

The learning community as knowledge builders

The 2003–04 ACRL President's theme

by Tyrone H. Cannon

As this issue of *C&RL News* arrives in your mailbox, you are probably in the throes of gearing up for another busy academic year on your campus. For many of us, this includes announcing new programs and services, orienting new faculty and students to core library services, learning new technologies and databases, and perhaps fondly remembering our great summer vacations which now seem like ancient history! While those days at the shore or camping in the mountains are distant memories, we are invigorated about the new and continuing partnerships and connections that each fall semester or quarter brings to our academic lives.

Partnerships and connections

My presidential theme of "Partnerships and Connections: The Learning Community as Knowledge Builders" will promote the partnerships, connections, and collaborations that academic and research librarians have on their campuses and beyond them to promote information literacy and lifelong learning. We all know that continuity gives an organization its strength and vitality. In that spirit, the theme that I have chosen is inspired by the themes of past-presidents: Betsy Wilson's "Community and Collaboration" and Mary Reichel's "ACRL: The Learning Community for Excellence in Academic Libraries."

Partnerships, connections, learning, and knowledge building define present-day higher edu-

cation. While my theme is externally focused, it is important that we not forget the crucial internal partnerships and connections that we must have with our co-workers in reference, acquisitions, cataloging, library systems, ILL, and circulation/access services. These partnerships ensure just-in-time access to needed resources for our users and keep our organizations team-based and healthy. Beyond the library's physical walls, "academic and research librarians have a long and rich tradition of collaborating with disciplined-based faculty members to advance the mission and goals of the library. Included in this tradition is the area of information literacy, a foundation skill for academic success and a key component of independent lifelong learning."¹

As academic and research librarians, we recognize that student learning and access to information requires the ability to find and critically evaluate information in all formats. This ability, if truly integrated, becomes a part of the student's skill set and equips him or her to succeed as a self-sufficient consumer of information. This self-sufficiency is demonstrated by one who can navigate a Web-based search engine, directory, database, or print resource and evaluate the information and appropriately apply it to a life task.

Susan Barnes Whyte reported on her August 2000 experience as an Immersion Institute faculty member. She said, "Information literacy or critical thinking is a way to connect students with

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information through a process that is not about the right way to do research. Rather it teaches students to think about—to create meaning—from the information they find.²

This meaning provides the intellectual connection for the student and excitement about what they are learning. The learning partnership with the librarian and the intellectual connection with meaningful information are key steps towards the student becoming comfortable with his or her new set of skills and can promote true mastery of new subject or content areas.

In a recent article, Kitty McNeil and Beth Haines discuss the benefits of successful partnerships for librarians and faculty members. "Librarians can develop successful partnerships with faculty and publicize the library's role in teaching and learning by participating in the campus and national discourse on the scholarship of teaching. The key benefits for the library include: higher visibility on campus, inclusion in the discussion about curriculum, a better understanding by faculty about how the librarians support the educational purpose and objectives of the teaching, learning, and curricular concerns of faculty."³

At ACRL's 11th National Conference, "Learning to Make a Difference," in Charlotte, North Carolina, there were a number of presentations about the partnerships and connections academic and research librarians have on their campuses. The presentations included "Practical Ways to Integrate Information Literacy into the Curriculum on a Shoestring Budget—Three Community College Approaches," "The Librarian as Teacher: Personalized Library Instruction Programs," and "Ideas, Incentives and Interaction: Integrating Information Literacy into the Curriculum through Faculty-Librarian Collaboration."⁴

Another very successful presentation at the ACRL National Conference was by John Gardner, director of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina. Gardner challenged academic librarians to become more involved with the freshmen experience programs found in many colleges and universities. As a result of Gardner's challenge, a new ACRL Task Force on the First-Year Experience, chaired by Jane A. Carlin, will explore librarians' involvement in freshmen-year experience programs. The Task Force will study the work of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and then promote to the center and others involved in first-year expe-

rience programs the work that librarians have done. In addition, the AASL/ACRL Information Literacy Joint Task Force has become a joint standing committee to continue this partnership to prepare K-20 students to be information literate.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, we recently celebrated the opening of the new Martin Luther King Jr. Library at San Jose State University. This project has been described as a unique example of creative partnerships and resource sharing and a model for academic and public libraries of the future.⁵

ACRL members should be proud of the innovative partnerships and connections that we have established. In the coming months, this column will feature articles about more of the creative partnerships and connections involving ACRL members.

