Thomas (Tom) Abbott and Steven J. Bell
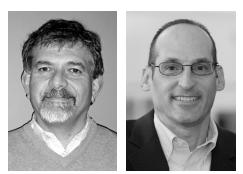
Abbott and Bell share plans for ACRL

Cast an informed vote in the election this spring

Ed. note: C&RL News offered candidates for ACRL vice-president/president-elect, Thomas (Tom) Abbott and Steven J. Bell, 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 national forum to all members. We hope this will assist you in making an informed choice when you vote in the election this spring.

Thomas (Tom) Abbott   Steven J. Bell

THOMAS (TOM) ABBOTT
A proposed conversation with the profession

Academic institutions have arrived at a historic educational crossroad. We are at a point where we must decide whether we're ready to change our institutions and ourselves, adapt to the new generation of students and their demand for vastly different learning processes, or continue to muddle through by doing more of the same. This is not to say that what we are doing is of poor quality or inconsistent with the traditional college education, but rather that the scope and structure of traditional colleges and universities (as well as many of our own libraries) are no longer a good fit for many of today's students or current societal methods of learning and doing.

In response you might say that current labor studies report that the vast majority of newly created jobs require a baccalaureate degree, but I will argue that those predictions are based on the same traditional measures we've used for generations. The higher education degree is but one way to measure accumulated knowledge, experience, and skill; and until recently, college was one of the few ways to obtain the whole package of knowledge, and that degree remained the standard yardstick.

For the sake of argument, let me ask you if you think someone without a college degree but with strong lifelong learning skills can manage to retrain himself or herself with the help and support from an educational or vocational center or online training? The usual reaction at this point is "yes it's possible, but most people entering the workforce don't have those lifelong learning skills and would fail at this self-study."

Point taken, but I do think this is the direction in which we are headed, and just to radicalize this a bit more, I will add that I also believe that just-in-time online training for specialized knowledge and skills, along with credentials and certificates may well replace many traditional college degrees in the not too distant future.

At my institution in Maine, our 5,500 students average 32 years old, and most work more than 20 hours a week. The majority are parents, many single parents, and 70 percent are women. Each semester, we deliver more than 150 courses and 8 degree programs at a distance in Maine and beyond, and our students live and work in their home communities—as we have no residence halls. One of our essential tasks is to develop dynamic learning skills that will take these students in successful new directions. Of course, we are measured on degree completion by IPEDS, and that metric for our school is much lower than those of traditional four year schools. Our students take many years to finish their degrees—stopping and starting again—but they do apply their learning along the way to new jobs and promotions.

External pressure for a more practical standard for colleges is building at an accelerated pace. We are seeing it with the increase in part-time learners, and growing numbers of requests for just-in-time training for employment certification. Our online courses fill up first and have waiting lists often on the first day of registration. In fact the number one pressure point in U.S. higher education today is that students are registering for online courses in amazing numbers.

Online courses and degree programs are increasing so rapidly that our more "traditional" faculty are struggling to keep up, and worrying about whether their on-campus courses will "make." Teaching as a process of transferring knowledge to worthy students has become an anachronism. Today's students expect to be active and engaged in learning and creating knowledge in groups. Instructional designers are running full speed to help faculty recreate courses for online platforms.

Based on these observations, I believe that most college campuses and their academic libraries will dramatically and completely change in the next ten years. Higher education for the majority of our post-high school students will be provided through technology and in small chunks of applied and practical knowledge—all available via the ubiquitous Web. Campuses will become resource centers of knowledge creation and instructional development, and students will study independently and in online communities at a pace that works for them—and that is where academic libraries will once again come into their full prominence. We already know how to do this—we can do it well, and now perhaps the rest of the institution will catch up.

