Leo S. Lo and Elisandro (Alex) Cabada share plans for ACRL

Cast an informed vote in the election this spring

Ed. Note: *C&RL News* offered the candidates for ACRL vice-president/president-elect, Leo S. Lo and Elisandro (Alex) Cabada, this opportunity to share their views with the membership. Although many of the issues facing ACRL are discussed informally at meetings, we want to use this venue to provide a forum to all members. We hope this will assist you in making an informed choice when you vote in the election this spring.

Leo S. Lo

I joined ACRL back when I was a library school student, and I am deeply grateful for the many opportunities that the association has provided for me to learn, to grow, and to serve, over the years. I am proud to be a member of ACRL, and I am honored to be nominated for the position of vice-president/president-elect, with the possibility of becoming the first Asian-American president of the association.

With the uncertainties of the ALA budget situation, and how it might impact the different divisions, including ACRL, we must be flexible in adapting innovative approaches, and turn challenges into opportunities. The pandemic forced everyone to adjust many traditions and to experiment with using different ways to accomplish their goals. We must learn from these experiences and apply the lessons for our association's future.

Ultimately, the job of the president of an association is to deliver value to its members. My goal is to provide our existing members with a worthwhile return on their investment in ACRL membership, and to actively recruit potential members with unique opportunities that ACRL offers. While there are many ways to provide value for members, I will prioritize three areas that are particularly important to me.

Justice, Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, Accessibility (JEIDA)

As a first-generation Asian-American immigrant, non-native English speaker, and first-generation college student, I have encountered my fair share of obstacles, and I understand how important it is to advance Justice, Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Accessibility (JEIDA) not only in our professional field, but to make an impact beyond librarianship. This issue hits close to home for me. In the summer of 2022, my wife and I were the targets of an AsianHate incident while walking down a street in downtown Chicago, when mud was thrown at us and insults were yelled at us. It was a frightening experience, and fortunately

we were not hurt. This incident only further fueled my determination to actively do my part in advancing JEIDA and to make our world a safer and more welcoming place.

Just as I am instituting a strategic priority of applying a JEIDA lens for all our work at my own institution, my plan for ACRL is to embed this mindset in all of the association's actions. This means working to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all members, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or background. It also means promoting equity and justice within the profession by advocating for policies and practices that support the success and well-being of diverse librarians. We can increase the representation of diverse voices in our leadership, committees, and other decision-making bodies. By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, we can ensure that our association truly reflects and serves the needs of all members, strengthening and enriching it in the process.

Professional development and upskilling
Technology is changing fast. We are all trying to catch up and take advantage of the benefits new technology brings. And so are the people we serve. As a result, the expectations of college and research libraries are also evolving very fast. Therefore, it is our responsibility as professionals to continue to learn and upskill in order to enhance the services and products we offer.

I plan to deliver value to our members by offering a variety of professional development opportunities. In order to offer webinars, workshops, and conferences on topics that are relevant to the field, we must seek to understand our members' needs, as well as being alert to the most important development in both librarianship and higher education. I believe the association should use its various official and unofficial channels to communicate with members and develop programs that meet their needs and wants.

In addition to traditional professional development opportunities, I also plan to investigate innovative ways to support the professional growth of our members. This may include expanding mentorship programs, creating new online courses, and establishing learning communities. I will work to obtain funding for grants and scholarships to enable member attendance at these professional development offerings. By offering a variety of professional development options, we can more effectively meet the diverse needs and preferences of our members.

Foster a sense of community
One of the most valuable aspects for me as an ACRL member is the opportunity to connect with and learn from my peers. Therefore, I would like to build upon the efforts of previous leaders to strengthen a sense of community. Just as we have learned to use new technologies to communicate during the pandemic, we now have the opportunity to explore new ways of building a sense of community, even if not every member can always meet in person.

