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## New Roles for the Road Ahead

ACRL commissioned report considers new emerging roles within academic librarianship

While many academic librarians have used the 75th anniversary of ACRL to reflect on how our profession has evolved through the years, others have capitalized on the occasion to look ahead. In an effort to not only celebrate ACRL's historical achievements but to also anticipate the association's future accomplishments, the ACRL 75th Anniversary Celebration Task Force charged the ACRL 75th Anniversary Celebration Task Force Commissioned Report Working Group with the task of producing a document that would assist academic librarians in looking ahead.

Cochairs Nancy Allen and Betsy Wilson, and members Stephanie Atkins, Kaijsa Calkins, and Michelle Demeter discussed options for potential authors and the projected content for the report. In order to emphasize collaboration, it was decided that multiple authors with a range of viewpoints would be best. Due to the popularity of professional interaction among librarians online in social media forums, blogs, and other avenues, the group chose three high-profile and catalytic bloggers—Steven Bell, Barbara Fister, and Lorcan Dempsey—to author a commissioned report that would inspire thoughtful discourse and action among ACRL's membership. Fister noted that it was an honor to be asked to participate, stating the

work provided “an interesting challenge to think about the near future with two other authors.”

The resultant work, *New Roles for the Road Ahead*, avoids proscriptive rules and instead offers a more organic text that addresses collaboration, right-scaling, value and values, the need for and role of leadership, and finally an environment of ever-present change.

Bell optimistically notes that “while we are confronted with some serious challenges, both at the institutional and library levels, this is also a time for great opportunity if we take on a leadership role on our campuses.”

Dempsey echoes the importance of projecting ahead because “we are now increasingly thinking about the library in the life of the user. This changes how we think of services, roles and positioning.”

Each author chose topics of interest, with Bell, Dempsey, and Fister providing different yet complementary perspectives on ways academic librarians can position themselves as campus and institutional leaders. While the authors and working group collaborated, another avenue



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to include even more feedback was provided when the a draft of the report was released using CommentPress to invite ACRL members to interact with and respond to the in-progress document. Between November and December 2014, ACRL members provided commentary on the draft, much of which was incorporated into the final work.

Bell thought that the comment period not only provided an excellent platform for member engagement, but he also believed the process “would make for a better end product.” Fister saw the use of CommentPress as a microcosmic encapsulation of broader issues regarding online documents.

Within the final report, readers can expect a wide range of topics spread out over three main sections—“Framing the Road Ahead,” “Shifts in Positioning,” and “Responding to Opportunity: Creating a New Library Landscape.” In the first section, “Framing the Road Ahead,” Dempsey kicks things off by briefly considering the “rules and roles” of education, technology, and scholarly publishing. From there, readers are given an in-depth look at the traditional four-year academic institutional model versus the nonlinear and unpredictable experience found in alt-higher education. This was followed by explorations of student demographics and how libraries can use these changes to their advantage, creating a bridge between technology and information behaviors tied to workflow, discovery, and space.

The second section, “Shifts in Positioning,” advocates academic librarians’ ability to shift and change “to meet new and somewhat ambiguous expectations.” We are urged to consider the academic library’s infrastructure, digital curation, partnership in teaching and learning, assessment, and even our physical space. Physical space takes the spotlight as librarians are asked to consider how to strike a balance between the lack of space and the need for more space in an environment often deemed sacred in its inherent scholarliness. Furthermore, librarians are encouraged to focus on knowledge creation, facilitation of teaching and learning materials, and collaboration both on and off campus in an effort to

connect with the community at-large as well as the institution.

The final section posits the creation of a new landscape, which is couched in terms of both value and values. What is the demonstrated value of the academic library, and how do we express the values academic librarians find purposeful and effective? In this section, the authors lead a more nuanced exploration of breaking down boundaries by exploring new contexts of collaboration through the lens of technology, learning/teaching support, and publishing. Also of importance is right-scaling and how this can “increase efficiencies and impact.” The ever-expanding range of professional development opportunities is emphasized, as is the importance of personal and professional branding. Finally, our unique position to provide common ground as a place to both “preserve and share knowledge” is examined.

These wide-ranging topics are bound by the singular understanding that action will need to be taken soon in order to stay current and relevant as ACRL celebrates its past successes and looks ahead to its future. Dempsey, Fister, and Bell have run ahead on the road to tomorrow and returned to share what they gleaned from the signposts ahead. They’ve done the reconnaissance, and it is now our turn to set the foundation for another amazing 75 years of accomplishments. The authors hope this report will instill a sense of passion, hope, and inspiration among ACRL’s membership.

Bell states that “just like this publication, which is something that was made better by a group of people coming together to achieve much more than we could have as individuals, ACRL depends on academic librarians working together to make sure the generations that follow us will be doing great things for higher education many years from now.”

We invite you all to join the authors at the ACRL 2015 conference as they discuss “New Roles for the Road Ahead” at their ACRL 75th Anniversary Invited Panel on March 26, 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., in the Oregon Convention Center Portland Ballroom 251/258. The final report will be available as a PDF on the ACRL website in mid-March 2015. *ZZ*