AALL Task Force on the ABA Standards for Academic Libraries
Report to the AALL Executive Board
Meeting April 1-3, 2004

As a follow-up to recommendations made in the July 2002 AALL report entitled “Beyond the Boundaries: Report of the Special Committee on the Future of Law Libraries in the Digital Age,” President Carol Avery Nicholson appointed a Task Force on the ABA Standards for Academic Libraries. Specifically, the Task Force was charged to: review existing ABA standards for academic law libraries; review the existing annual and site evaluation questionnaires; recommend appropriate changes that reflect the changing nature of law libraries in the digital age; and seek to work cooperatively with the Law Libraries Committee and any other relevant entities of the ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. The final report of the Task Force would be due in time for the November 4, 2004, meeting of the Executive Board.

The following AALL members were appointed to the Task Force: Marcia J. Koslov (Co-Chair); Steven M. Barkan (Co-Chair); Jan Fleckenstein; Hazel L. Johnson (withdrew in June 2003); Rita T. Reusch; Milagros R. Rush; Robin M. Schreiber; Leonette Williams; Janis L. Johnston (AALL liaison).

At its organizational meeting in Chicago, February 7-8, 2003, the Task Force agreed to divide the project into two phases. During the first year of the project, the Task Force would focus on researching and gathering data on issues relevant to the Task Force’s charge. The second year would be devoted to synthesizing information developed during the first year, surveying the relevant membership constituencies, formulating recommendations, and writing the final report.

For the purpose of developing expertise and a common knowledge base among the members of the Task Force, the members agreed to investigate several subjects relevant to the Task Force’s charge. Among the subjects to be investigated were: libraries and accreditation, in general; trends and issues in library statistical measurements; trends and issues in evaluating library collections and services; collection development and resource sharing in a networked environment; legal research instruction in the future; history of the ABA Standards and questionnaires; the future of law school libraries.

After the relevant issues had crystallized and the Task Force members had developed a better understanding of the information that would be needed, the Task Force would survey librarians and others who have been involved in the ABA accreditation process as site evaluators and/or directors of libraries that have been evaluated. The purpose of the survey would be to identify perceived problems with the ABA Standards and accreditation process with respect to the development of law libraries, and to elicit comments and recommendations from the membership as to how the standards should be amended or modified. Survey methods might include personal telephone conferences and/or email requests for information.

In January 2004, the Task Force learned that the ABA’s Standards Review Committee would be conducting an extensive review of the library standards in 2004, for the purpose of recommending changes to the standards by August 2004. As part of its process, the Standards Review Committee solicited input from the ABA Law Libraries Committee. The Law Libraries Committee will be conducting surveys and discussions via various listservs and scheduling
programs and forums at the AALL annual meeting. The process started in February, and the Committee has been soliciting comments and feedback on all of the ABA library standards.

Going into this project, the Task Force was aware that the ABA would be conducting its formal review of the library standards at some point in the future. However, there was no awareness that the ABA process would be conducted as early as 2004 or that the recommendations would be due in August 2004, before the report of the Task Force would be due. The members of the Task Force suggest that the recent standards review initiative of the ABA’s committees makes the Task Force’s project redundant and unnecessary. The ABA Library Committee appears to be effectively soliciting the same information that the Task Force would solicit, and the Task Force believes that it would be confusing and counterproductive to engage in a parallel or competing process. Upon learning of the ABA standards review process, the Task Force suspended its activity.