How should academic librarians respond to these new challenges? We began the process of adapting to these new challenges when we created our first online catalogs in the mid 1980s. We've seen it in our students' eyes and through their questions as they wrestle with the "Google vs. the Library" discussion. We regularly encounter faculty members who are not cognizant about online resources or how best to use them. We work with administrators who are unclear about why libraries and their librarians continue to be their campus' greatest resources. This disconnect between academic libraries and their institutions is related, I believe, to the fact that traditionalist leaders and many senior faculty have not been engaged with these in-your-face changes in the same way librarians have. The college of these administrators and faculty is one of bricks and mortar and traditional libraries. They are not yet capable of providing adequate infrastructure support for their academic librarians, or faculty for that matter, to make the transition. Instead they wait, on the fence between the traditionalists and the new online agitators, leaving us as librarians without the means to respond adequately. And until our institutions take a position, we won't be able to successfully engage the faculty in this new educational process. The need to restructure the academic library is pressure point number two for me.

How do you know we really are facing a sea change?

• Librarians struggle daily to convert those who believe open Web-based in-

formation systems (Google et al.) are an inexpensive replacement for libraries and librarians.

- Librarians notice that libraries have become for some little more than study and Internet access spaces, and we aren't sure what to do with that.
- Librarians find it difficult to influence or impact student learning outcomes inside academic discipline courses.

Link the need for academic libraries to reinvent themselves with the pressure on colleges to change, and we have the perfect opportunity for academic libraries to get in on the ground floor of reinventing a new version of higher education for this new century.

Librarians *will* find a home in this new environment because we already live in this new open and flexible world of teaching, learning and helping create knowledge—usually at the cutting edge of change. As academic librarians, we have a strong history of supporting independent learning opportunities—one-on-one and in small groups, and we have always been able to explain the value of academic libraries to a college education.

So what is our library plan for the future?

Find a platform for influencing campus discussions and politics at this ground floor level.

Organizational transitions to new systems are usually bumpy. Librarians who can stay focused while adapting and adjusting to this rocky road can become leaders and provide creative solutions. During this time of transition, you must expand your sphere of influence at your institutions by joining, being elected to, or just showing up at college/university-wide activities such as strategic planning task forces, budget planning committees, core/general education councils, fundraising events, and legislative receptions. You are a good researcher—study the issues and become an expert contributor. Speak out with a common refrain: "The world of higher education is changing, and we must be a part of that change." When others decline to volunteer for leadership positions, step up—even if it means rescheduling your library responsibilities—you only get one shot at this.

In the academic program arena, find ways to break into the course development process. Take the chair of the curriculum committee to lunch and suggest ideas that might help his or her efforts to make needed changes. Pair every academic librarian with one or more faculty members teaching online to create a course-related Web package of resources, and talk about student learning outcomes from your perspective—try to find common ground with his or her course learning outcomes. Go to their classes. Most faculty members do not understand how a librarian's investment in information fluency relates to their goals of critical thinking and preparing a research paper. To them you are a trainer of skills rather than an educator. We must eliminate this disconnect.

My longer term goal for academic librarians is to help move us back into the mainstream of higher education where your time and expertise is valued as part of the daily higher educational process. You should be welcomed in the course and syllabus design process, where your information fluency student learning outcomes are fully built into each and every academic course.

We'll worry later about how many more librarians you need to do this.

STEVEN J. BELL
There's a bit of a formula to these statements. I know that having looked at them from the past few years. It goes something like this:

1. Honored to be a candidate.
2. Dedicated to ACRL.
3. Why I'm qualified.
4. I'll build on the foundation laid by past presidents.
5. Here's what I'll I do (e.g., support the strategic plan).
6. Elect me.

This structure allows candidates to provide the membership with a picture of who they are and why they want to be the ACRL vice-president/president-elect. One thing you should know about me is that I like to deviate from the formula. That often leads me in search of new ideas and new ways to approach professional challenges. I've held multiple offices and responsibilities within ACRL. From president of my regional chapter to section chair, each was an amazing learning experience and opportunity to leverage a leadership position to engage colleagues in doing something both innovative and of value to our members. I'd like to continue to move ACRL forward through the pursuit of following three objectives:

• leverage the talents of individual members to achieve collective solutions,

• promote the value of academic librarians along with the value of their libraries, and

• explore open innovation as a way to engage the membership in innovative problem solving.

