

Meet the candidates for ALA president

Cast your vote in the election this spring

by Martin Gomez and Sarah Ann Long

The ACRL Board of Directors posed the following questions to the candidates for ALA president and *C&RL News* is pleased to publish their responses. Each candidate was given 1,200 words in which to offer a brief opening statement and to respond to the questions; their responses are identified under each of the six questions.

Martin Gomez

I want to be the next president of the American Library Association. What I offer you is vision, experience, and a commitment to all libraries. Over the past 21 years, I've earned my experience and found my vision on the job and in my work in ALA.

As ALA enters the 21st century, I believe we should seek new external partnerships and cultivate new library leaders for the association. I want to join you, the members of ACRL, in promoting information literacy in the age of technology. Your voice is needed in ALA. It will contribute to the association's influence in national and international arenas, where it is playing an ever larger role.

Sarah Ann Long

I appreciate the opportunity to share my views with the membership of ACRL.

As a former academic librarian, I know the important role of the college and university library. I am aware of the issues and



Martin Gomez



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concerns confronting academic librarianship, including the effective use of new technology in teaching and learning, preservation, collection development, copyright revision and intellectual property, academic freedom, cultural diversity, and adequate financial support. As president of ALA, I would work closely with the officers and Board of ACRL to further the division's goals and its outstanding programs and member services.

Questions for ALA candidates

1. What is your position on the acceptability of ALA divisions, such as ACRL to establish and publicly promulgate their own positions on issues important to the profession and germane to their own interests? Should divisions be encouraged to establish relationships, independent of ALA, with other relevant organizations, such as AAHE, for example?

About the authors

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Gomez: The ALA has a very unique operating structure. ALA divisions are governed by the provisions of the Constitution and Bylaws of the Association. Divisions also have the authority to adopt a constitution and/or bylaws which "shall not be in conflict with those of the Association" (Art. VI, Sec. 9a). We also have an adopted set of policies that dictate our practices and a unique operating agreement that spells out roles and responsibilities between the 11 ALA divisions and the larger association.

The *ALA Policy Manual* is very specific about this relationship. The preamble of Section 6.4 (dealing with divisions) states that ALA "is one association with indivisible assets and a single set of uniform administrative, financial and personnel policies and procedures. It is governed by one Council, from which its Executive Board is elected, and is managed by and Executive Director who serves at the pleasure of that Board." In effect, we are one association with 11 voices.

Yet, elsewhere in the constitution, it is clear that divisions do have significant latitude in establishing relationships with external organizations, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors of the division and in accordance with the policies of the association, (see Art. VI, Sec. 2). Ultimately, however, the corporate and legal entity for any activities of any division is the ALA. Because divisions are "entities" of the association, I believe that it is impossible for a division to have a relationship with any organization, independent of ALA.

Nonetheless, working within this framework, it is possible for divisions to establish relationships with other relevant outside organizations, subject to the policies of ALA. In my opinion, this only becomes an issue if and when that relationship becomes a fiduciary and/or legal liability for the association. Divisions should be encouraged to actively pursue external relationships that help further the goals of the association.

Long: As the administrator of a cooperative library system consisting of over 600 member libraries of all types and sizes, I am very sensitive to the need for autonomy and good communication in the development of policy. Also, my experience as an academic, public, and school librarian provides me with

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an awareness of the different perspectives that exist in an organization as complex as the ALA.

ALA's strength is in the diversity and expertise of its membership, and I believe it is important that its divisions and units have the opportunity to take positions on issues pertinent to their members. It is also important that ALA's divisions and units have the flexibility to establish liaison and communication with organizations having similar goals and interests. These partnerships are of increasing importance in advancing standards and cooperative programs at the national and international level.

There is also a need to coordinate position statements to ensure they are consistent with ALA's policies, as well as the policies of other divisions and units. In the same fashion, representation needs to be coordinated to avoid duplication. These are matters that can be effectively addressed by the divisions and ALA, and resolved in the best interest of the membership.

It would be one of my goals to ensure that ALA's divisions and units have the flexibility to take the initiative on matters of concern to their members, and that representatives from the divisions and units also contribute to the formulation of ALA's policies and the selection of representatives to organizations relevant to the divisions and units.

