

SCCLL, Pronounced *Skill*

by Joanne Beal



include agency lawyers, judges and their staffs, prosecutors or public defenders, as well as elected officials. Joint tenancy and politics often go hand-in-hand. In the pursuit of good public relations, one might find that the most important library customer is in the office down

Skill (skil), *n* 1. the ability, coming from one's knowledge, practice, aptitude, etc. to do something well. 2. competent excellence in performance; expertness, dexterity. — *Syn.* 1. proficiency, facility. 2. deftness, cleverness.

The best thing that can happen to an organization is to have a totally apt acronym formed from its official name. In absence of such good fortune, the second best thing is to be able to pronounce those letters as a word that appropriately describes the group. With a little phonetic stretching, the State, Court and County Law Library Special Interest Section of AALL is able to do just that.

How could anyone deny that the members of the Special Interest Section known as SCCLL are anything less than **skilled**? The multifaceted nature of their employers, their services and even their user group can attest to the fact that these individuals must possess competencies and skills that differ from those traditionally identified with the term *librarian*.

These are the dedicated souls who are employed by federal and state agencies, county and local governments and courts, and nonprofit associations comprised of attorneys and ancillary members of a local or regional legal community. Stewards of quasi-judicial and political organizations, these librarians have developed proficiencies that should be recognized.

Even the casual observer in a SCCLL library notices the uncommon diversity in patrons. Using a geometric illustration, this user group can be pictured as a triangle, with each side representing a different faction. The first side represents the employees of the court or government with which the library is aligned. This might

the hall, at least until the next election. In addition, the **skill** in manipulating the political dynamic of resource and space sharing in a government building often requires the use of catlike instincts and balance.

The second side of the triangle represents the lay user, the *pro se* patron, or the inquiring John Q. Public. Distinctly different from the other types of law libraries, a primary mission of some SCCLL institutions is to serve the legal research needs of the public. Equal access to justice and the courts, including access to legal information, is a commonplace mandate of government at all levels and many SCCLL libraries aggressively seek to fulfill this mission. Meeting the needs and service requirements of lay users requires not only the honed **skills** of a reference librarian, but also that of one well aware of the threshold of unauthorized practice of law. In addition, a well-proportioned sense of compassion and empathy for personally troubled patrons is essential. The **skilled** librarian must possess the heart of a social worker as well as the mind of a researcher in order to perform valuable services for patrons.

The two sides rest firmly on the base of the triangle that represents the practicing bar. The research needs of this group can be satisfied in the depth and breadth of a well-developed collection. In addressing the needs of the larger law firms, the SCCLL institution maintains subscriptions that serve as an extension and enhancement of privately held collections. The retention of costly and specialized treatises by the law library strengthens its value in the legal community by reducing the need for firms to subscribe to them. For smaller law firms, as well as solo practitioners, the SCCLL library serves as the basic collection of primary and secondary sources that, along with a liberal circulation policy, obviates the need for these researchers to overextend on such purchases. For both groups, the law library serves as a vital conduit for information, whether in a print or electronic format. The amount of private financial support for SCCLL libraries can be in direct proportion to the success of this endeavor and the **skill** with which it is executed.

Another three-sided image of the SCCLL librarian has to do with the skills and acumen needed to serve such a varied user group. The three faces of this individual can be identified as **skilled** public administrator, **skilled** businessperson and **skilled** librarian.

The receipt of public monies for the purpose of managing a law library clearly requires the director to engage in some form of public administration. In general, the librarian will be accountable to a governmental agency for the accurate and efficient use of the funds. In addition, the record keeping thereof is subject to formal examination and, very often, reporting requirements are a matter of statutory or regulatory provisions. The actual day-to-day governance of the law library may be subject to the vagaries of politics, with elected officials either serving on a board or appointing others to serve.

