1997

Program Planning-Ideas for Improvement

Joyce Manna Janto
University of Richmond, jjanto@richmond.edu

Recommended Citation

Joyce Manna Janto, *Program Planning-Ideas for Improvement*, AALL Spectrum, June 1997, at 24.

Program Planning—Ideas for Improvement

by Joyce Manna Janto

Picture the scene: you're at the Annual Meeting, it's Tuesday, and you're listening to your fifth "talking head" presentation. At the front of the room are five librarians/speakers, each of whom has exactly 15 minutes to shower you with their words of wisdom on the selected topic. In the audience are scores of librarians, whose eyes are glazing over and whose thoughts are wandering to more congenial topics. Sound familiar? This describes way too many programs at the typical AALL Annual Meeting. Instead of a good, thought-provoking discussion, or vigorous give-and-take between panelists and audience, we get sound bites. Why do we do this to ourselves?

No self-respecting librarian would design an educational program like this for the patrons of his/her library. How many firm librarians, faced with the influx of summer clerks, sit them in a room and have different members of the library staff lecture them for 90 minutes on how to use the library? How many academic librarians, when teaching legal research to first-year students, rely strictly on a lecture? Instead, we combine lectures with tours of the library, scavenger hunts with candy prizes, trivia contests, and hands-on training in the use of resources.

In the past few years, much has been written and programs have been sponsored (by AALL no less!) on the different ways in which people learn. By now we all know how auditory learners differ from visual learners. We are even coming to accept that some people are tactile or kinetic learners. Now we must also realize that, in addition to this, we adults learn differently than children. First of all, the majority (55%) of adults are global learners. Adults prefer to have an overview of the subject first. Once they have the big picture in focus, they can concentrate on the details. Another obvious (if you think about it) difference with adult learners is the background they bring to the learning experience. They bring to the classroom not only previous academic experiences but also, in many cases, practical work experience. A good teacher of adults will assume some background knowledge and try to tap into the learners' experiences and opinions. She will try to make the presentation learner-centered rather than teacher-centered.

Teachers of adults have another advantage denied to those who teach younger students. Because of their previous academic exposure, adults, regardless of their individual learning styles, have become adept at handling other styles. Multi-media presentations are particularly well-suited to adults. A successful presentation would combine text, video, and sound.

So what does all of this have to do with librarians and AALL? Quite a bit, when you consider that our organization's premier educational event is just around the corner. During our time in Baltimore, we will all sit through some wonderful, energizing programs—programs that will fill us with the desire to go back to our libraries and institute new services, new procedures, new attitudes. Unfortunately, we will also sit through some boring talking-head programs that will be a waste of our time. Fortunately we now have the tools at hand to ensure that more of the programs offered at the Annual Meeting fit the first scenario rather than the second.

What are these tools? The first is the demographic survey commissioned by AALL last year. ("AALL 1996 Survey of Members—Summary Report," *AALL Spectrum*, October 1996, p. 19 ff.) This survey is a fascinating snapshot of our membership. But more than that, it is an excellent tool to help us improve AALL and the programs offered. Did you know that the average attendee at the Annual Meeting has 13 years experience in law librarianship? I didn't. This figure is even more jarring if you review past programs and see how many programs are advertised as being for the beginner or novice librarian. No wonder membership in the Shopping and the Sightseeing SISs is booming. The demographic survey also provides information on the types of educational programming members find the most desirable. (See the graph on this page). I would highly recommend that anyone who wants to propose a program for the Anaheim meeting read this document. (Heck, you should read it anyway. It is an absorbing glimpse into who we are.)

The second tool is the *Program Planners Handbook*. This remarkable document was developed by the Executive Staff with significant input from the Annual Meeting Program Selection Committee. Copies have been distributed to all Chapter Presidents, SIS Chairs, and Committee Chairs. This document takes you step by step, helping you plan a successful presentation. What may be the most worthwhile feature of this handbook is the list of alternative formats for presentations. It lists such techniques as the audience reaction team (where a pre-selected group reacts to speakers); the interview (where the moderator asks the speaker questions prepared in advance or taken from the audience); brainstorming (where the moderator solicits ideas from the participants, with a speaker who shares experience on the topic).

We should be using these tools to make our programs more meaningful and relevant to those who attend the Annual Meeting. Soon we will begin submitting program proposals for the 1998 Annual Meeting in Anaheim. I would like to challenge all of the program planners out there to start thinking "outside of the box." Try to come up with innovative ways to present information to your colleagues. Try to use formats that will keep every member of your audience engaged, for at least part of the time. Challenge assumptions. Expect your audience to contribute something to the process. Dare I say it? Let's try to make every program for us just as good as the ones we plan for our patrons.

Joyce Manna Janto is Acting Director of the Law Library at the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia.

Technology and Library Management are by far the most desirable continuing education programs

Category	Percentage
Technology	68%
Library Management	55%
Law for the Non-JD	24%
Public Services	19%
Collection Development	18%
Technical Services	16%
Legal Information Policy	15%
Foreign/International Law	14%
Space Planning & Design	13%
PR, Fundraising, Marketing	12%
Non-Legal Subjects	8%
History of Law & Librarianship	6%
Social Issues	3%