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Celebrating ACRL's 75th Anniversary: Librarians' Roles in Changing Times

Trevor A. Dawes

Washington University in St Louis, tad@trevordawes.com

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Although I have never been a subject librarian, I am acutely aware of the value *Choice* has brought to many of us in higher education over the years. Recently, the ACRL Board and the CHOICE staff have been discussing ways in which CHOICE should--and will--change to meet the evolving needs of our user communities, so it seems fitting that I reflect on some of the changing roles of librarians that I have been discussing as I have been meeting with ACRL members over the past year, both in person at conferences and in virtual spaces. It has been such a pleasure for me to travel around the country indeed around the world and learn about the new ways in which librarians are engaging with with each other, their communities, and the wider profession. In this, the 75th anniversary year for ACRL, it is not surprising that we are discussing changes for CHOICE, or that current ACRL president Karen Williams has chosen a theme during her presidential year that will focus on the new roles for librarians.

I've had occasion to speak with many librarians who have described the new or revised roles they, or others in their organizations, are playing as a result of shifting needs on their campuses. Although not exhaustive, some of these roles have been described in the recent report from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), *Transforming Liaison*

*Roles in Research Libraries*¹. This report is but one in the ARL series, “New Roles for New Times.” The series was developed to demonstrate the new and emerging ways in which work in academic libraries is changing as a result of changes in the academic landscape. In this particular report, the authors suggest that the liaison librarian should have expanded-or rather *shifting*--duties that include, among other things: assisting with the research process; engaging in digital scholarship projects; enhancing the user experience; developing data management plans; and working with research data.

Faculty members, students, and researchers on our campuses are realizing they need more assistance with their research. Several are turning to the library, and the library has successfully made the case that they can provide the needed assistance. The nature of the relationship we have with our community members – the campus community – and the ways in which we engage with them are certainly changing:

- We have seen the rise of more interdisciplinary work on our campuses. In cases where research crosses several subject disciplines, one subject specialist librarian may not be able to provide sufficient research assistance needed by a library user. The librarian, therefore, must also work across disciplines, not only in his

¹Jaguszewski, Janice and Karen Williams (2013). *Transforming Liaison Roles in Research Libraries*. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries. Available online at <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/NRNT-Liaison-Roles-final.pdf> [Accessed November 10 2014].

or her own silo.

- The recent requirements to include data management plans in some federal grant applications – although not yet enforced universally – has increased the need for librarians to assist researchers with developing these data management plans. Beyond the data management plans, librarians are also embedding themselves in research projects.
- Increasing development of digital scholarship projects, including e-science and digital humanities projects, has left scholars yearning for ways to adequately store, describe, preserve, and provide access to their works. These are, of course, traditional librarian roles, but the objects that we are describing, storing, and preserving are in formats much different from those with which we have been familiar for so long. Being a part of the research team where these functions are needed is yet another role for some librarians.
- In spite of the seeming decline of university presses and the fact that, as a profession, we are advocating for more open access, some libraries are embarking on publishing initiatives. Whether through the traditional publishing models, or through digital publishing with faculty on projects like digital humanities, or through participating in projects like Knowledge Unlatched (where libraries pay a set fee to ensure open access to specific content), libraries are demonstrating that there are alternatives to the more established modes of

publishing and that we can make research findings or other created content accessible in more open, and in some cases, more affordable ways.

Not all these activities will be relevant in every setting, but there is certainly a recognition that these are new, in some cases perhaps developing, areas in which faculty, students, and researchers need assistance.

From writing data management plans in grant applications to mapping information using geographic information systems software to creating or participating in the creation of online or other digital projects, scholars are discovering that they need help because some of the tools and resources needed to successfully execute these projects fall outside their area of academic expertise. These are skills that libraries and librarians can – and should – bring to the research and scholarly process.

Regardless of the level to which these new activities will be practiced on each campus, they demonstrate a shift in the nature of the library's relationship with the campus community. Librarians, once more internally focused, are now being encouraged to engage more in the academic environment; to develop and enhance their relationships with the faculty, students, and researchers; and to further demonstrate the value we add to the academic enterprise.

These new roles, however, may require a re-tooling of our staffs' skills. Some of the skills needed to perform the tasks now required include: project management; instructional design or instructional technology; digital information management; programming; data analytics; fundraising; and communications and marketing.

As librarians we are not reluctant to learn or develop these skills. We have always been flexible in determining and delivering the services and programs that our community members want and need.

It's exciting to think about the new roles for librarians in the context of ACRL's 75th anniversary. The association has a long history of helping its members succeed on their campuses by providing professional development opportunities, setting standards and guidelines, and advocating for libraries and librarians. As we think about our new roles, and take on new functions in our respective organizations, ACRL will, naturally, continue to support its members.

During its strategic planning and orientation session this past year, the ACRL Board determined that we need to help our members address issues of data management – an emerging area on our campuses. As we continue to have national conversations about the increasing cost of college, the financial literacy initiative started during my presidential term will continue as a joint project with several other ALA divisions. We're also planning a workshop on Open Educational Resources (OERs) aimed at

helping our members understand ways in which we can help stem the expenses associated with higher education – in this case, the cost of textbooks. We have charged a task force with revising the Standards for Information Literacy, and their work is well underway; and we continue to find new ways to demonstrate our value on campus. The Assessment in Action Program, in which my own institution participates, is designed to help demonstrate the impact use the library has on student success. These are but some of the new and ongoing ACRL initiatives that are related to the new roles of librarians.

As librarians change to keep up with our communities, so too does ACRL evolve to keep up with librarians. As I reflect on the conversations I've had about new responsibilities and different relationships with our students, faculty, and staff members, I see that connection between the librarians' needs and the services and programs that ACRL provides. For 75 years ACRL has been making those connections. I have no doubt that over the next 75 years, as librarians continue to redefine the work they do, they can continue to rely on ACRL as a source of innovation, inspiration, and education. I'm looking forward to those times.