A variety of voices converge at the 2010 Diversity Symposium

**2010 Diversity Symposium: “Adaptation: How Technology is Changing and Being Changed by Diversity in the Law Library World”**

Presenters: Anne Robbins, moderator, Jenner Law Library at the University of Illinois; Ryan Overdorf, University of Toledo College of Law Library; Gayle Lynn-Nelson, LexisNexis; Maribel Nash, Chicago-Kent College of Law Library; Joyce A. McCray Pearson, University of Kansas Wheat Law Library

The 2010 Diversity Symposium examined a wide range of diversities in law librarianship and the critical role that technology plays in this diversity. The primary focus of the symposium was to examine ways that libraries can build an equitable environment that serves all patrons. This is especially important as libraries serve increasingly diverse populations. Technology should be an enhancement rather than a barrier to library assistance. Anne Robbins, chair of the Diversity Committee, acted as moderator to a wide range of librarian speakers representing numerous groups: Ryan Overdorf spoke on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and compliance issues in electronic services; Gayle Lynn-Nelson discussed the impact of mentoring both internally and externally in a large corporation; Maribel Nash focused on the expanded role of the virtual AALL placement office and enhancements to the AALL online Career Center; and Joyce McCray Pearson added perspective on recruitment and the overall role of the Diversity Committee during her long-time membership in AALL.

### Diverse Perspectives

Overdorf, a member of the Adaptive Technologies Committee of the Computer Services Special Interest Section (CS-SIS), began the discussion by highlighting the lack of standardization of both American Bar Association-accredited law school websites and law library websites under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Section 508 standards define the minimum level of web accessibility for the visually and hearing impaired. Overdorf stressed that by providing accessible electronic services, libraries can meet the needs of all users by creating a more inclusive environment. He touched on both voice recognition and text-to-speech navigation software as two vital components of providing accessible services.

Next, Lynn-Nelson talked about the role of mentoring in her workplace. LexisNexis provides both an internal mentoring program for its own employees and the opportunity to mentor young people in the community. The internal mentoring program, called Women Connected, provides support and networking in the company. Lynn-Nelson stressed that simply employing a diverse range of people is not enough to ensure a truly diverse atmosphere. Members of diverse groups must achieve success and move up in the ranks of the company. She also participates in an external mentoring program for young people and emphasized the importance of technology in communicating with mentees.

Nash proudly discussed the AALL Placement Office’s enormous step forward. The Placement Office is now completely electronic and is open to all...
Association members. As a result, it will reach a much wider—and more diverse—group of job seekers because attendance at the Annual Meeting is no longer required. In addition, the AALL Career Center website (www.aallnet.org/careers) has been enhanced with new search and alerting capabilities.

McCray Pearson, a long-time member of the Association and former Diversity Committee member, focused on using technology to increase accessibility for all members of the community. As director of the University of Kansas law library, she must meet the needs not only of students and faculty but also public patrons. Providing access to the public may mean paying for public access terminals, providing multilingual staff, and making not just computers available but also a wide range of programs installed on the computers. McCray Pearson emphasized that training staff to create a welcoming environment is key.

Growing Complexity, New Challenges

As usual the symposium crowd was engaged and had many insightful questions and comments. One attendee asked about the role of social media in library employment and recruitment. A lively discussion about LinkedIn and the lack of diversity of its users ensued. McCray Pearson highlighted that while social networking can be useful, it is important to remember that not all groups use mainstream sites such as LinkedIn.

Near the end of the question and answer session, panel members discussed the misconception that the Diversity Committee has a fairly narrow definition of “diversity.” In fact, the committee has long been committed to reaching out to an expanded audience.

Conversations about mentoring, accessibility, and recruitment continued during the reception held immediately following the symposium. Numerous people commented on the wide scope of this year’s symposium. Robbins, chair of the Diversity Committee, notes that “even though the symposium covered a very broad array of issues, the panel was able to weave a number of different topics and perspectives into something cohesive.”

It is clear that as our Association grows and becomes more complex so does the diversity of its membership. As with most years, the symposium attracted only a tiny percentage of the number of attendees at the conference. After attending seven of the last 10 diversity symposiums, I’ve noticed that each year I see many of the same faces.

Despite this year’s attempt to expand the aim of the symposium, it did not seem to attract many new attendees.

Near the end of the symposium, panel members again emphasized the commitment of the Diversity Committee to reach a wide range of Association members. This year’s symposium clearly showed that commitment. However, it appears that too few members are aware that the Diversity Symposium is not just for the “diverse” members of the organization—it is for everyone. I expect next year’s symposium to be as enlightening as ever and hopefully it will draw many more attendees.

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(From left) Diversity Symposium panelists Joyce McCray Pearson, Maribel Nash, Ryan Overdorf, and Gayle Lynn-Nelson, along with moderator Anne Robbins (far left), discuss the role of technology in libraries serving increasingly diverse populations.