

LEADER
PROFILE

RISK TAKER, MOVER +SHAKER

AALL President Keith Ann Stiverson talks communication, connection, and the importance of taking risks.

“Be honest, even if it hurts.”

KEITH ANN STIVERSON

Keith Ann Stiverson is passionate about her profession and its growing importance in a tech-heavy world:

“A professor of ours recently said to me, ‘I need a librarian more than ever because I just can’t possibly get through it all. I don’t know every database now. I don’t know all these new things that have sprung up.’ The metadata isn’t good throughout the web, and you need to have people who are keeping up with all of this. And I don’t think we remind people of these simple facts enough. Especially in a specialty like law, it’s really important that we

remind everybody of our value because we’re essential to their success.”

Stiverson, who began her term as AALL president this past July, is director of the library and senior lecturer at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law. She’s been an active member of AALL since joining in 1988, when she was working as special assistant to the law librarian at the Law Library of Congress. She served at various institutions prior and since, including Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, D.C.; Benjamin Cardozo School of Law in New York; Peck, Shaffer & Williams in Cincinnati; and University of Texas School of Law in Austin.

Following, Stiverson discusses the profession, her career, and the year ahead.

Now that you are in office, what do you want to accomplish first?

I will fall back on the statement that I made when I started running for office, and that is that AALL has always been my professional organization of choice, and I want everyone to feel the same way about it that I do. It’s meant so much to me, so I want to grow the membership and I want to increase the number of members who are really engaged in the Association. I would like to get more people involved in what we’re doing.

QUICK HITS WITH KEITH ANN STIVERSON



e-books or print?

Print, unless it's a reference book or I'm traveling, because when I'm traveling I take five or six books.

having a Mac because I'm the one who always complains about the difficulties you have with PCs. I don't know, I just haven't made the change.

Mac or PC?

PC at work, iPad at home, and my staff regularly make fun of me for not

iPhone or Android?

iPhone. I tried an Android, went mad, got an iPhone.

Text or phone call?

Text, but only to family and close friends.

Did you upgrade to Windows 10?

No. It is being tested by our IT Department, but there are privacy concerns. Lexis and Westlaw are acting funny at law firms using it, I hear. There are a number of things that are being worked out. We're also worried about our integrated library system working with it, so we have a lot of testing to do. We don't make these changes

lightly because people go crazy. It's a big group.

Phone order or GrubHub?

I order online but not from GrubHub. I go right to the restaurant website.

Scrabble or Words with Friends?

Scrabble. I don't know Words with Friends at all.

Favorite apps?

The Art Institute of Chicago has a great app that will take you on tours of the collection and give you brief explanations.

So, if you couldn't go there, like if you broke your leg but you wanted to go, their app is fabulous. They tell you where everything is in the collection, and they walk you there. The map will pop up and show you. They're doing great stuff. Also, the app for Divvy Bikes and the Crime Reports app, which tells me about every criminal in the neighborhood and what crimes have happened and that kind of stuff.

Do you have goals or special initiatives that you plan to pursue in the coming year as AALL president?

We've been working on a rebranding initiative that has been quite interesting for all of us. I think that a number of initiatives will come out of that. And we have things that we're still finishing up from this previous year, so I would like to see us close things off and then get going on the way in which we deal with the results of the rebranding initiative.

The theme of the 2016 Annual Meeting is "Make it New: Create the Future." What does this theme mean to you?

In many ways it means that I think we should start over and give up the old ways of doing things, which aren't serving us very well. It used to be that we concentrated on how big

our collection was, that sort of thing. And now I think we have to think of everything we do in a new way. Things are changing so quickly—especially with technology—and we have to be ready for whatever happens.

Where lie the biggest challenges in law librarianship?

I believe the biggest challenge we have is seeing ourselves whole and realizing all of the things we can do. In some ways, our minds have been a bit narrowed as to what we are able to do, but the minute we free ourselves from the old ideas that we have, the minute everything opens up. At my school, it's amazing to me how many fingers we can put in the dike with all of the talents among the library staff. So I think that the biggest challenge we have is not dreading change but embracing it and moving on because we have so much to offer.

What is your favorite thing about your job?

