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astjohn@aall.org

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calemmer@iupui.edu

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AALL Spectrum (ISSN: 1089–8689) is published monthly except January and August with a combined September/October issue by the American Association of Law Libraries, 105 W. Adams Street, Suite 3300, Chicago, IL 60603. Telephone: 312/939-4764, fax: 312/431-1097. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, Illinois, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *AALL Spectrum*, 105 W. Adams Street, Suite 3300, Chicago, IL 60603.

Writers wanted — contribute to your Association's magazine. For guidelines, visit www.aallnet.org/mm/publications/spectrum/policy-spectrum.html or contact Editorial Director Catherine A. Lemmer at calemmer@iupui.edu.

Advertising Representative

Innovative Media Solutions
320 W. Chestnut Street
P.O. Box 399
Oneida, IL 61467
Telephone: 309/483-6467
Fax: 309/483-2371
Email: bill@innovativemediasolutions.com

AALL Spectrum is a benefit of membership in the American Association of Law Libraries. Of each year's dues, \$42 is for one year of *AALL Spectrum*. Nonmembers may subscribe to *AALL Spectrum* for \$75 per year. For membership and/or subscription information, please contact the American Association of Law Libraries at the address above.

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from the editor

By Catherine A. Lemmer



Making Time for Your Career

As information professionals, we work to inspire in our users the importance of lifelong learning. Depending on your environment, this work takes many forms and cuts across all areas of the library—from urging students and attorneys to push the limits of a search algorithm or adopt a new database to encouraging library staff to learn and implement a more efficient workflow process.

Despite the passion with which we advocate for lifelong learning among our users, we often struggle to find the time to incorporate professional development time into our own schedules. Have you had to skip a webinar because someone scheduled an impromptu meeting? How many articles have you downloaded to read with your Sunday morning coffee because you just couldn't get to them during the workday? Do you groan when you hear the phrase “professional development day,” knowing that it is going to cause scheduling disruptions and challenges? Do you respond to so many emails and texts during a conference program that you leave the program without learning anything? We know that acquiring new skills and knowledge is essential to our professional development, yet we often let it slip to the bottom of the work stack or, worse, upset our whole work-life balance by catching up with it on weekends and in the evening.

I'll be the first to admit that professional development often gets short shrift in my schedule. Over the course of my career, however, I have implemented a few strategies to help myself stay on track. First, I identify a goal and think about the professional development I'll need to achieve that goal. This ensures that the time I do spend on professional development is focused. Second, and perhaps more important, I've learned to step away from my phone and email and pay attention during the time I've dedicated to the professional development activity.

I have also adopted a few simple, silly tricks, such as calendaring an occasional hour of topical reading to alert anyone scheduling a non-urgent meeting that the particular time slot is busy for me; scheduling to eat lunch at my desk during a webinar; and, believe it or not, actually putting the webinar on my calendar as soon as I receive notice of the date and time! I've also set up an accountability feature by committing to talk about, write about, or share information learned with others to make sure that I follow through on attendance.

Last week we made time at our annual public services staff retreat. We took a few hours to come together to enjoy lunch and snacks and to talk informally about what we do well, what we wish we could do better, what summer projects we should take on, and what we would like to do next year. Yes, there were the usual scheduling, funding, and planning challenges. In addition, I had to do some door-to-door campaigning to urge everyone to come with ideas and to reassure everyone that “what was said at the retreat stayed at the retreat.” In the end, we all benefited when we shut off our electronic devices for a few hours, allowing us to come together and identify areas for future professional development, strategize about the challenges we are facing, and re-evaluate our efforts on certain projects. I came away revitalized by a talented staff that is intent on improving library services for faculty, students, and staff and interested in investing in the necessary training to do so. Our retreat resulted in a professional development opportunity for which the “return on investment” far exceeded my expectations.

Equally inspiring are the professional development experiences that members write about in this issue of *AALL Spectrum*. The authors describe valuable experiences attained from attending the AALL Management Institute, the AALL Leadership Academy, and the Harvard University Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians. In addition to these formal educational programs, authors write about exciting work opportunities that required them to independently take on the process of acquiring new skills and knowledge and the resulting satisfaction from doing so. What is made clear in this issue is that while designing and charting your course of professional development is essential, you don't have to go it alone. Our profession provides a wide range of programs and mentoring support to help you achieve your professional goals.

This issue also includes a few updates on our upcoming 108th AALL Annual Meeting & Conference, our most important professional development and networking opportunity. I hope to see you there! ■

Catherine A. Lemmer
calemmer@iupui.edu
www.aallnet.org/Blogs/spectrum-blog