To foster a sense of community, we could promote networking opportunities, such as online discussion groups and regional meetings, where members can connect and share their experiences and knowledge. We could also encourage members to get involved in the activities of ACRL and make it easy for them to volunteer, serve on committees, or participate in special interest groups. It is critical that the association helps to make the members' investment of their time and energy worthwhile. Therefore, I will seek to solicit input and feedback from members on the direction of the association and recognize and reward member

contributions. By involving our members in the decision-making and leadership of ACRL, we can build a stronger and more inclusive community.

Conclusions

Finally, I am committed to promoting the value and importance of libraries and librarianship to the wider community. This may involve partnering with other organizations, promoting the work of our members through various channels, and collaborating with like-minded groups to advocate for the importance of libraries and librarians. College and research libraries are essential to their parent institutions and play a vital role in the cultural, intellectual, and social life of our communities, and I am dedicated to advocating for the support and resources that libraries need to thrive. By raising the visibility and impact of ACRL, we can help to raise the profile of the profession and ensure that the value of academic librarians is recognized and appreciated by policymakers, educators, and the general public.

Elisandro (Alex) Cabada

As a first-generation American born of Mexican immigrant parents, from my early days in elementary school in the predominantly Latinx immigrant Chicago neighborhoods of Little Village and Pilsen, I was drawn to the local public libraries. I did not understand why at first but eventually came to realize it was because those spaces felt safe. When I was in a library, surrounded by shelves of stories, I could get lost in the endless experiences of others. My own childhood was filled with violence and other challenges that many of our families tragically experience. For a period of time, I was in state care at the Cuneo Hospital and Maryville Academy in Chicago where I lived with other children from similar circumstances. I was very frightened at first, surrounded by the unknown. When I attended school at Cuneo, I felt more secure as the classroom was filled with library books. I could once again get lost in stories.

I would enter the foster care system under the guardianship of my maternal grandmother, who would become the foundation of my life moving forward. With the stability she provided with a safe home, I excelled in school. As I attended Gurdon S. Hubbard High School in Chicago, I spent my lunch periods as a student volunteer in the library. I assumed I was just anxious about being in a room filled with so many people but would later be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and found loud crowded spaces triggering. During my time in high school, I was also introduced to emerging technologies. I enrolled in the computer-aided design (CAD) course where I learned about architectural design. This would be in the late 90s when personal computers were still very rare, at least in my neighborhood. While the school library provided me with a safe space, I learned about advanced computing, CAD, and 3D design in Mr. Gerald Geenen's class. Mr. Geenen gave me something I never had in my life at that point, he had expectations for what I could accomplish. This support came at a vital point for me as my home life would once again be turned upside down. Mr. Geenen could sense turmoil in my life as he helped me focus on my schoolwork.

I would learn how to take a computer apart and reassemble it and I would become at ease with advanced design software. I was no longer intimidated by technology.

I would eventually graduate and attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). That same summer I graduated from high school, my grandmother would pass away. I was with her when she went to the hospital in the ambulance. She was panicked at first due to having trouble breathing but once she was placed on oxygen, she saw the look of worry in my eyes, she signaled, "It's going to be ok" with her hand. It would be the last time I saw her conscious and alive. After the graduation ceremony I went to the hospital where she was still alive but unconscious, I wanted her to know she helped me accomplish something few in my family had at that point.

Thank you, grandma.

I offer these personal details as everything I have experienced has informed my professional goals and passions in my career in librarianship and has determined what is important for me to work towards and accomplish in life. I am driven to build those library spaces where it is safe to learn out in the open, to feel safe to fail, as failure is a critical step in the learning process. I am driven to provide services to break down barriers to knowledge and help improve representations of underserved and underrepresented communities in our academic spaces.

Since 2000, when I first worked as a library student assistant (2000–2005) at UIUC, I found myself fully immersed in the work of the library. "Unexpected" is a word that has described my career trajectory as I was fortunate to have mentors that gave me many professional development opportunities. I have not been a passive bystander in my career, I have been fully engaged in every position and role I have held. Over time I developed a broader perspective of the multifaceted way libraries support innovative research and instruction. It was with this purposeful interest that I learned, developed extensive experience, and became a leader in academic librarianship.

