

Michelle Demeter

ACRL in the 1970s

Organizational identity, social change, and technological advancement

The 1970s comprised an integral decade that bridged the revolutionary and socially engaged 1960s with the tech-savvy and economically unstable 1980s. During this confluent time, movement toward equal rights continued, technology (especially computers and automation) gained significant developments, and emphasis on personal liberation, identity, and independence flourished.

It was in this transitional time that ACRL's membership struggled with their identity as faculty and their place within higher education, as well as the organization's overarching identity within ALA.

In alignment with the focus on personal liberation, the question of self-governance dominated much of ACRL's discussions in the early '70s. The issue of ACRL's affiliation with ALA was battled out in various reports, editorials, letters to the editor, meetings at conferences, and other official engagements of the organization.

In September 1970, ACRL recommended that "ALA become a federation of library associations with a strong central headquarters' secretariat" and that ACRL be included within that structure as a "federated association ... headed by an executive director."

In 1978, on its 40th anniversary, ACRL held its first standalone conference separate from ALA's Annual Conference. The three-day event, themed "New Horizons for Academic Libraries," boasted 67 contributed papers, 115 commercial and professional exhib-

its, and a "Boston Dinner" with famed author Kurt Vonnegut. This inaugural event also marked another first: the introduction of the Academic/Research Librarian of the Year Award. Two winners were selected to share this prestigious award: Keys

D. Metcalf, Harvard University Library director from 1937 to 1955; and Robert B. Downs, former ALA president and director of the University of Illinois Library from 1943 to 1971.

Another significant contribution during this decade was the drafting of the 1971 "Standards for Faculty Status for College and University Libraries." Upon its passage in June 1971, ACRL sought support from such higher education organizations as the American Association of University Professors and the American Association of Colleges.



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This document addressed issues that faculty librarians still hold dear, such as tenure, access to research funds, library governance, salary, academic freedom, and other topics.

During the 1970s, women and minorities capitalized on the momentum created by the fight for equal rights and social justice begun in the 1960s. In direct response to those threatening this progress within the profession, ACRL passed a 1970 resolution that called for a censure of any libraries or librarians lending materials to “racist institutions conceived for the purpose of circumventing the law of land” during desegregation.

This resolution was adopted by the first Black Caucus, which became a strong proponent for black library professionals. In another directive, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded ACRL a \$350,000 grant to fund a three-year program to “accelerate the development of the management ability of librarians in black colleges and universities.” Women also benefited from ACRL involvement in social issues. In November 1973, ACRL sought membership feedback regarding an ALA-drafted Equal Employment Opportunity Policy.

Finally, the last major concern was one that is all too familiar today—the introduction of new technology within various library services. Stephen K. Bailey noted that even in 1978, the issue of becoming obsolete was not a new topic. “Beginning ten or fifteen years ago, speeches and articles began to appear predicting the imminent demise of libraries as we have known them. Computers would replace card catalogs, microfiche and a variety of electronic print-out systems would replace books and journals. . . . Computer terminals would replace librarians.”

Certainly this concept of upgrading humans with technology was prevalent as evidenced in numerous articles and book reviews regarding the place of technology in libraries, automation of services, and computer literacy.

Joe B. Wyatt ended his March 1979 article, “Technology and the Library,” urging library science programs to include “computer-based system design, development, management, and use. . . . Every librarian should be com-

puter-literate.” Furthermore, he encouraged all academic librarians to make an effort to become leaders rather than followers in the coming tech-dominated age.

In addition to these exhortations, the rapid expansion of OCLC’s online cataloging system was of concern for many academic libraries. Dartmouth, Cornell, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and the New York Public Library (NYPL) led the charge with each adopting the OCLC system in short order. Other libraries soon followed suit and developed consortia like Yale, Columbia, Harvard, and NYPL did in 1974 with their Research Libraries Group.

Regardless of the challenges ACRL tackled, the organization remained optimistic in the face of an approaching economic crisis that emerged in the late 1970s and would ramp up in the 1980s. ACRL encouraged its members to embrace technology and become more equity-minded and socially conscious while asserting their unique role within ALA. Thus, college and university librarians looked toward an uncertain yet exciting new horizon. *ZZ*

“No reservations” (cont. from page 333)

to an economic model that serves the interests of neither students nor the academy.

Notes

1. Mark J. Perry, “The College Textbook Bubble and How the ‘Open Educational Resources’ Movement Is Going up against the Textbook Cartel,” <https://www.aei.org/publication/the-college-textbook-bubble-and-how-the-open-educational-resources-movement-is-going-up-against-the-textbook-cartel/>.

2. The College Board, “Average Estimated Full-Time Undergraduate Budgets, 2013–14 (Enrollment-Weighted),” <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-estimated-undergraduate-budgets-2013-14>.

3. Mary S. Laskowski, “The Textbook Problem: Investigating One Possible Solution,” *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services* 31 (3-4): 161–70, doi:10.1016/j.lcats.2007.09.001. *ZZ*