

Editorial

Professional Service: A Few Perspectives

An ongoing topic I continue to think about is what professional service means to others and to myself. Considering many facets of professional service, such as internally to the library, university-wide, to service in professional organizations on local, regional, national, international levels, I'm sure there are other types of professional service I haven't even thought about. I have found professional service essential to understanding how to do my job, developing new skills, to making lasting connections with colleagues that have become close friends and collaborators. As Editor and one of many stewards of *C&RL*, I see the work and time put in by peer reviewers, the authors, the Editorial Board and ACRL staff who all work together to generate each issue. Recognizing how professional service is interpreted can vary within individuals, but also within their institutional cultures, I mentioned this in a conversation with former *C&RL* Editor Wendi Arant-Kaspar. She had the insightful idea of asking for viewpoints from the Editorial Board members to write an editorial—so here we are! It was a marvelous idea. As a result, three Board members, Sarah Fitzgerald, Brad Warren and Christopher Cox responded to the following prompt:

For the past couple of years, I've been thinking about in the academic library world what service means and how philosophies and cultures around service vary among organizations, institutions, groups and individuals. What does professional service mean to you as an academic librarian? What does it mean for your respective institutions, your experiences and/or your other perceptions about professional service? Why do you participate in professional service?

Sarah Fitzgerald*

Service on the Library Personnel Committee has become central to my thinking about my role in the library since I became the chair. As an Assessment Librarian and a scholar of faculty work, I have been considering the quality of the assessment tools the librarians use to evaluate one another for promotion and raises. I see the personnel committee as a defense against growing pressure across academia to conform to administrative rather than peer goals. Peer review of our work ensures that library services reflect the values of librarianship.

An important role for service in my library has been the work of creating a more diverse and inclusive environment. The librarians who created and work on the diversity and equity committee have been doing essential work that wasn't addressed by the official structure of

* Sarah Rose Fitzgerald is Assessment and Planning Librarian at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and *C&RL* Editorial Board member.

the library. This work has predictably and lamentably been a burden to librarians with minoritized identities who bear the brunt of the consequences of a lack of diversity and equity and the brunt of the labor to correct the problems.

Librarians with a strong research focus tend to contribute service through peer review, editorial boards, and scholarly conference planning. A strong publication record creates demand for these librarians in professional association service. These service roles can be either in the professional associations of the discipline the librarian serves or in library professional associations. Professional service in peer review, editorial work, and conference planning improves the state of research and professional development in the field of library science and the fields librarians serve. Librarian perspectives can particularly improve the quality of literature reviews due to our expertise in that area. Experience with peer review can also improve a librarian's instruction about the publication cycle.

Librarians who are less focused on research sometimes have fewer requests for external service and sometimes resent those whose service is externally focused for not participating as much in internally focused needs for service. Because of the understaffing and overwork of librarians that is common across higher education, it is a struggle to fill library service positions. As for other faculty, it is important for pre-tenure librarians not to let service commitments monopolize time they need to spend on librarianship and scholarship.

Service at the university level is a good opportunity for librarians to make connections with faculty outside the libraries. This is an opportunity for faculty to learn about library services and for librarians to get to know faculty. This is especially important for librarians who do not have liaison roles but need to form relationships that can supply recommendation letters for promotion and tenure evaluations. Participation from librarians in university governance can lighten the university service burden for other faculty members and help contribute library perspectives to decisions about academic programs, technology, and budgets.

Bradley Warren*

In wrestling with an answer to these questions, I see this as an explanation of my personal commitment to professional service and how that translates in my career both through my direct responsibilities and personal service to the profession. I have found that my personal thoughts on service and the profession have evolved and matured as I too have evolved and matured in my career. I was extraordinarily lucky to have experiences and mentors that matched my interests, learning, and ability to grow and make an impact at each stage of my career as a fellow, individual contributor, department head, associate dean, and dean. I will confess to being quite confused and a bit lost initially in what professional service looked like in Access Services, which is my area of expertise. This confusion, combined with a dose of imposter syndrome and a deep desire to help others in similar situations has fueled my approach to professional service. Once I realized that any of us has the power to lead change, I decided to partner with others to create the change we desired. This drive has led to the creation of the [ACRL Access Services Interest Group](#), the 2020 [Framework for Access Services Librarianship](#), and a continued commitment to serve our library community by ensuring the voices of frontline academic library service providers are heard in our profession and various institutions.