The ACRL vice-president/president-elect is a position of considerable responsibility, and I approach the possibility of serving our profession in this capacity with the utmost seriousness. I appreciate this opportunity to stand as a candidate for this office, and I have profound awe for past presidents and their accomplishments. Looking to the future of ACRL, new leaders need to not only execute the responsibilities of the office and work to put the ACRL strategic plan into practice, but must also seek out new ideas and opportunities that will help the association to thrive and be sustainable.

Start with the why question

I also believe it's our individual and collective responsibility to continually ask three questions of our organizations and ourselves, and to think deeply about the answers and prospects for change. The three questions are the what, how, and why of ACRL: What is ACRL? How does it accomplish its mission? Why is it doing what it does? For the what, we could look to ACRL's mission statement. For the how, we should closely study ACRL's strategic plan. Of the three, the why is the most critical because nothing is more important than understanding why ACRL exists. ACRL's leaders must passionately articulate the answer to the why question, deeply believe it, and be strongly committed to achieving it. Doing so will better position this association for the future. And if we more effectively communicate the answer to the why question, it may also serve to encourage less engaged members and nonmembers alike to connect with ACRL.

Every librarian a contributor

As I was preparing a short statement about my goals for use in promoting the ACRL Candidates' Forum, I reviewed the questions asked at prior forums. One thing I noticed about them is that they made an implicit assumption that ACRL and the ACRL president are expected to come up with solutions to some wicked problems. For example, "How can ACRL help librarians increase their visibility on campus?" or "What goal in the ACRL strategic plan is most important to you and how will you achieve it?" These are thoughtful questions that point to some rather difficult challenges that face the organization and its leaders. To my way of thinking, any solutions to these challenges—and even the process for identifying what those challenges are—should not be left to ACRL's leadership team and its president alone. This organization is a collection of vast experience and knowledge. It is the membership—you and your fellow academic librarians—that should help to establish the agenda that steers and moves forward ACRL.

From libraries to librarians

ACRL is far from the automobile being driven down an icy hill, an analogy used in the past to describe rudderless organizations set adrift and vulnerable to the whims of external influences over which it has no

control. To the contrary, ACRL's leadership, both the Board of Directors and the ACRL staff, have performed in exemplary fashion in constructing strategic initiatives and establishing a roadmap for guiding ACRL into the future. Over the past few years, it seems to me that the agenda tends to focus more on the library than the librarian. I'd like to deviate from this path to one that is more about you, the academic librarian.

While I have no desire to advocate a radical departure from the current strategies, creating more opportunities for member engagement in establishing the agenda—in fact seeking ways to invite academic librarians beyond the membership—is an idea worth exploring. I'd be less than honest to claim excitement about the prospect of sitting through many more meetings and contending with the tangle of bureaucracy that ACRL sometimes is—and I would do what I can to work at simplifying these processes and making them more transparent to the membership. But I would look forward to taking on these responsibilities as ACRL vice-president/president-elect because it offers the opportunity to help make this organization better for you.

New ideas need you

ACRL presidents are not lone geniuses who devise the groundbreaking ideas that propel forward ACRL, or even redefine the why of ACRL. Rather, ACRL is about bringing members together to achieve progress. Writer Steven Johnson, innovators Kevin Kelly and Chris Anderson, and designers like those at IDEO and Adaptive Path have all pointed to the importance of bringing people together, and blending their unique individual talents into movements that identify better ways to overcome great challenges. In ACRL, too often innovation occurs within silos, such as sections and chapters. The Communities of Practice structure does help to facilitate the exchange of ideas between sections and interest groups, but the process for bringing new ideas forward also requires going through the proper channels in order to

receive attention and funding. I'd like to see ACRL exploring new ways to inspire innovation through conversation and cooperation among its sub-entities, going beyond what may appear as a competition for a share of the ACRL funding pie. Can we do a better job at innovative problem solving?

