



## Defying Gravity—Rise to the Challenge

You probably won't be surprised to hear that the 100th AALL Annual Meeting in New Orleans is on my mind a lot these days. So is our theme for the Meeting, "Rise to the Challenge." But I'll confess that I've also been finding inspiration from the lyrics of a popular show tune. The musical *Wicked* has been playing in Chicago and around the country for several years. Its blockbuster song, "Defying Gravity," expresses the refusal to be held back by obstacles and problems, while also celebrating a soaring spirit that breaks free and takes risks—in other words, it rises to the challenge.

*It's time to try defying gravity ... I'm through accepting limits ... some things I cannot change but till I try, I'll never know.*

Defying gravity doesn't necessarily require magic spells and a witch's broom. Gravity can be any force or problem that holds us down and keeps us stuck in place. And in order to overcome that force or problem we must challenge ourselves, focus our attention, and expend energy. Sometimes the things that hold us down are external factors, out of our control, which we are forced to confront. Other times we are held back by our own inertia or lack of commitment—we allow ourselves to be bound by self-imposed limitations.

New Orleans, the host city for the 2007 AALL Annual Meeting, has spent the last year and a half rising to the challenge of recovery from a disastrous storm and its aftermath. The people of New Orleans have expended tremendous energy to "defy" the reality of overwhelming devastation and loss in order to work step by step to rebuild their city. Their efforts provide us with stirring examples of what a community can accomplish with cooperation and determination.

With those inspiring efforts in mind, what are some of the challenges facing us right now as a profession, as an association, and in our individual lives as professionals?

### Challenges for the Profession of Law Librarianship

Our roles, jobs, and institutions are being scrutinized in the face of declining budgets, often by critics with incomplete information. To respond effectively to these challenges, we need to stay well-informed in a variety of areas, including legal information retrieval, delivery techniques, customer service, information policy, and changes in the law. We need to find new

ways to raise our visibility and communicate our value to significant decision makers in the legal profession.

For a thoughtful examination of the challenges facing our profession,

I recommend an opinion paper on the future of law libraries, which was recently posted on AALLNET. Written in 2005, it is part of the *IMLS Study on the Future of the Library Workforce*, sponsored by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services ([www.aallnet.org/services/future\\_of\\_library\\_workforce.pdf](http://www.aallnet.org/services/future_of_library_workforce.pdf)).

Members of the Law Library Advisory Panel who prepared the report on law libraries for the IMLS study are Johanna Bizub, Karen Brunner, Tory Trotta, and Gail Warren. Their liaison to the IMLS Study's National Advisory Board was Gayle Lynn-Nelson. As the panelists point out in their opinion paper, law librarianship faces challenges in a variety of areas, including staffing, recruitment and retention, staff development and training, leadership, changing constituencies, and globalization. One solution the panelists suggest is greater collaboration among professional associations such as AALL and graduate schools of library and information science. Their paper concludes by emphasizing that "For all its challenges, law librarianship remains an exciting, rewarding career choice."

### Challenges for AALL

As an association entering its second century, AALL is dealing with a variety of issues. Now, more than ever, we rely on the energy, creativity, and dedication of our members. While we have identified broad new Strategic Directions to guide our course until 2010, we need your help to define and implement actions to reach our goals.

Some things facing AALL in 2007 are items of "headline news." As we look forward to July, we are adjusting to a new, condensed schedule for our Annual Meeting. Several events have been discontinued and others have been relocated to new days and times. We all need to be flexible and innovative to make this new format work smoothly.

At the same time, we are in a transition period as we carry out a search for a new executive director for AALL. Also, we need to select a new editor for *Law Library Journal*, to replace Frank Houdek, who is stepping down from that position. This spring we are hosting a groundbreaking Advocacy Summit to explore the need for authentication of primary legal information at the state level and identify potential solutions.

Other challenges for the Association are more systemic in nature. How do we use our diversity of employment as a strong point, rather than as a divisive factor? How do we relate to vendors in the legal information industry whose goals sometimes seem in direct conflict with our own? How do we ensure that all our members have ongoing education opportunities outside the Annual Meeting? How do we organize the work of the Association to provide numerous opportunities for meaningful volunteer work and mentoring of future leaders? How do we continue to provide the best support and greatest value to our members?

### Challenges for Individual Law Librarians

In this time of rapidly changing technology and work environments, we all need to be both flexible and resourceful. Ask yourself—are you rising to any challenges in your professional life these days? Are you doing more than the minimum of professional activity? AALL and its chapters and SISs provide us with many opportunities to challenge ourselves, but it may seem safer and more comfortable to sit on our hands and stay put where we are.

Are you willing to take a risk by entering a contest, volunteering for a committee, submitting an article for publication, proposing a program, applying for a grant, doing a research project, running for office? How about starting up an e-mail conversation with a colleague or signing up for a continuing professional education program, either in person or on the Web? Is there some pro bono legal research work you could do through your job or in your local area?

Step back from your daily routine. Push your thinking in some new ways. Moving up requires stretching ourselves, but responding to challenges makes us stronger and brings out the best in us.

### When You Resist the Force of Gravity, the Sky's the Limit

What do you want your profession, your Association, and your own career to be? Are you being held down by external limits or by ones you impose on yourself? What are you willing to do to take charge of your own and our collective future? As the song says, some things can't be changed, but until we try, we'll never know.

I hope you'll join us in New Orleans July 14-17 for the 100th AALL Annual Meeting. We'll gather there to share knowledge, make connections, and renew our spirits. Then we'll head home better prepared to tackle some obstacles and **rise to the challenge** all year. ■