* *Bradley Warren is Dean of Libraries at Augusta University and C&RL Editorial Board member.*

In thinking of how my own approach to professional service is demonstrated within my institution, I am committed to creating a learning organization in which all library employees are given agency, empowered with the ability to make decisions and take risks, and are coached with the premise that good ideas are worth pursuing regardless of the limitations that may exist. I try to help my organization think about the creative ways in which it can approach solutions as well as be comfortable with shedding unnecessary self-imposed barriers to successfully reach those aspirations. As a Dean, I am fortunate in that this work can happen within our libraries, through our partnerships with the communities we serve, or even more broadly with the mission of a very ambitious and collaborative comprehensive research university. I suppose that a simple way to explain this is that my professional service approach is to create and be the change that you want rather than wait for someone else to do it! I participate in professional service to ensure that others are given the opportunities to speak their truth and create the libraries, careers, and profession that they want to see.

Christopher Cox*

Service has helped me grow as a librarian and a professional. Early in my career, I sought out opportunities that allowed me to learn more about topics connected with my job or that I wanted to learn more about. At the time, that meant instruction and, later, marketing. I started by serving in regional organizations like the [New England Library Instruction Group \(NELIG\)](#) and later in national organizations like ACRL [University Libraries Section \(ULS\)](#) and ACRL. As time went on, I went from evaluating conference presentation proposals and working on projects to chairing the meetings and planning conferences. I gained leadership skills and learned how to work with others when I did not have a position of authority. I was proud to represent my university. I also brought back new ideas that I could implement to innovate my work and improve the library. Serving on committees also allowed me to connect with colleagues from other institutions with similar jobs or interests. Many of the people I met on these committees have become lifelong friends whom I communicate with regularly or meet at conferences.

The skills I learned in professional service helped me gain confidence as a leader and transition from a librarian to an administrator. As Assistant Director at Eau Claire, I oversaw marketing and didn't know much about it when I was hired. The connections I made and knowledge I gained in marketing ULS came in handy as I learned how to "sell" the library. Knowing the value service has provided me, I encourage my employees to seek our service opportunities at the regional and national levels. I want them to learn and grow, gain leadership skills, and participate in conversations to improve the profession. Professional service allows not only for the development of connections but the sharing of ideas.

As a dean, service looks different. It's more about giving back or exercising influence than on learning and growth. Most recently, I have served as President of the [Association of Southeast Research Libraries \(ASERL\)](#). In this role, I have had the opportunity to work collaboratively with my peers to develop new services to share collections, share expertise, and, most recently, to increase diversity in our profession. I find I can impact the direction of the organization in positive ways. I also serve on the [Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition \(SPARC\) Steering Committee](#). Being able to participate in conversations about and

* Christopher Cox is Dean of Libraries at Clemson University and C&RL Editorial Board member.

influence legislation on open access, ensuring scientific data is freely available, provides me with great satisfaction as the benefits are immediately apparent.

I realize that service is something many of us are expected to do as part of our roles as faculty/librarians, but I'd do it even if it weren't required. Not participating wastes your potential and is the equivalent of keeping your head in the sand. Service allows us to grow, learn, and gain influence, so we can be better individuals, improve the profession, and improve the lives of those we serve.

Kristen Totleben

Professional service has always been a priority to me. A persistent theme throughout my years of professional service has been the benefit of connecting with other colleagues and community members to better understand their work, my work, that there are many ways to approach projects and, frankly, to give me the feeling of hope and connectivity in the profession. Working with others to, as my colleague Justina Elmore says, "leave it better than how you found it," helps all of us grow, learn and progress. In my organization, I value working with colleagues because it helps me more deeply understand what they do and how to work together in a more deliberate, thoughtful way. Service in ACRL and other professional organizations has been valuable in not only the work produced in groups, committees or other teams to share with others, but in the people I meet. Service is professional development and a deeper sense of commitment to the profession, for learning, practice, scholarly inquiry and growth.

In my institution, it is not required to publish but published work can be considered for promotional purposes. Librarian faculty and staff statuses in colleges and universities is an ongoing discussion, but as a staff member, there is an advantage to not having any requirement to publish. In my experience, it takes the pressure off and helps me decide how I wish to professionally develop and contribute to the profession. This is always a balancing act, in terms of job responsibilities, initiatives, professional development, all around professional service, and "other duties as assigned." As a personal priority, all elements of service must be done in concert, so it informs and helps others and myself in our professional work, while maintaining values of integrity, honesty and kindness.

After reading Sarah's, Brad's and Chris's viewpoints, I learned more about their careers and values, and am feeling inspired and grateful to work with them. While many of their reflections resonated with me, some challenged me to think more about what changes I wish to see in the profession and what I might do to help make that happen. Thinking about the new year and what it will bring, how do you perceive professional service and what does it mean to you? How does it affect your professional goals and everyday work?

Christopher Cox, Sarah Rose Fitzgerald, Kristen Totleben and Bradley Warren
College & Research Libraries Editorial Board