Open innovation

Here's the simple idea. We all work together to do the following:

• identify the wicked problems confronting our libraries and our user communities,

• engage our community to share their ideas for solutions to these problems, and

• collectively select those problems which most deserve our attention and for which manageable solutions are identified.

This process can be open to all academic librarians, and those who want to help can join in the effort. If this sounds like some impossible task, take a few minutes to explore IDEO's OpenIDEO (openideo.com). It's one potential model for an ACRL open innovation project. None of this suggests a revolution in ACRL's structure or process for change.

The ACRL "Charting Our Future: Strategic Plan 2020" document, the strategic area for our association, speaks to the need to build our membership while recruiting from new and diverse communities, to drive entrepreneurial activities and to bring new talent to ACRL. Engaging the membership in an open innovation exercise can advance ACRL on these and other strategic fronts.

Captains not figureheads

If my statement's deviation from the formula adds an element of ambiguity to your decision making, that's not entirely unintentional. Your ACRL president should do more than fit into the accepted structures, whether it's for statements like this one or keeping the organization moving forward. I like what John Berry, *Library Journal*'s editor-at-large, stated in an editorial published on June 9, 2010, when he wrote that our library association presidents needed to

aspire to being more than figureheads for the organization. The president, claimed Berry, needs to be the captain.

Good captains have the vision for what needs to happen, and motivate others to join in to achieve the mission. I'll work to inspire members to participate, to get nonmembers to consider joining, to get all of them working together to, as Berry asserted, make all of our libraries stronger. If given the opportunity, I will lead the membership to take on wicked problems, encourage those who have yet to find their place in ACRL to get involved, and bring a new spirit of collaborative, member-driven innovation to the association.

You may have read something I've written or heard me give a talk. I hope it inspired you to think differently and challenge your assumptions. Please know that I aspire to do more than advance ideas. You can count on me being an outcomes-focused leader who values the importance of getting things done.

Whoever you decide to vote for—just be sure to vote. That is the first step in individual participation and collective action to create change. ℛ

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elvezrestaurant.com). El Vez is an energetic and stylish Mexican-inspired restaurant from famed Philadelphia restaurateur Stephen Starr, who you might have seen on *Top Chef*. Get their incredible guacamole and a Granada margarita and your night will be off to a great start.

If you want a more quiet setting, **Zavino** (112 S 13th St., zavino. com) is located right across the street. Zavino has a wine bar featuring pizza topped with seasonal ingredients. Their tasting board of meats, cheeses, and veggies is great to share with a group. Continuing with the pizza theme, the new kid on the block is **Barbuzzo** (110 S 13th St., barbuzzo.com/barbuzzo). Their cheese stuffed meatballs will make you feel like you are sitting in your Italian grandmother's kitchen, even if you don't have one. Both restaurants offer handmade pasta dishes and many options for both vegetarians and meat lovers.

Zavino is one of the many restaurants located in Midtown Village. Photograph by Jessica Rossi.

Sampan (124 S 13th St., sampanphilly. com) has a fun hip aesthetic and offers a wide range of Asian street food. Their take on the Philly Cheesesteak features a bao bun and sriracha sauce.

Ever wanted to taste the food of an Iron Chef? Fortunately for you, Philadelphia is home to Jose Garces, winner of the second season of *The Next Iron Chef*. Garces has been a staple of Philly's emerging dining scene for many years.

The Garces Trading Company (1111 Locust St., garcestradingcompany.com) is a great place to sample all that this celebrity chef has to offer; it is part specialty food shop, wine bar, and restaurant. Pick up a great souvenir for your favorite foodie friend or relative. Then you can dine in and enjoy the house made charcuterie or Chicago-style deep dish pie.

These are just a few of the many wonderful eateries Philadelphia has to offer. ℛ