

Pamela Snelson

# It takes an association

ACRL 1940–2015

In May 2014 I wrote an essay for the *C&RL News* introducing ACRL's 75th Anniversary celebration. Now the formal festivities have ended, and we can look back on an impressive set of activities. The publication *New Roles for the Road Ahead*,<sup>1</sup> commissioned for the anniversary, contains 20 essays in three sections, "Framing the Road Ahead," "Shifts in Positioning," and "Responding to Opportunity: Creating a New Library Landscape." The authors shared their thoughts on the world in which academic libraries will thrive, ways libraries are responding to change, and new roles for libraries and librarians. *College and Research Libraries* published a special issue in March 2015 reprinting seven landmark articles from the journal's history as chosen by the readers. The *C&RL* editorial board also solicited authors for companion essays aimed at illuminating the contemporary, and ongoing, significance of these works. Programs at the ACRL 2015 Conference in Portland and the ALA Annual Conference in San Francisco focused on the new roles librarians are undertaking and what this might tell us about libraries and librarians in higher education. Fun celebrations included a cake cutting, sealing the ACRL time capsule, and creating a special ACRL 75th anniversary cocktail.

Even though I've been a continuous mem-

ber of ACRL for over half of its 75-year history (amazing, isn't it?), I learned a great deal about ACRL's history and many accomplishments during the anniversary year. ACRL is an organization whose members are predominately individuals, and it could not accomplish all it did without member volunteers. Conversely no individual member could begin to match what ACRL has done.

This brings me to this essay's title: "It takes an association." What do I mean by this phrase, reworked from a book by the former First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton?<sup>2</sup> Like a village, an association is made up of many people with

different talents. ACRL brings together the energy, passion, perseverance, experience, and generosity of diverse members. As it takes a village to raise a child, it takes an association to advance learning and promote scholarship on a broad scale. As individual librarians, ACRL members make significant contributions to their institutions and to the profession. But I would argue that it takes an association to:

- **Create standards.** ACRL released its first standard within a decade of becoming an ALA division. Since the 1950s ACRL has provided



Pamela Snelson is college librarian at Franklin and Marshall College, email: [pamela.snelson@fandm.edu](mailto:pamela.snelson@fandm.edu)

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academic librarians with flexible standards based on firm principles. For a standard to be useful, it must have authority. ACRL provides libraries and librarians with standards that have been formulated by a committee, reviewed by the ACRL membership, shared with complementary associations, and then promulgated to the higher education community. There is gravitas behind the Standards for Libraries in Higher Education, and libraries use them to plan and assess.

- **Advocate change.** A major activity of ACRL during the 1960s was the promotion of federal legislation for grants in aid to college and university libraries for the acquisition of books and periodicals. In the technology area, ACRL advocated for greater access for schools, public libraries, and museums to the National Science Foundation Network (NSFNET) in the 1990s. ACRL advocated on behalf of academic librarians and higher education users as both the Next Generation Internet Initiative and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, along with other important information-related legislation, which worked its way to U.S. Congress. Currently ACRL is focusing on access to federally funded research and curbing government surveillance.

- **Encourage research and scholarship.** ACRL's publishing program is as old as the association itself. *College and Research Libraries* published its first issue in 1939 and continues today as a highly ranked, open access journal. As an early supporter of open access, ACRL created the freely available Scholarly Communications Toolkit to assist librarians in promoting a shared system of research and scholarship. Seventeen ACRL conferences have provided a forum for research and professional discussion.

- **Connect people.** More than 70 years ago, an amendment to the bylaws authorized state chapters of ACRL—a recognition of the value of local networking. In 1978, ACRL was the first ALA division to host a national conference separate from ALA with no business meetings. Through its committees, communities of practice, interest groups, and discussion groups, ACRL brings colleagues together to create a network of values and relationships. I

know I am not the only person to have developed lifelong friends through ACRL activities.

- **Support librarian development.** During this recent anniversary, ACRL organized a fundraising campaign to solicit funds for 75 additional scholarships for attendance at the ACRL 2015 Conference. The response from membership was overwhelming. ACRL awarded a record-breaking 179 scholarships. Scholarships were awarded in six categories, including early- and mid-career librarians, support staff, and Spectrum Scholar travel grants amounting to a total of \$112,995. Funding for 75 of these scholarships (more than \$56,000 in value) was raised through the ACRL 75th Anniversary Kick Start the Future Scholarship Campaign. Mentoring both new and mid-career librarian has been a longstanding ACRL tradition. Notably, the College Library Director Mentor program, now in its 23rd year, has roots in ACRL's College Libraries Section. For more than 50 years RBMS has sponsored a conference for rare books, special collection, archives, and manuscripts librarians. The Dr. E. J. Josey Spectrum Scholar Mentor Program, founded in 2003, recruits and maintains academic and research librarians to serve as mentors to ALA Spectrum Scholars. Many sections offer mentoring programs for their members. In addition, ACRL regularly sponsors workshops, webinars, and online seminars.

It is the ACRL membership that keeps the association strong and vibrant. Every academic and research librarian has benefited and continues to benefit from all that ACRL has accomplished. I would like to extend my appreciation and congratulations to all current and past members of ACRL for their participation to create and sustain ACRL, and thus academic libraries and librarianship.

## Notes

1. Steven J. Bell, Lorcan Dempsey, and Barbara Fister, *New Roles for the Road Ahead: Essays Commissioned for the ACRL's 75th Anniversary* (Chicago, IL: ACRL, 2015).
2. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village: and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). *ZZ*