

# Meet the candidates for ALA president

Vote in the election this spring



Wanda Brown



Peter Hepburn

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates (Wanda Brown and Peter Hepburn are ACRL members) for ALA president, and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,200 words in which he or she could respond to six questions and contribute an optional opening statement; the responses are identified under each question.

## Opening statement

**Wanda Brown:** As a presidential candidate for ALA, I remain committed to the growth and development within our association. My career success demonstrates that hard work and the inclusiveness of others brings forth greater opportunities to all. I am therefore encouraged by the work of our library professionals and our ability to aid in the shaping of our futures. That success is dependent upon our ability to create and sustain essential partnerships. Partnerships that will inform, engage, and connect our members. Partnerships that will strengthen our voice. If

we are persistent in being proactive and intentional, then our association and its members will be stronger and strategic. Take the first step by casting your vote for me in this upcoming election.

## 1. How might you articulate the goals and values of ALA to the incoming executive director to help him/her better understand and adopt the culture of the association?

**Brown:** I would share my thoughts about the association and its value to the members based upon my experiences within ALA. As a part of my campaign at Midwinter, we will seek member input at my table concerning what they value most about their membership with ALA. The results will be shared with the new director and may be used to inform programs and services. The best way for a new leader to understand the organizational culture is to invest serious time in getting to know its members. I suggest interacting with each division, attending the ALA Annual Conference and Midwinter Meeting, state conferences, regional gatherings, and other places where librarians are convening. I would recommend that the new executive director hold a multipart retreat.

In preparation for that retreat, I would ask each division to prepare documentation that shared answers around the following: What are your members' values, primary objectives and goals? What are your current programs and projects? What concerns do you have as it relates to your effectiveness as a division? How may the

association help your division reach its goals?

**Hepburn:** The incoming executive director will have demonstrated to the search committee and ALA Executive Board that they understand and are committed to the values of our association, though that won't necessarily translate into an understanding of the structure and culture of ALA. Given my experience working within ALA—in divisions such as ACRL, in round tables, and on committees—I will be able to share a global view of the association with the new executive director. I can connect them with member leaders within ACRL and across ALA, and provide guidance on how membership functions. My knowledge of ALA's values and its workings will be invaluable to the person who assumes that position.

## **2. Please speak to the importance of supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in all libraries, and what steps you have taken to ensure that these fundamental principles have moved from theory into practice?**

**Brown:** I wholeheartedly believe in the efforts made for encouraging inclusion within our libraries and my legacy demonstrates my commitment. I have worked continuously to foster a diverse and inclusive community of librarians demonstrated by serving on committees, drafting Wake Forest University's first Diversity and Inclusion strategic plan, implementing a diversity and inclusion seminar for library student workers, and partnering with the University of North Carolina-Greensboro ACE Scholars in its program to recruit minority students to the MLS program. I support creating programs that partner librarians from majority-serving institutions with HBCUs, Title III public schools, and public libraries in communities of color. Mentorship plays an important role in providing guidance for all individuals, and I support and will help create initiatives to teach, educate, and mentor individuals in this profession to respect all human elements.

**Hepburn:** Students coming into my library often seek assistance from student workers rather than from the librarians because they are more comfortable talking to someone like them. The library staff is relatively middle-aged and white and does not mirror the diversity of backgrounds found on my campus. My concern is that this means we do not reach at least some of the disadvantaged populations that are at higher risk of not meeting their academic goals. The library strives, slowly, to change staff demographics but pursues other strategies in the meantime. These range from seeking professional development opportunities to give us tools to reach these students to implementing outreach efforts on campus that look beyond academic departments and embed library staff in the places on campus where the students are more likely to be.

Of course, how ALA and ACRL address equity, diversity, and inclusion will have a far greater impact than the actions of any one individual library. The recommendations in the report from the Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion lay out a roadmap for ALA and ACRL to follow. Some have been implemented, but the work is not yet complete. ALA and ACRL must commit resources, including finances, to ensure that the remaining recommendations are met. The associations have the opportunity to provide guidance in this key area and serve as a model for libraries as we move from intention to practice.

## **3. ALA and ACRL must demonstrate their value to recruit, engage, and retain their membership. How can ALA remain a relevant, vital, and financially sustainable association for academic and research librarians? To those new to the profession?**

**Brown:** Recruitment and retention are vital to the life of member-driven associations. Our ability to do so is dependent entirely upon perceived member benefits and how we can answer the questions What have you done for me? and What will you

do for me? We must provide opportunities for our members to network and connect and provide information and training at reasonable and affordable cost. We must be willing to give back to our members by providing the infrastructure needed for professional growth and to be open to trying new programs that engage members from novice to seasoned. ALA divisions need to come together and work as partners building a stronger association for all.