An ancillary duty might be the continued vigilance of the librarian over the activities of legislative bodies that have the capability of amending the statutory provisions that affect the governance or financial resources of the SCCLL institution. The SCCLL librarian must be prepared to

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offer testimony or respond to requests for information from legislative bodies, ad hoc committees and the media that may be questioning the justification of the institution's very existence.

In other ways, the management of a library is not unlike that of a small- or medium-sized business. Procuring items, cash flow and the dispensing of services all must be performed in a business-like manner. To show that the SCCLL institution is a cost-effective business, standard accounting principles must be adhered to; clear and accurate banking records must be maintained; and honest and ethical practices are de rigueur. And because many membership libraries are nonprofit corporations, they are subject to the statutory provisions governing all nonprofit organizations. The duties of registering the corporation and bylaws with the secretary of state, handling the election of trustees and officers, as well as the recording and maintaining of corporate minutes are duties that often fall on the shoulders of the librarian and staff. Other duties may

include the completion and filing of Internal Revenue Service and state and local tax forms.

The most rewarding **skill** remains the performance of duties as a trained and dedicated librarian. Though the political and business demands may at times seem to distort our three-sided figure, it is the classical and academic precepts of library science that keep it properly aligned. Collection development for the purpose of maintaining a well-rounded repository of legal research materials to serve the needs of a varied user group remains a rewarding exercise of professional judgment. The discernment employed in organizing a library for optimum use by both educated and uneducated patrons particularly illustrates the speculative abilities of an information scientist. Further, the extremes of satisfying the in-depth research needs of lawyers as well as lay users typifies the mental dexterity of a reader-services specialist. In days gone by, these duties were referred to as acquisitions, cataloging and reference.

Even dressed up in the contemporary vernacular, the spirit of these tasks still stirs in the hearts of the true librarians.

When picturing these three-sided figures, do not visualize them as stationary images. Rather, imagine them as flexible, with adjustable lengths and angles. For this is the premier **skill** of the SCCLL librarian: the ability to prioritize and accommodate the various demands and expectations of the service levels required and to modify short-term and long-range plans in order to satisfy governmental and private interests.

In the growing ranks of the Special Interest Sections of AALL, let SCCLL be known as one whose primary purpose is that of fostering the fervent service ethic instilled within its assemblage of highly prized and highly **skilled** librarians.

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Employment Checklist

As an aid to SCCLL employers, the following checklist contains questions to consider when recruiting a skilled librarian.

Administration and Management

What standing in the overall institution does the library occupy?

Is it a separate and autonomous department?

Are human resources and personnel issues handled within the library or by an outside office?

Is there a formal classification or categorization of employee types?

Does the library fall under the oversight of another department or an elected official?

What is the level of fiscal accountability of the librarian?

What is the level of decision-making of the librarian for purchases, employees, activities and projects?

With whom will regular communication be expected? Judges? Elected officials?

Department heads? Attorneys?

Do statutory provisions for financial oversight and reporting apply to this library?

Do statutory provisions for the governance and operation of a not-for-profit corporation apply to this library?

Professional Duties

As a reference assistance, will the librarian serve primarily judges, elected officials, attorneys, paralegals, law students or members of the general public?

Is the selection and maintenance of electronic sources of information within the purview of the librarian?

Is the creation and maintenance of a descriptive catalog of materials within the purview of the librarian?

Does the opportunity for professional activities, continuing education and publishing exist?

Background and Credentials

What level of education and background does the job classification or description of duties require?

Generally speaking, at the director's level, a postgraduate degree in law, library science or public administration is preferred, if not required. Dependent upon the breadth of other positions within the organization, an SCCLL employee may elect to choose from other options, such as:

- a bachelor's degree;
- an associate's degree in library technology, paralegal studies, business or criminal justice;
- completion of college-level courses in library services, business or public administration; or
- employment experience in libraries, government or criminal justice.

A foremost need to maintain a quality SCCLL facility is the availability of continuing education, as well as the motivation for attendance by the director and staff.