Throughout my 15 years as library support staff (2007–2017) and as a faculty librarian (2017–present)—at the Grainger Engineering Library at UIUC and Walter Library at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities (UMN-TC)—I have supervised and managed staff and teams at every level. From managing a large workforce of library student assistants, support staff, and pre-professional LIS graduate assistants, to leading teams of librarians and academic staff through work in library projects and committees, campus partnerships, and through professional service. I have served as engineering and innovation librarian and head of the Breakerspace digital scholarship center at the UMN-TC Walter Library (2017–2018), and Medical and Bioengineering Librarian (2018–2022), head of the Grainger IDEA Lab (2016–2017; 2018–present), interim head of the Mathematics Library (2020–present), and emerging technologies and immersive scholarship librarian (2023–present) at UIUC. I also currently hold the tenure-track academic rank of assistant professor at the University Library and Carle Illinois College of Medicine at UIUC.

In my career I came to realize an effective leader achieves the student success mission of the library through developing and investing in their staff. By leveraging not only the skills tied to job duties but also the professional interests of each team member, you give agency and build trust through investing in their future. I have had many opportunities to build on this practical leadership experience through participating in leadership development programs, such as ALA Leadership Institute Program (2019), ALA Spectrum Scholarship program (2016–2017), and Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Kaleidoscope Scholars program

(2015–2017). As well, since 2018, I have served on the leadership team that established the ACRL Digital Scholarship Section (ACRL DSS), which is the association's newest section. As I complete my last year on the ACRL DSS leadership team (current recent past chair), I am grateful for all of the opportunities to work with amazing colleagues to accomplish important work through some very challenging times in our organizations and communities.

I believe ACRL plays a critical role in providing professional development and service opportunities to train our future library support staff and librarian leaders, particularly those that address the inequities in our profession.

As scholarship is increasingly borne-digital and reliant on emerging technologies, academic libraries have been developing innovative services and technology-rich spaces to facilitate interdisciplinary "design thinking" pedagogy. Since 2007, I have had a key role in designing, shaping, presenting on, and leading these services and spaces. From developing the UIUC Grainger IDEA Lab and UMN-TC Walter Library Breakerspace digital scholarship centers, I have led projects to repurpose thousands of square feet of traditional stacks space into facilities supporting digital scholarship and high-tech research and instruction. As I discovered in my study on the impact of the Center for Academic Resources in Engineering (CARE) service at UIUC, the library is an effective partner in developing new services to support scholarship. Since CARE was established, not only did demand for library services increase, but student retention rates improved as well at Illinois.

Along with access to space and technologies, it is critically important that we help our users build an understanding of the pedagogical affordances, barriers, and best practices to integrating emerging technologies into research and teaching and learning. As most technology-rich spaces and services are embedded in discipline-specific facilities and programs, there is a large population of faculty, students, staff, and local communities without ready access to the technology and understandings of how it can impact their teaching and learning. As I stated in a WCIA broadcast news story about my Step Into VR workshops, the library as a discipline-agnostic space is well positioned to help our communities of underserved and underrepresented patrons get access to technologies to position them to innovate in their education and beyond. I have pursued this goal through serving on several grant projects such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Immersive Scholar grant, and the Department of Education Illinois SCOERs (Support for Creation of Open Educational Resources) grant, where I serve as 3D Printing Project Coordinator. I have also developed community programming, particularly geared towards youth engagement, by building partnerships with local public libraries and community groups, and national organizations such as MakerGirl and Girls Who Code.

As ACRL president, I would work towards increasing the association's commitment to helping our members prepare students for a future in higher education. We cannot wait until the students reach the university/college level as many may never reach that point due to the inequities in our education system. We must partner with our local communities and leverage opportunities with national organizations and I believe ACRL can help lead those efforts. ⰰ