

APPENDIX D:

CORE COMPETENCIES OF LAW LIBRARIANSHIP

(5/1/00 draft)

Core Competencies of Law Librarianship

A profession can be defined by the skills and practical knowledge its members apply to the shared environment in which they work. The American Association of Law Libraries seeks to define the profession of law librarianship and its value to the legal field today and in the future by identifying, verifying, and actively promoting the core competencies of law librarians.

Individual librarians may use the AALL Core Competencies for coordinating their continuing education as they identify areas for professional growth. Employers may use the Competencies while making hiring, evaluation and promotion decisions. The American Association of Law Libraries uses these Competencies as a framework within which to structure professional development programs. This framework provides guidance to ensure that programs are offered which will assist AALL's members in attaining the skills or knowledge necessary for their current and future work.

The following competencies are derived from many sources, including a 1997 survey of AALL members. The first section, "General Competencies," are those which apply to all law librarians. The subsequent sections are those that are related to specific functions. Some law librarians (for example, solo librarians or those librarians in smaller institutions) might have multiple responsibilities and might need to be proficient in more than one of the "Specialized Competencies," while other law librarians might specialize in just one area or in a subset of one area.

The Association is now actively soliciting input from its Chapters, Special Interest Sections, and members, to ensure that all relevant skills and knowledge are represented and presented appropriately.

1. General Competencies

The Skilled Law Librarian

- 1.1 Is patron and service oriented.
- 1.2 Has effective communication skills and is able to promote the library and advocate for its needs.
- 1.3 Exhibits leadership skills, regardless of position within management hierarchy.
- 1.4 Is committed to working with others to achieve common goals.
- 1.5 Is well versed in the legal system and the legal profession.
- 1.6 Understands the social, political and economic context in which the legal system(s) exists.
- 1.7 Is knowledgeable about library and information science theory, information creation, organization and delivery.
- 1.8 Communicates effectively with vendors [information providers] to advance the mission of the library.
- 1.9 Recognizes the value of professional networking
- 1.10 Actively pursues personal and professional growth through continuing education.

Specialized Competencies

2. Library Management

The Skilled Law Librarian

- 2.1 Understands planning, budget preparation, and budgetary control in the library setting.
- 2.2 Is capable of selection, supervision, evaluation and development of library personnel.
- 2.3 Is able to measure and evaluate the quality of library services.
- 2.4 Is able to provide leadership within the parent organization to insure that the library remains vital to that organization.
- 2.5 Is able to analyze users' needs and provide facilities that guarantee a high level of service.
- 2.6 Is knowledgeable about information providers, and has the ability to follow movements of and changes in these providers.
- 2.7 Tracks, anticipates and affects changes in policy and legislation that impact the library and the profession.

3. Reference, Research and Patron Services

The Skilled Law Librarian

- 3.1 Is able to provide experienced and customized reference services on law related topics.
- 3.2 Is able to provide skilled and customized reference service on relevant, non-legal topics.
- 3.3 Is able to create research and bibliographic tools (handouts, aides, pathfinders, bibliographies) on legal and related topics.
- 3.4 Is able to assist users with legal research using both print and electronic resources.
- 3.5 Can evaluate the quality, authenticity and accuracy of sources, both traditional and electronic, and convey the importance of these to the user.
- 3.6 Is able to assist non-lawyers in accessing the law.
- 3.7 Is capable of monitoring trends in specific legal fields.

4. Information Technology

The Skilled Law Librarian

- 4.1 Has knowledge of integrated library systems, client server hardware, software and networks, and electronic information resources.
- 4.2 Can make decisions regarding evaluation, purchase, implementation and testing of software and hardware necessary for accessing information in electronic form.
- 4.3 Can evaluate the need for new and evolving technology and implement required changes.
- 4.4 Can assist with long range planning and policy formulation for computer services and training issues.
- 4.5 Can troubleshoot and assist with resolving library hardware, software, LAN, website and Internet connectivity problems.
- 4.6 Can provide technical support to library users, including assistance in maintaining an integrated library automation system.
- 4.7 Can develop a plan for the library Web site and its associated resources.

5. Collection Care and Management

The Skilled Law Librarian

- 5.1 Is able to develop collection development policies that are appropriate to the overall mission of the parent organization.
- 5.2 Can evaluate both print and electronic resources, integrate them to meet the needs of the library users, and discard them when appropriate.
- 5.3 Can make selection decisions, in consideration of all relevant factors, including the library's collection development policy, differences among formats, and costs of purchase and upkeep.
- 5.4 Is able to improve the power and scope of library services by making outside collections and databases accessible through resource sharing.
- 5.5 Is able to select and implement an appropriate level of cataloging, classifying and indexing that meets the needs of the institution.
- 5.6 Is able to create and select catalog records according to national standards and accepted practices.
- 5.7 Is knowledgeable about the acquisition and management of a diverse collection of legal treatises and continuations.
- 5.8 Is able to select and implement an automated processing system appropriate to the needs of the institution.
- 5.9 Can apply appropriate preservation techniques to the library's collection.

