

Jenifer Abramson, Pat Hawthorne, Joan Kaplowitz, and Leslie McMichael

## Voices of the future

### Next generation professionals speak

**D**uring a March 2008 visit to UCLA, ACRL President Julie Todaro met with library school students and early career librarians in two separate focus groups to learn more about their perspectives. Both 90-minute focus groups were designed to elicit comments about career choices and interests and desired working environments and conditions.

Five students from the Department of Information Studies program in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies participated in the focus group. The group included four female and one male participant; four of the students were in the second year of the program and one in the first year. All of the students are Millennials (born after 1980) and ranged in age from 23 to 27. The participants included a majority of Caucasians and one participant of mixed ethnicity. All are interested in academic libraries, and most mentioned interests in areas related to technology. All are currently working in academic library settings while earning their degrees, and all worked in libraries (most as undergraduates) or related fields prior to entering graduate school.

In discussing their choice of the library profession as a career, the students used terms such as "exalted profession" and "calling, not a job," and all expressed a commitment to the profession. With the majority of the student participants nearing graduation, the discussion on job hunting had a practical tone. Students shared their view of the "seller's market" and outlined how they are planning broad job searches and seeking as much education and experience

in as many functional areas of librarianship as possible to make themselves more marketable.

#### Location

Geographic limitations of the group very much reflect the trend noted in *IJ's Annual Salary and Placement Survey*, where the majority of graduates take their first job in the state or region where they attended library school. The students seemed to feel graduate coursework must be coupled with library work experience and/or internships in libraries.

Nontraditional jobs rate as desirable to this group, which also expressed a strong desire for work-life balance. The majority are interested in management and see themselves in managerial and leadership roles eventually.

Eleven librarians from all sectors of the UCLA campus, all with ten years or less experience as a professional librarian, participated in a separate focus group. Made up of nine female and two male participants, the group included seven Caucasians, two Mexican-Americans, one Latino, and one South Asian.

The participants ranged in age from 29 into their 40s, and included Baby Boomers

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(those born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1980).

Nine participants had earned their MLIS degrees between 2003 and 2007, one earned the MLIS in 1998, and another participant did not hold the MLIS degree. Nine of the participants had worked as degreed professionals for three years or less and two had worked for more than four years at the professional level.

All but one participant had earned their degrees from either the UCLA or San Jose State University programs. At least half of the 11 worked as paraprofessionals in academic libraries prior to earning their degrees. Four have additional graduate degrees at the master's and doctoral level, and two are currently working on additional graduate degrees. All indicated they would recommend the profession to others.

This group of professionals described unique career paths into academic librarianship, most noting the encouragement of professionals as playing a key role. Like the students, these participants would recommend librarianship to others. The group included professionals in first or second jobs. In discussing job postings, this group was more specific about what they look for in postings and clearly noted they look for it between themselves and the institution.

In response to the question "Has the reality of your job played out according to what you expected?", the responses were varied and reflected different experiences in different institutions.

As working professionals, the group discussed both their positive and frustrating experiences learning to work within an organizational culture and academic bureaucracy, getting access to needed and desired technology, and the craving for mentoring from senior professionals and administrators. Six are interested in moving into management and leadership roles.

Similar to the student group, they noted the importance of library work experience and internships coupled with the graduate

program as critical. Remaining in academic librarianship will be dependent on sustainable salaries and professional development support and funding (an important factor for the students in job searches). While this group included different generations (Baby Boomers and Gen Xers) and the student group was Millennials, the desire for work-life balance was also evident.

For complete summaries of these two focus groups, visit the "Working with and Retaining New Librarians" section of the ACRL Recruitment and Retention wiki at [wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/Working\\_with\\_and\\_Retaining\\_New\\_Librarians](http://wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/Working_with_and_Retaining_New_Librarians) and offer your comments.

### Editor's note

Julie Todaro facilitated these focus groups on Monday, March 10, 2008, on the UCLA campus. Jenifer Abramson, Pat Hawthorne, Joan Kaplowitz, and Leslie McMichael served as note-takers and collaborated on compiling the focus group summaries. Both focus groups at UCLA were conducted in compliance with UCLA's Institutional Review Board protocols.

The focus group planners gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the leadership of the Department of Information Studies program and Librarians Association of the University of California-Los Angeles (LAUCLA) in setting up these focus groups. //

### **ACRL President's Program**

If you are interested in recruitment and retention in our profession, attend the ACRL President's Program at the 2008 ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim on Monday, June 30, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. to hear Dan Ariely speak on his new book, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions*. Ariely will be joined by a panel of four early-career academic librarians—Mario Ascencio, Brett Bonfield, Ellie Collier, and Marla Peppers—from around the country and a variety of institutions.