

Meet the candidates for ALA President

Vote in the election this spring

by Nancy Kranich and C. James Schmidt

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates for ALA president and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,200 words in which to offer a brief opening statement and to respond to the questions; their responses are identified under each of the five questions.

NANCY KRANICH

I accepted the nomination for ALA President because I believe that ALA and its chapters can profoundly influence funding and public policy. ALA provides us the platform and the resources. When we speak out articulately, we can galvanize public support for libraries and librarianship. We need public support like never before because quality library services are by no means guaranteed in an age plagued by technological barriers, censorship, budget cuts, demographic shifts, skyrocketing material costs, and a widening gap between information haves and have nots. Now more than ever we face serious threats to public access and the free flow of ideas. We must act quickly if we are to convince the public that libraries are the information and literacy access points they and their children need to succeed in the 21st century information society.

As ALA President, I will focus my efforts to ensure that we have the will—and the



Nancy Kranich



C. James Schmidt

means—to act decisively to fight for first amendment and fair use rights and to reduce financial, educational, and linguistic barriers to information access. My objective is to ensure that we speak with a unified voice, and that we build partnerships and coalitions to educate the public and amplify our voice to decision makers.

C. JAMES SCHMIDT

A person who would be president must be able to listen to, and hear, the membership even as he or she represents the association. I have served in elective and appointed positions in divisions, which include: chair of the Academic Status Committee on whose watch the baseline documents on faculty status were done, elected chair of the University Libraries Section, member of the ACRL Board, editor of *College and*

About the authors

Nancy Kranich is associate dean at the New York University Libraries, e-mail: kranich@elmer4.bobst.nyu.edu; C. James Schmidt is university librarian at San José University, e-mail: Jim_Schmidt@sjsu.edu

Research Libraries, member and chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee during the years of the FBI's Library Awareness Program, and member and chair of the Committee on Accreditation. I understand how the divisions and the association work and how policy is developed and adopted. In accepting the nomination of the committee, I begin with a faith in libraries and a pride in librarianship.

Questions for ALA candidates

1. What is your position on the acceptance of ALA divisions, such as ACRL, to establish and publicly promulgate their own positions on issues important to the profession and germane to their own interests? Should divisions be encouraged to establish relationships, independent of ALA, with other relevant organizations, such as AAHE, for example?

Kranich: ALA's strength is in its diversity. Our many voices give us the depth and breadth to speak out for all the public's information rights. Each one of our divisions has a major role in identifying issues of importance to its members and constituents. We must depend on our divisions to promote library services within their own communities.

My objective as ALA President is to encourage our members to speak out and to build partnerships. ACRL has done an outstanding job

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of promoting academic and research library interests through such initiatives as launching the Institute for Information Literacy, working closely with AAHE to organize a forum for their national conference, and gaining membership in the Council of Higher Education Management Association.

ALA's strength is also in its ability to integrate many points of view into a single, coherent position. ACRL's work in copyright, government relations, intellectual freedom, and dis-

tance learning are just a few areas where the division's efforts frame key issues of broader concern to the profession. Articulating concerns from the higher education and research communities contributes to ALA's collective positions and builds our capacity to speak with a powerful, unified voice to influence public policy and promote information access for all.

Schmidt: Since the major restructuring of ALA, ACADONDA, and ANACONDA we have evolved a federated structure. Units, divisions, and roundtables can and do speak within their defined areas of responsibility. This is a sensible arrangement. It has served ACRL well in standard-setting (such as standards for faculty status on my watch in the 70s) for community college library/learning resources centers, college libraries, and university libraries. Relationships with other organizations will often be more appropriate at the division or roundtable level. Applicability of ALA policies to such relationships will depend on the clarity of the definition of "area of responsibility." I favor maximum latitude for the divisions and roundtables on the presumption that such units are representative of and responsive to their membership.

2. As President of ALA you will be called upon to speak for librarians on a variety of issues. How do you propose to seek input from the various ALA divisions and to weigh that input to represent effectively and accurately the views of librarians to the general public and the press, to local and state governments, and to the national government?

Kranich: As Chair of the ALA Executive Board's Planning Committee, I urged the establishment of our liaison program to enhance communications with ALA's divisions, roundtables, and units. As President, I will build on this successful forum by consulting early and often with divisions and other ALA units on issues of common concern. Our positions are only as strong as their relevance to and support from our members. Examples from our units resonate with the public and help us to strengthen and interpret our message. An articulate ALA President can leverage our message by relying on member experts to testify and present our positions on various issues. I will call on ACRL leaders to speak out when issues affect them. When we combine our voices, our powerful message is formidable.

As ALA President, I will encourage every one of our members to participate in advocacy training. Perfecting our skills in speaking out at every level is essential to our success in galvanizing support for library programs on campus, in state capitals, and in Washington. The stronger we advocate to foster the value and use of libraries at our own institutions, the more likely our success in all efforts to advance the role of libraries in our society.

Schmidt: Presidents of ALA are called upon to speak for ALA in a variety of fora, and often without time to broadly consult. I expect that ALA staff *and* elected division and roundtable leadership will have been consulted prior to a “speaking opportunity” so that the ALA President can and will accurately represent the views of the membership.

In turn, the ALA President must be very careful to distinguish between speaking as President of ALA and speaking as an individual. Members of my homeowners association or my city council don't much care about ALA when I speak about local issues, except maybe those having to do with the local public library. Then my fame, were I to be elected, would be fleeting.