**Hepburn:** Members often approach paying dues as a question of what they get for the money they spend. There are visible benefits, such as lower prices for conference registration, publications, and other professional tools or access to training. Member dues are a major revenue stream, but for an individual, they can be a barrier to membership. ALA should explore options, such as greater graduation of dues, bundled discounts for divisions or round tables, or discounted memberships for lapsed members. For membership not to drop below current levels or to grow, ALA will need to give serious examination to alternatives to the current dues structure. Membership is not strictly transactional, however. In large number, members have a stronger voice in championing our values and advocating on issues. What ALA and ACRL offer to members, new and not-so-new, is that in belonging they are part of a united effort to work for our libraries and users, to stake a claim in that progress and contribute to it.

**4. What does a successful term as ALA president look like to you? How will you know you have been successful in the role?**

**Brown:** I will have been successful as ALA president if all members feel connected and every voice feels valued welcomed and heard within the association; if we have positive outcomes that can be measured against goals that we have set collectively with council and other division leaders; if we have established some

new relationships and strengthened our long-standing partnerships, and if we have taken a public stand, speaking out when necessary as the voice of equal access and fair treatment to all. Then the association will have moved forward, and I will feel successful. Success in this profession also means that our stakeholders, our communities, and our society are all receiving the kind of networked instruction and guidance to be able to fully evaluate and use the increasing amount of information made available to them. Measured goals related to these issues will be evaluated for success.

**Hepburn:** Success is stability, even growth—in membership, the budget, the endowment, impact of advocacy—during the transitional period when there will be a new ALA executive director. Success is also the continuation of current, important efforts, as well, such as completion of the work of the Task Force on Sustainability and implementation of its recommendations. Success will be reflected in how well I facilitate the transition of the person hired into the executive director position. Finally, having worked closely with ALA Presidents during my time on the Executive Board, I know that otherwise unforeseen issues can steal time and focus away from the best of intentions and plans. With that in mind, success will also be demonstrated in how well I navigate ALA through the situations that are sure to arise during my presidential year.

**5. Which areas of advocacy and legislative agenda are of primary concern for ALA, its membership, and our libraries?**

**Brown:** ALA advocacy efforts should be targeted within overall funding models that offer support for school media programs and community colleges. The strength of today lies within our ability to close the gap between those who have and those who do not. Programs such as net neutrality narrow the digital divide within

our communities. School media coordinators are vital to the overall development of our young people. Community colleges also play an important role in narrowing the digital and economic divides. Funding is essential to our ability to improve and sustain programs within communities where help is needed the most. A key element of advocacy is to ensure that lawmakers fully understand the role that information professionals play at all levels of education and public need. Helping our lawmakers understand and support this role should be a primary agenda item and goal of ALA and all of its divisions. We all benefit from well-informed and educated communities.

**Hepburn:** Two issues spring to mind: net neutrality and school libraries.

The fight over net neutrality continues, and though at this writing the number of votes in the Senate to overcome the FCC decision is within reach, ALA must continue work to ensure that net neutrality is preserved. As I discuss in a post on my blog (<https://www.peterforala.org/blog/2017/12/12/ala-fights-for-net-neutrality>), net neutrality is an equity issue. For lower income students at my college, for example, being unable to afford data packages may prevent them from accessing the library's streaming media resources. The disadvantaged become more disadvantaged. Rolling back net neutrality has implications far beyond our own academic library community, but there is very much a connection to the work that we do.

Securing support for school libraries is another key advocacy area. Academic libraries and school libraries share an educational landscape in which school libraries influence learners at an earlier age. Public libraries are part of that landscape, too. They also feel the impact when school libraries are not supported. Championing school libraries is an issue that should be important to members across the entire association.

**6. How do you see ACRL most effectively contributing to your goals for ALA,**

**and what is your vision regarding the role of ACRL within ALA for the future?**

**Brown:** I see ACRL as an ally, one that provides the connection to higher education and typically is in the best position to influence partnerships related to resources and implementation of information literacy standards. These partnerships with vendors and educators are important for everyone in the profession as these types of partners can become our champions overall within community and government support efforts. Higher education impacts American society, and ACRL has a large hand in driving librarianship through their relationships with library schools and the education of our future professionals. ACRL does and can continue to help ALA develop these relationships that will ultimately create champions for our profession as a whole.

**Hepburn:** Ensuring that ALA transitions smoothly to a new administration is a key goal of mine. ACRL can contribute most effectively when its member leaders and staff provide support and guidance needed for the new executive director.

The work of ALA does not always have a clear, direct link to the work of academic libraries. Nonetheless, I hope that ACRL members will embrace what is going on elsewhere within the association. In the meantime, ACRL will continue to serve its members as effectively as possible by delivering terrifically rich content through publications, training, and its excellent conference. My vision for ACRL in the future is one where cooperation among ACRL and the other divisions, round tables, and ALA units is all the greater. It is one where academic libraries and library workers are enthusiastic contributors to a wider range of issues affecting all who use our libraries—all types of libraries. It is a vision wherein ACRL continues to welcome members who work in libraries or who are passionate about issues of libraries in higher education, much as it does today. 🦋