2. A strong ALA with a centralized focus provides great strength to the profession. However, ALA is made up of 11 divisions. What should be the appropriate input from the divisions to ALA in influencing policy and procedure? How should this input be formalized and obtained?

Gomez: The formal process for divisions to have input on ALA policy is spelled out in the policy manual, Section 6.4.III.C. In theory, through this process, the nuances of the operating agreement can be fine-tuned.

Other methods exist including formal communication between division leaders and ALA staff, the Executive Board, and the Council via their division councilor.

Recently, the Executive Board issued a working document entitled "New Visions: Beyond ALA Goal 2000" to membership for review and comment. The purpose of this document is to provide a new vision beyond Goal 2000, the formal five-year initiative of the association. This process, although in its early stages, should provide an additional opportunity for direct-member input into the future direction of the association.

My experience on the Executive Board has demonstrated to me that it is no easy task to assimilate the desires, wishes, and requests of the 11 divisions, countless units, roundtables, and thousands of members. The Executive Board has established formal "liaison" relationships with many of our internal units, offices, and divisions, as well as chapters and affiliates. This is one way for the Executive Board to be better informed about the concerns of our members. One solution might be to look at the make up of the Executive Board. What would happen if we replaced the current structure with a "parliamentary-like" structure with representation from divisions, chapters, and other key constituents?

A more direct channel to facilitate communication across division lines may very likely result.

Long: I sometimes think ALA designed itself as a matrix organization before management theorists thought of the concept. Policy concerns can emerge from any part of ALA—membership, council, Executive Board, division, roundtable, ad hoc group X, and when they do they deserve the attention of all appropriate channels, especially Council, the policy-making arm of ALA.

During my service as the president of an ALA division, and my service on the ALA Council, I gained insight into the important role of the divisional representatives on the ALA Council. These divisional councilors

have the opportunity to communicate ALA's proposed policies and initiatives to divisional officers and boards and the ability to voice support or opposition on issues pertinent to divisional membership to the Council.

In addition, I think it is very important that the division presidents and the president of the ALA regularly communicate their goals and initiatives. A synergy can be achieved that will be mutually beneficial to the members. It would be my intent to further strengthen these links through personal meetings at conferences and through ongoing communication via the Internet. A balanced representation from the divisions on ALA's committees and task forces is also important to ensure that policies and programs are drafted that strengthen ALA and divisional membership. It would be my goal to appoint committee and task force members who reflect this balance. Furthermore, I believe that ALA and divisional executive staff are working effectively in concert with one another to improve communication and avoid potential conflict.

3. As we move inevitably into the electronic information age where information can be obtained increasingly without a librarian intermediary, what are your views on the future of librarianship or roles future libraries will play in the information society?

Gomez: This is a discussion that is long overdue. We need a national, if not international, "summit" on the future of librarianship. No organization other than ALA has the clout and vested interest to help us define our roles in shaping the future of the profession. This will require leadership from ALA.

Librarians must continue to function as the human bridge between print and electronic formats. This is the primary role for all librarians in the information age—school librarians, public, academic, and special.

I believe the profession must continue to influence public policy that promotes and protects access to information. This debate needs to take place in local communities as well as in the global arena. Even though there are unmediated resources in cyberspace, I believe that librarians must

also be responsible for developing instruments and guides for the public to find information in this new environment.

Long: The exponential growth of information and the diversity of sources increases the importance of librarianship in the future. While the number of computers and the volume of digital information are dramatically increasing in our society, a majority of the United States and the world's population still do not have convenient access to these resources, or the knowledge to use them. While access and knowledge will certainly increase, the need for professionally trained librarians and information specialists to create, organize, evaluate, acquire, interpret, and manage the new information technology will also expand.

Just as the printing press created a need for a profession to build and organize book collections responsive to the needs of general and specialized users, the explosive growth of the computer and digital information industry underlines the necessity for our profession to further evolve to better evaluate, organize, and access the flood of information being generated. The future of our profession rests on our ability and commitment to invest in the time to prepare ourselves and the next generation to use this technology. Academic librarians play a critical role in this through their role in the education of undergraduate students.

4. It is sometimes argued that in the legal, medical, and engineering fields, professional certification has led to consistent standards of practice and raised the esteem (and pay) of the practitioners in those professions. Should ALA support certification of librarians as having a defined set of skills and body of knowledge? Should ALA be the certifying agency? Why or why not?

