

# Leadership through the lens of learning

A look at the role of the librarian for the new century

by Maureen Sullivan



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As academic and research librarians, we continue to face a variety of challenges as the world of higher education becomes ever more complex. My work as an organizational development consultant affords me the opportunity to visit a number of colleges and universities each year and to observe the various effects of the changes and challenges encountered by ACRL members. I selected "Leadership and Learning" as the theme of my ACRL presidency because I believe it will give us a chance to reflect upon our role as campus leaders and to rethink how we learn, as well as what we learn.

Leadership and learning are behavioral processes that are critical to our effective performance as professionals. They also are values. In his address as the 1998 ACRL President's Program speaker, William H. Gass talked about the importance of "leadership from within" in a way that suggested that both leadership and learning are important individual values for us and that the two form a symbiotic relationship for us as individuals and for our profession. The 1999 President's Program Planning Committee, chaired by Mary Beth Clack of the Harvard College Library, is planning a series of ac-

tivities through which we will explore the theme of leadership and learning; the symbiotic relationship between the two as processes, sets of behaviors, and values; and as strategies for success in a world of continual change.

## Your role

Librarians play a critical role in the education of students at our colleges and universities. I believe it is librarians who contribute the most to what students really learn through their college experience. The importance of the librarian to student learning will grow as the Internet and other means of electronic access to information become more prevalent in higher education. The role of the librarian as educator is our most critical leadership role. Leading in the learning process and learning to lead in the transformation of student education affirm the symbiotic relationship of leadership and learning. Sharon Coatney, the current president of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), has joined me in the formation of a Joint Task Force on the Education Role of the Librarian.

Another critical role for the academic librarian is as campus leader. To help with our professional development in this role, the first ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute will be held in August 1999. The curriculum for this intensive, week-long program will be based upon relevant theoretical and prac-

## About the author

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tical issues involved in the leadership of college and university libraries. The principal learning approach will be the case study method, with small group discussion and faculty interaction. Planning is well underway and the brochure and application form will be ready for distribution in January 1999.

A critical role of any professional association is the professional development of its members. ACRL provides many professional development opportunities for its members: sections and committees present a variety of excellent programs during the ALA Annual Conference; ACRL Chapters provide many local programs; National Conferences focus on special topics; and our strong publications program disseminates ideas widely.

In addition to these efforts, however, we need a comprehensive program that describes the full range of activities; that meets the learning and development needs of the membership; and that is aligned with our Strategic Plan. The current Professional Development Committee, chaired by Lee Van Orsdel of Montevallo College, will provide the framework and guidance for the creation of an ACRL Professional Development Pro-

gram this year. Identification of the various activities already underway is a critical early step in this effort and will require the participation of ACRL sections, committees, and chapters.

As we face a new millennium, ACRL is fortunate to be able to build upon its strong tradition of service and its deep commitment to the improvement of academic and research libraries. We have a Strategic Plan that provides a strong foundation for meeting the challenges of the future.

During this year, we will review and update this Strategic Plan through engagement of ACRL member leaders and the general membership. This process will begin at the Midwinter 1999 meeting in Philadelphia with a planning retreat to which a broad cross section of elected and appointed leaders, as well as some ACRL members who do not serve in an official role, will convene to identify key elements of our vision for 2005 and develop a set of strategic directions. I hope this effort will engage many ACRL members who will learn together and create a framework for our leadership role in higher education as we begin a new century. ■



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