

Erika C. Linke

The purposeful advocate

The 2008–09 ACRL President's focus

When I stood for election for ACRL president, I noted the centrality of “Charting Our Future: ACRL Strategic Plan 2020,” as the cornerstone of ACRL’s present and future. It articulates the essential goals for the association. Every year is a new opportunity for ACRL to revisit the plan to ensure that the organization is nimble, member-focused, and . . . strategic. ACRL presidents look to the strategic plan to identify objectives that connect directly to their presidential focus. This year, the thrust of my presidential initiatives does not veer from that path. New initiatives need to strengthen and not detract from association efforts already underway.

Transforming the association

Two current initiatives should have a particular impact on communications and opportunities for engagement within ACRL:

- ACRL membership voted to approve the addition of a new type of member group—the interest group. The vote also led to some by-laws changes that gathered member-sponsored groups—sections, discussion groups, and interest groups—into “communities of practice.” ACRL is making Web site changes and procedural changes that will enable interest groups to form on member request.

- The standing committees of ACRL are constituted to help the Board and ACRL achieve association strategic goals, improve practices, and underpin a nimble organization. Unlike the sections that have Board liaisons, the standing committees may have linkages through coordinating committees, through staff liaisons, or have a loose relationship with the ACRL Board. Not all standing committees have enjoyed as a close a relationship to the Board. Uneven channels of communication can result. During the coming year, the Board will examine the role that stand-

ing committees play in the association’s ability to perform at a high level, to make progress on the goals of the strategic plan, and to help the association address the important issues facing academic and research libraries. The Board will kick off this work at the fall strategic planning and orientation meeting.

Purposeful advocacy

A major focus this year will bring new or renewed attention to the broad area of advocacy. The theme of advocacy addresses our external communications and encompasses professional, governmental, local, and personal actions. Taking a stand in support of a specific action or outcome needs become part of our routines. Like a muscle, it needs to be exercised in order to be effective.

This spring, the United States experienced a remarkable presidential primary season that has generated interest and enthusiasm in the political process. By the time this piece is read, politics will be in high gear for the November presidential election. No matter who wins nationally, or at the state or local level, every election brings a renewed opportunity to build a relationship with the newly elected and the newly appointed. What better time to recommit to legislative advocacy actions? What better time to learn how to be more effective in that realm? ACRL has identified the importance of legislative advocacy with the appointment of Michael McLane as visiting program officer for legislative advocacy. National legislative advocacy happens not only inside the Beltway but more often occurs at the local offices of nationally elected

Erika C. Linke is associate dean of university libraries for collection and user services at Carnegie Mellon University’s Hunt Library and ACRL president, e-mail: el08@andrew.cmu.edu

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officials. Practices that prove effective at the national level can be applied at the regional, state, and local level. You may be able to help. Any qualified ACRL member could become an ACRL legislative advocate.¹

In my first month as your president, I had several opportunities to speak with the press as a spokesperson for academic librarians and librarianship. This experience reinforced my concern that more can be done to promote a better public understanding of contemporary academic libraries. Each academic librarian plays a daily role in communicating current issues and changing roles of academic libraries and librarians. Those who have used *The Power of Personal Persuasion: Advancing the Academic Library Agenda from the Front Lines*, authored by Julia Todaro (ACRL's current past-president), know what a valuable toolkit this is. Every ACRL member received a personal copy in the mail. It is also available on the ACRL Web site.² ACRL would like to learn how you have used the toolkit and share those stories with other members. Your feedback can help ACRL provide additional toolkits or identify ways you'd like to receive this information.

During Mary Reichel's term as ACRL president, a Scholarly Communications Task Force was formed under the leadership of Ray English. As a result, the Scholarly Communications Committee was created, which aggressively addresses emerging issues in scholarly communication and supports new initiatives to explore alternative modes of research and publishing. The Scholarly Communication Committee issued an action report, "Establishing a Research Agenda for Scholarly Communication: A Call for Community Engagement"³ in 2007. The scholarly communication agenda sits at the heart of teaching and research in higher education. There are many alliances to be made in this area. It requires collaboration across associations, across disciplines, and across higher education and the publishing community. To have impact and influence in this arena we cannot act alone, but we must collaborate at the highest level and at the local level.

When I think about the challenges that lie before our association and its members, I can-

not but help remember some thoughts about achievement offered by Randy Pausch. Many of you are probably aware of Pausch, a Carnegie Mellon professor, whose last lecture on the Carnegie Mellon campus released a torrent of interest on the Internet and became a best-selling book. One of Pausch's notions is that difficulties and obstacles are valuable tests of our resolve. The brick wall tests and strengthens our determination and commitment.⁴ Advocacy seeks to make a difference—to make a change. Persuasion and direct action require that obstacles or contrary opinions do not discourage us, but instead challenge us to reframe, restructure, and repeat our message. Let's take those obstacles as what they are and let them strengthen us.

Advocacy as a theme generally represents the collective action of individuals working in concert to move forward a specific action or idea. To achieve this goal, each individual must take that transformative step from passive intellectual support to intelligent action. Of course, we are busy. Demands on personal time obstruct or interfere with the ability of well-meaning individuals to commit to taking action. The purposeful advocate recognizes those obstacles but finds a way around them. ACRL—with its strategic plan, with improvements in internal communications, with its fresh initiatives for advocacy in an election year—provides each of us with the boost to get over that next brick wall.

Notes

1. Learn about ACRL Legislative Advocates at www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/washingtonwatch/acrladvocates.cfm.

2. Julie B. Todaro, *The Power of Personal Persuasion: Advancing the Academic Library Agenda from the Front Lines* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2006), www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/marketingyourlib/advocacy_toolkit.pdf.

3. Establishing a Research Agenda for Scholarly Communication: A Call for Community Engagement. November 7, 2007, www.acrl.ala.org/scresearchagenda/index.php?title=Main_Page.

4. Randy Pausch, *The Last Lecture* (New York: Hyperion, 2008). ❧