I think all the changes in the job and the fact that you work with new people all the time because watching people develop and helping them develop great careers is what you do if you're a director. It's not about you anymore; it's about them, and it's about what they can learn and how you can bring them along so that they have a great career, just as I've had.

How do you stay engaged and passionate about your work?

You know, it changes all the time, which keeps me engaged. We get new faculty much more often than we used to. Faculty move around a lot more often, and faculty now have J.D.s, Ph.D.s, so it's law and psychology, law and philosophy, law and this, law and that. And their research interests are much more varied. The kinds of collections we used

to have are completely inadequate for the faculty of today, so the fact that it changes all the time and that we're in a library-rich city and I can depend on all of the libraries around me to help me meet our goals keeps me engaged. It's a great city with a lot of libraries at your disposal.

What is your leadership style?

I'm very collaborative, and, as I said before, it's not about me, it's about them. So I might have a conversation with a librarian one day and say, "What do you think of this idea? And if you think it's stupid, tell me you think it's stupid." I expect people to speak their mind and to learn to deal with adversity and with questions like, "What are we going to do now that we only have \$1,000 and there's a \$5,000 thing that somebody wants? What are we going to do about that?" We figure things out together, and we all talk

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about things. I don't make decisions on my own. I talk to five people before I make a decision about anything, and then it's a better decision.

What is the best career advice that you have been given?

I think about this a lot because I see people who are limited by the fact that they are insistent upon staying in one place. The best advice I ever got was actually from my mom. We moved a lot when I was a kid, and she said, "Never be afraid to move." And she was right. And also, take risks. Nobody's going to die. We're not in an operating room. And nearly always, you will

learn from it or you will have success doing something in a different way. All you had to do was let yourself go a little bit.

How would you describe the value of AALL membership to a non-member?

I know the world has changed and we have a lot more technology that keeps us informed, but I think the biggest problem with all of our ways of communicating now is that we never really communicate. We're drowning in a sea of information, and we aren't making the individual contacts that we used to make. I think that as technology has changed and we are less, let's say, dependent upon one another for a lot of things, we've lost some of the community that was extremely important to me in developing my career.

I remember calling AALL when I was a government librarian and saying, "We need support for the federal law librarians in Washington. We need support for our budgets or we need support at the Library of Congress for the appropriation of the law library," and I would get help. I would get all sorts of help that, in a direct way, kept me in my job, kept that library going, and it's happened time and again. I got very involved in advocacy, and, through the people I met at AALL, I was able to go from one job to another—because I had a community, and we shared resources.

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You work with information for a living. Do you ever completely unplug?

I do, and I immediately regret it. I get like 400 emails a day. I will admit that I'm not very good with social media. If my cousin sends me a string of photographs to look at, that's one thing, but I'm probably not going to have time to look on Facebook and figure it out. I don't tweet about things. I don't get

more involved in personal social media the way other people do, and I know I'm missing something, but I just can't keep up with all of it. It's all I can do to keep up with my emails. So I unplug, and then I'm sorry.

What is a quote that you live by?

The one that sticks with me the most is "Be honest even if it hurts." Just be honest. I find it hard to deal with people who are always polite and politically correct, and you wonder what they're really thinking, you know? So I think it's just a better policy to say here's what I really think, and then you learn from other people's points of view. You're not disparaging anyone else, but you're being honest about your real thinking because it's so much easier just to go through life when you're being honest.

And another quote to live by is what I said before about taking risks. Constantly remind yourself—this is not a big risk. It's a small risk, and it may really improve things or you will learn something. There's nothing wrong with failing at times.

What are you currently reading?

When Terry Gross spoke to us at the Annual Meeting, one of the first things she said was a quote from John Updike's *Self-Consciousness*, one of his nonfiction works about his own life. It's one of my favorite books. And so it's so strange ... I was walking around Philadelphia after the Annual Meeting, and they have a little bookstore right next to the library there. And outside there was a big display of books for sale, and right in the middle was a hard copy of *Self-Consciousness*, so I grabbed it and I've been reading it ever since. I thought it was just so strange. You know he was from a small town in Pennsylvania, and it's just a wonderful book. And here was Terry Gross bringing it back to me ... and that's what books do, you know? ■