Gomez: I support certification. It is the consistent way to maintain professional competencies and standards. Should ALA do this? Under its current corporate structure we cannot grant certification without exposing our association to liability. Because we are a charitable nonprofit educational organization, we need to create a separate organization that has the legal authority and the objective criteria to certify.

Long: I agree that society is demanding greater assurances of the competency of the service professions, and I believe it is inevitable that there will be certification of librarians. In fact, several states already require certification of selected types of librarians. I do not believe there is consensus as to whether certification should be administered at the state or national level, and who should establish the standards.

However, ALA and its divisions should have a role, for they have been very effective in setting national standards, and they have a long history in the development of continuing education programs for the pro-

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profession. Research and discussion on this issue will be essential for ALA, its divisions, and the profession. I would hope to build on the work that has previously been initiated and take the opportunity to further clarify and define our goals and strategies through existing units or a special task force.

5. ALA membership meetings have been unsuccessful as a means for obtaining general membership opinion for several years. There is some feeling that ALA policy, e.g., on filtering, is in opposition to the views of the general membership. As ALA increases in size and complexity, how do you envision that the association will continue to reflect the views of its membership rather than only the views of its member leaders? How can ALA's role in the development of public policy in areas of concern to its members be strengthened?

Gomez: Views of the membership are currently represented through Council, the policy-setting body of the organization.

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published materials from the nineteenth century. These scholarly materials—often not found within the current purview of rare book repositories, archives, and special collections—present a significant and growing intellectual, financial, physical, and administrative challenge to librarians, archivists, and scholars.

The program includes a diverse array of plenary addresses, seminar sessions, paper presentations, and workshops designed to foster the investigation of collection development, preservation, public service, technical service, and administrative issues central to the work of rare book and special-collection librarians and information professionals.

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Council represents membership. If the council is not representing the "will" of the membership, then those who are in opposition to current policy should run for Council, or not reelect those who do not represent their viewpoint. Membership meetings should be held. They are the only forum in which members can communicate with each other and association leaders on issues of concern. The Council's recent action at Midwinter to schedule membership meetings immediately before Executive Board and Council-information sessions will improve attendance at membership meetings.

We've entered the national debate on many fronts. Overall, this is good for the association. The issues that ALA is concerned with are becoming more complex. The arenas in which ALA is participating are wider. Yet ALA's structure is adapting well to the increasing demands from the growing influence of information technology in society.

Focusing on the cogent initiatives in Goal 2000 is the best way for us to strengthen our role in the development of public policy. To remain focused we have to increase the ways in which members communicate. There is no doubt that electronic communication tools will assist us to create strong ties within the library community and among association members. An aggressive outreach, bringing in leaders and participants through our members meetings, conferences

Speakers: Plenary session speakers—including John Cole, Center for the Book, Library of Congress; Nancy Gwinn, Smithsonian Institution Libraries; Alice Schreyer, University of Chicago; Paul Conway, Yale University Library; Sandria Freitag, American Historical Association, and others—will address key issues relating to the development, research use, and preservation of nineteenth-century materials.

Registration is \$175 for ACRL members; \$210 for nonmembers. There is a \$50 late fee for registrations received after May 15.

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and programs, will strengthen our voice in the public policy arena.

Long: ALA's growth and complexity call for creative new initiatives to increase member awareness of the important issues confronting our profession and to grant them greater input and involvement in the formulation of policies and programs reflective of their priorities and views. In that regard, I believe there are several examples that illustrate what good leadership can accomplish. President Barbara Ford has proposed greater use of the Internet to permit more members who are unable to attend ALA conferences to participate in committee work, and the ALA Council has waived existing restrictive policies to permit this to be tested. President-Elect Ann Symons has adopted as her goal the development of a new intellectual freedom statement for the electronic age. To gain broad input from all sectors of the membership, she has initiated an innovative drafting and revision process.

There are many other examples of creative leadership in the ALA, ACRL, and the other ALA divisions. It would be my intent to draw upon these successful programs, as well as my own experience as a multitype library system administrator in gaining input from a diverse and talented constituency. Large and complex organizations are capable of achieving major goals, if they have creative, energetic leadership committed to effective communication with the membership. ■