Continuing initiatives

The ACRL @ your Library Task Force and the ACRL Spectrum Scholar Mentor Task Force, past-president Helen Spalding's milestone initiatives, will both continue as new ACRL standing committees. The ACRL Marketing Academic and Research Libraries Committee will be chaired by Ken Marks and the ACRL Spectrum Scholars Committee will be chaired by Theresa Byrd. The Focus on the Future Task Force, chaired by Lee Hisle, made its final report to the ACRL Board in Toronto. ACRL is committed to keeping the seven top issues⁶ identified by the task force at the forefront of our activities and will explore ways this coming year to do so. ACRL's scholarly communication initiative will continue its partnerships with libraries and higher education organizations to advocate for changes in the system of scholarly communication and encourage increased participation of academic and research libraries in scholarly communication issues.

Strategic planning

In 1995, John Bryson wrote, "Leaders and managers of governments, public agencies of all sorts, nonprofit organizations, and communities face difficult challenges in the years ahead. Upheaval and change surround them. Organizations that want to survive and prosper must respond to these changes. Their response may be to do what they have always done, only better; it may also involve important shifts in organizational focus and action. While organizations typically experience long periods of relative stability, they may also typically encounter periods of rapid change. These

periods of organizational change can be exciting, but they can also be anxiety-producing or even terrifying.⁷ Eight years later one thing has remained constant, rapid change! Academic and research libraries and ACRL members can certainly identify with this phenomenon. Technological innovations, budget reductions, increased competition for students, assessment and outcome demands, recruitment and diversity issues, and demographic concerns are some that come immediately to mind.

Bryson defined strategic planning as a "disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it. To deliver the best results, strategic planning requires broad yet effective information gathering, development and exploration of strategic alternatives, and an emphasis on future implications of present decisions."⁸ This last statement has special significance for member organizations as they strive to be flexible and sensitive in order to meet changing member needs and demands.

The current ACRL strategic plan expires in 2005, and the process to revise the plan has started. ACRL has contracted with Tecker Consultants to help with the process. Tecker Consultants LLC is an international consulting practice that focuses on meeting the special needs of organizations managing change. With more than 20 years' experience, Tecker has provided associations, companies, and public agencies with insightful counsel and talented facilitation.

Employing a variety of techniques and tools carefully selected for each assignment, Tecker provides a combination of consultation, facilitation, and education to address key areas like leadership and governance, organizational design, staff development, and marketing.

The major milestones of the process include the following: Data/Information Collection (steps 1–4); Strategic Planning Session (step 5); Product/Program Assessment (step 6); Strategy Session (step 7); and an Action Planning Session (step 8), which produces an action planning report and a final strategic plan.

To date, we have conducted focus groups at the ACRL National Conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, and held a thought-provoking leadership session in Toronto, conducted by Tecker principal partner, Paul D. Meyer, CAE. The next steps include conducting a Web-based survey of ACRL members and conducting qualitative phone interviews with members, nonmembers, ALA-

only members, inactive members of ACRL, and new members of ACRL. We are working with the ACRL Membership Committee, ACRL Research Committee, Chapters Council, and the ACRL Board to assist with this part of the process. At the annual ACRL Board Retreat scheduled for late October 2003, Board members will work with Tecker and Meyer on step 5 in the planning process. Later this fall, ACRL members will have the opportunity to comment on the draft strategic plan and more work will occur during the ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Diego. The process is expected to conclude in early spring 2004.

This is an exciting and challenging time for ACRL. I am honored to be the association's 66th president and to be working with a strong Board, membership, and staff to set the course of action for the next five-to-ten years. When we look back upon our summer travels and fun, I know we will also recall the exciting partnerships and connections that we explored this year and the 2003–04 dynamic strategic planning process.

Notes

1. Ilene F. Rockman, "Strengthening Connections Between Information Literacy, General Education, and Assessment," *Library Trends* 51, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 185–198.
2. Susan Barnes Whyte, "From BI to IL: The ACRL Institute for Information Literacy," *OLA Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 14–15.
3. Kitty McNeil and Beth Haines, "Scholarship of Teaching and Librarians: Building Successful Partnerships with Faculty," *Georgia Library Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 4–8.
4. For more information about these excellent sessions, see the June 2003 and July/August 2003 issues of *C&RL News*.
5. A news release entitled "First Co-Managed City/University Library in the Nation Opens Its Doors" can be found at http://www.sjsu.edu/news_and_info/releases/072803.htm.
6. Lee Hisle, "Top Issues Facing Academic Libraries: A Report of the Focus on the Future Task Force," *College and Research Libraries News* 63, no. 10 (November 2002): 714–15.
7. John M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement* (Jossey-Bass, 1995).
8. *Ibid.*, 4–5. ■