3. What do you see as the opportunities and challenges technology offers ALA in allowing members to participate at a distance electronically and to be polled electronically to obtain information on their views?

Kranich: Electronic participation allows us broader involvement by members as well as more efficient means for disseminating information widely and quickly. Those not attending conferences or serving on committees have new opportunities to observe and participate in the deliberations of our governing bodies and to learn more about emerging issues. Some are more comfortable speaking in this format than before a large assembly of seasoned members. We must provide disparate forums for our diverse membership to exchange ideas and learn from others. We can also offer “just-in-time” learning with the help of new technologies in order to transcend geographic and time barriers that discourage participation.

New technologies can heighten member involvement. But they must not substitute for informed, in-person debate and decision-making. As a former member of Council, I recognize the importance of public debate that en-

courages diverse voices to present their points of view—voices not always represented in electronic discussions. Listening to input from all stakeholders and healthy discussion are critical to democratic decision-making. A simple “yes” or “no” electronic poll is apt to blur the true nature of a debate and drown dissident positions, which can nurture and inform the final decision-making effort.

Schmidt: Technology offers opportunities for participation that are immense and without equal in our past. While some use to abuse, it is clear that more can participate through the Internet and the Web more easily than was previously possible. The member-forum and the Council mail list are current examples; there will be more as technology becomes more pervasive and easier to use, e.g., chat rooms, discussions, etc.

I applaud more means of participating more easily. In a representative governance system, which the divisions, roundtables, and the association have, every means of improving communication between the represented and the representatives is progress. If and when technology permits direct participation and voting in all matters, then structural change for the divisions, the roundtables, and the Association is necessary.

4. How would you, as president, lead the American Library Association in ways that would simultaneously provide the stability that some members seek while also providing the innovation and forward development other members seek? Is such a balance possible, or will you place more emphasis on one or the other of these aspects (stability or innovation) of ALA's culture?

Kranich: As we race toward tomorrow, ALA cannot afford complacency. In an age plagued by technological barriers, budget cuts, demographic shifts, skyrocketing materials costs, and a widening gap between information haves and have nots, we must position ourselves to combat serious threats to public access and the free flow of ideas. The rate of change will not slow down anytime soon.

To bring our libraries successfully into the 21st century information society, our leaders must articulate a clear, sound vision for the future, galvanize support by building partnerships and coalitions, transform our organizations so they can respond and adapt to the shifting needs

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of their communities, and design a strategy for sustained action to achieve goals.

We can achieve both stability and innovation by educating our members about the importance of ALA's vision to their future. We must anchor that vision in our values. As ALA President, I will work hard to communicate our vision widely, ensure we have both the will and the means to achieve our goals, involve members with our efforts, emphasize the benefits of our approach, and recognize our successes. Together, we can transform ALA into a 21st century learning organization if we empower members to participate in designing our future, focus our efforts externally, create an agile organizational structure, and ensure an open, candid forum for dialogue.

Schmidt: I am ambitious for libraries. I have faith in library workers. We share a common vision. The business libraries are in its service. Given the structure the association has evolved to—federation—I believe that a balance between innovation and stability has been achieved and can be sustained. I support and will encourage a defined level of autonomy for units, divisions, and roundtables at the same time I support the authority granted by membership to the Council to make policy for the association. The devil is always in the details, but I believe balance can be struck and sustained.

5. As we move inevitably into the electronic information age where information can be obtained increasingly without a library intermediary, what are your views on the future of librarianship and future roles libraries will play in the information society? What is your vision of the niche librarians fill so we continue to attach the support librarians and libraries need and continue to attract highly capable individuals to our profession?

Kranich: Librarians and libraries will become evermore essential with the exponential growth and diversity of information resources. Digital resources are support intensive—they require skilled organizers, navigators, evaluators, trainers, creators, and conservators. They test the bounds of intellectual property and freedom rights and require advocates well-versed in information policy issues.

Librarians need additional skills to succeed in the emerging digital environment. On campus librarians must: develop students' critical thinking skills in collaboration with teaching faculty; negotiate affordable contracts for resources and services; build strategic partnerships; participate in planning and decision-making; and communicate the importance of libraries to their constituents.

Today, the shift in focus from teaching to learning requires librarians to become active partners in the educational process. They must become more user-centered, continuously seeking community opinions and assessing the impact of their services. The user-friendly, sophisticated services librarians create are certain to awe users as well as attract the caliber of individuals our profession needs to thrive in the 21st century information society.

Schmidt: Librarianship has endured through eras of formats—from papyri to bytes. Fundamentally, the profession's core functions have not changed. Materials are selected, acquired, organized for use, and users are provided assistance in using materials. In Alexandria the scrolls were organized, and users were provided some assistance in using them. In cyberspace, files are organized, more or less, and users are provided with some instruction (bibliographic?) in accessing and using them. In Alexandria, as in cyberspace, librarians accept and implement a responsibility for preservation. If we now know much about preserving the print, we are among the pioneers in learning about preserving the digital. There is an heroic role in society present and future for those who would organize, preserve, and provide assistance in using the record of humankind's thoughts, feelings, views, and wisdom.

At the top of my agenda, if elected, is to celebrate our successes. Our profession has achieved remarkable things and we need to showcase our best examples. The proof of doing makes more credible the promises yet to be done. ■



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