississippi Law Library, but also provided excellent direction as a truly organized and thoughtful leader of the Association. You spend your year as vice president preparing to appoint committee members, working on your initiatives, and learning how the AALL Executive Board operates in conjunction with Headquarters staff.

It helps to have the support of your family and your employer. I have been lucky to have worked at two academic institutions that have been very supportive of my contributions to AALL and have worked with me when I needed time off to attend various events. However, not everyone on the board has been so fortunate, and I know that some board members have had to use personal vacation time in order to attend meetings and chapter visits.

This year, since becoming president in July, I've kept a fairly traditional AALL schedule. I attended an ABA section committee meeting in August in New York and the fall meeting of the AALL Annual Meeting Program Committee in Chicago in September.

In October, I served as chapter visitor to the Mid-America Association of Law Libraries at its annual meeting in Fayetteville, Arkansas; chaired the fall AALL Executive Board meeting in Oak Brook, Illinois; and attended a meeting of the AALL Local Arrangements Committee in Washington, D.C. (while in D.C. I also attended the Friends of the Law Library of Congress' Wickersham Dinner).

In late November-early December, I represented AALL at the International Association of Law Libraries annual meeting in Puerto Rico (I know, tough assignment!) and also traveled to Chicago to attend a meeting of the AALLNET Strategic Planning Committee, my main presidential initiative.

In January, I attended the Association of American Law Schools annual meeting in San Diego and the midwinter meeting of the American Library Association in Denver.

I also have monthly conference calls with the AALL Government Relations Committee, weekly chats with the AALL executive director, and daily e-mail exchanges and phone calls with AALL leadership and members, as well as vendors and other individuals. Of course, there are also these regular columns in *AALL Spectrum*!

The president is expected to write reports summarizing chapter and official representative visits, summarizing what happened and making any recommendations for changes (the reports are sent to the board or placed in the board books for general consumption).

As president, you work with the executive director to plan the agenda for the Executive Board meeting, run the meeting, then work on follow-up to make sure that assignments are made and (subsequently) accomplished. You help train the incoming board members at board orientation and work with the AALL treasurer and Executive Board Finance and Budget Committee to make sure that the Association has adequate resources to accomplish AALL objectives. In turn, you help mentor the AALL vice president and help him or her prepare

for the upcoming year (although this year's vice president, Cathy Lemann, was pretty darn prepared already).

What's on my plate for the rest of my year as president? A couple of chapter visits, some national meetings, and the possible opportunity to represent AALL at the China-U.S. Conference on Legal Information and Law Libraries in Beijing in May. And the thing I'm most looking forward to—seeing many of you at the 2009 AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., in July.

I don't relate these items to scare anyone off. Interested candidates need to know, however, what might be on their plates for the next couple of years. Fortunately, you don't have to do everything yourself, and the decision to attend the majority of these events is up to you (AALL Executive Board meetings are mandatory, though).

While I believe it is important to "fly the AALL flag" at many of these meetings, you can always delegate attendance to others or decide that an "official" AALL presence isn't required (something that is happening with more regularity during the current economic recession). It also helps to have members in local cities who can attend events rather than spend travel and hotel funds to send someone from out of state.

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by James E. Duggan



Photo by Candie Weser-Mitran.

Elizabeth Eckford (member of the Little Rock Nine and keynote speaker) and James Duggan at the 2008 Mid-America Association of Law Libraries Annual Meeting in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Eckford and Duggan hold "Law Librarian Day" proclamations from the Fayetteville mayor and Arkansas governor.

If you're looking for a new challenge, consider saying yes when the AALL Nominations Committee calls and asks you to run for the Executive Board as an officer or member (see page 37). It's fun, rewarding, and a great way to learn more

about AALL and the profession. Being AALL president has certainly opened doors for me, and I've met some wonderful law librarians both across the country and internationally. On average, participating in AALL at this level works

out to about an hour per day, and besides, my friends tell me that you don't need that extra hour of sleep anyway... ■

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