6. Teaching

The Skilled Law Librarian

- 6.1 Has the ability to work with and teach effectively a wide range of library clientele, including both technology and non-technology-savvy users.
- 6.2 Proactively identifies the educational needs of users through various needs assessment tools and activities.
- 6.3 Provides training and guidance on the organization and use of legal resources in various formats to users.
- 6.4 Promotes the effective use of new technologies for the retrieval of information.
- 6.5 May act as liaison with outside vendors of commercial research databases to coordinate instruction on the effective use of these tools.
- 6.6 Prepares and packages training materials such as bibliographies, pathfinders, training scripts and handouts.

Law Librarian Core Competencies and their Place In AALL/PDC Program Development

BACKGROUND PAPER

What knowledge and which skills should a competent law librarian possess? What standards should be used to assess the competency of law library professionals? These topics have been the subject of debate within the American Association of Law Libraries for much of its existence, and the Professional Development Committee, whose responsibility it is to oversee the educational mission of the Association, continues to grapple with those questions.

First, what is meant by the term "competency"? The dictionary defines it as "possession of sufficient knowledge, judgment, strength, or skill needed to perform an indicated action." Synonyms are: capability, fitness, adequacy, and capacity.

Special Libraries Association has defined competency as "the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform a job effectively, so the performance satisfies not only the performer but also the observer." (Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century 11-16 (1997).)

In a recent Law Library Journal article, Dick Danner defines skills or competencies as "the practical application of professional knowledge." ("Redefining a Profession," 90 Law Lib. J. 315, 326 (Summer 1998).)

Efforts have been made through the years by AALL members to enhance the professional credibility of law librarians and to recognize standards of competency in the field. One notable example is the AALL system of Certification, which was instituted in the 1960's and existed for 20 years until it was abolished in 1984. Another example is the list of competencies (general and subject) for law librarians identified in the "AALL Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Law Librarianship," which were approved by the AALL Executive Board in 1988. More recently, the 1997 PDC Subcommittee on Credentialing used a survey of AALL members to gauge current interest in establishing a credentialing program.

While the results of the Committee's survey indicated that there was not a clear mandate for the concept of an entry-level credential for law librarians within the AALL membership, the survey instrument itself included a list of 31 core competencies statements drawn from a number of source materials on law librarianship, (including the report of the Renaissance Task Force) and interviews with law librarians. Respondents were asked to rank these statements on an importance scale, and all 31 received strong support from survey respondents. The 31 competencies attempted to capture the essence of a law librarian's role today and provide a common denominator for describing the profession. They serve as a basis for the current draft of the AALL Core Competencies on Law Librarianship.

These competencies are an outline of knowledge areas for law librarianship and provide a guide to developing educational programming that will meet the professional development needs of all AALL members. The core competencies list may be useful in other ways as well—in recruiting prospective law librarians, in writing job descriptions, in evaluating job performance, and in demonstrating to current and potential employers the value that law librarians add to an organization. Publicizing the core competencies can also help define the role of law librarians to the larger communities within which they work.

We encourage your input in helping to make this document reflect those skills you believe are crucial to law librarianship. You can encourage dissemination of these competencies by scheduling a listserv

SELECTED RESOURCES ON CORE COMPETENCIES AND CREDENTIALING OF LAW LIBRARIANS

AALL Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Law Librarianship, Executive Board, American Association of Law Libraries, Nov. 5, 1988.
[http://www.aallnet.org/about/graduate_guidelines.asp]

Bryan Carson, *Librarians Need Certification and Licensing*, 1 AALL Spectrum, June 1997, at 13.

Competencies for Special Librarians of the 21st Century (submitted to the SLA Board of Directors by the Special Committee on Competencies for Special Librarians, 1996) [full report at www.sla.org/professional/competency.html and executive summary at: www.sla.org/professional/comp.html]

Eric A. Cooper, *Credentialing Challenges and the MLS; Securing the Law Librarian's Credibility with the Legal Profession*, 9 L. Libr. Mgmt. & Tech., Feb. 1998, at 5.

Caryl Cox and Jack McKillip, *Certification: Context and Development*, 2 AALL Spectrum, December 1997, at 12.

Richard A. Danner, *Redefining a Profession*, 90 L. Libr. J. 315 (1998).

Marydee Ojala, *Core Competencies of Special Librarians of the Future*, 84 Special Libr. 230 (1993).

President's Briefing: Law Librarian Competencies, 2 AALL Spectrum, April 1998, at 17.

Janet Reinke, *Librarian: Who's Entitled to the Title? Should Librarians Have the MLS degree?* 1 AALL Spectrum, June 1997, at 12.

Pamela J. Scott & Anne E. Kirby, *The SLA Competencies: Raising the Bar on*

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Performance, 124 *Libr. J.*, July 1999, at 46.

Kathy E. Shimpock, *Paralegal: Friend or Foe?*, 2 *AALL Spectrum*, Feb. 1998, at 6.

Special Libraries Association. *Future Competencies of the Information Professional*. Washington, D.C. SLA, 1991. (SLA Occasional Papers Series, No. 1).

Toward a Renaissance in Law Librarianship: Report, Recommendations, and Materials of the American Association of Law Libraries Special Committee on the Renaissance of Law Librarianship in the Information Age (Richard A. Danner, ed., 1997).

Anne Woodsworth, *New Library Competencies*, 122 *Libr. J.*, May 15, 1997, at 46.