

# Meet the candidates for ALA President

Vote in the election this spring

by John W. Berry and Claudia B. Sumler

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 they could choose to offer a brief opening statement and to respond to the questions; their responses are identified under each of the five questions.

## Opening statement

**Berry:** As a longtime ALA and ACRL member, I was deeply honored to be asked to stand for election as ALA President in the Spring 2000 election. Many of you will recall my years as LAMA Executive Director (1985–89), my subsequent return to academic librarianship at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), and my current position as a library consortium director for community colleges, colleges and universities in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa.

Serving as both an ALA staff and member leader over the past 20 years has given me a broad knowledge and understanding of ALA's unique organizational structure among major national associations. This knowledge base prepares me well to guide the association in the many challenges and opportunities we face in the first years of the new century.



John W. Berry



Claudia B. Sumler

In my view, during my years in our profession, there has never been a time that is as exciting as now. Though it is difficult to see what lies in store for us in the new century (there is, after all, no "there, there"), I have great optimism that we will emerge a stronger profession in the years ahead. Why? Because we know a lot about information and knowledge management; we have a terrific public service sensibility; we cherish and defend basic human rights like intellectual freedom, freedom and equity of access, and the right to privacy; and we have created many consortia and other cooperative and collaborative organizations for the collective good. In short, we know what we are doing.

My answers to the ACRL Board of Directors five questions appear below. For addi-

## About the authors

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tional information about my views on the state of the profession and the challenges we face, see my comments at [www.ala.org/berry](http://www.ala.org/berry) and link to additional professional and personal information on my own Web site from the ALA site. My personal site includes favorite music, books, films, food and wine, and even a funny story about my mom and the Dr. Laura controversy.

We need to come together and support all library and information professionals. We need to bridge the gaps between public, school, academic, and special librarians. The issues we all face include funding, diversity, professionalism, and filtering. How these issues affect us varies among librarians and the communities we serve, but we all benefit by standing together; and we can make a difference.

And, yes, please do take the time to vote this spring!

*Sumler chose to use her 1,200 words to respond to the questions.*

## **Questions for ALA candidates**

**1. What is your position on ALA divisions, such as ACRL, in establishing and publicly promulgating 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?**

**Berry:** ALA policy enables divisions to “speak” for the association within their respective areas of responsibility. Policy 9.1 also speaks to establishing formal relationships with other organizations to help ALA achieve its mission to promote and improve library and information services and librarianship. I believe now is the time to encourage ALA units to continue forming collaborative partnerships with organizations, such as AAHE, whose interests clearly intersect with ACRL’s specifically and to the whole association generally. There is sufficient flexibility in ALA policy to encourage and support these relationships that are increasingly important in a global information marketplace.

**Sumler:** In many ways ALA is similar to a federation of associations, each with their own constituencies, issues and concerns, rather

than a single professional association. However, ALA is a single legal entity. It is regarded by people not associated with the library profession as the organization that speaks for libraries. I believe that is important that within the association, that the members of all the divisions, roundtables, committees should find a forum for an open exchange of viewpoints.

Where else but in one’s professional association can anyone find an opportunity to explore and debate the issues that are important? Part of that exploration and debate is the effort to persuade others to accept a specific solution to a problem or to take a stand on an issue affecting the work we do. However, we must be willing to work towards consensus and recognize that at times there will be compromises. If ALA is viewed by the larger community as an organization where it is impossible to know what position is taken because there are several voices speaking on any given issue, the association will not be taken seriously. The lack of a unified voice will weaken our ability to win the support that we need.

It is my understanding that there are currently provisions to permit different associations within ALA to liaison with other groups and organizations and that affiliation is permitted if approved by ALA Council. Again, it is important that ALA as the overall legal body knows the activities of the various associations especially in relation to other outside organizations. It is also my understanding that divisions within ALA are able to liaison with groups that share common issues.

**2. As President of ALA you will be called upon to speak for librarians on a variety of issues. How do you propose to seek input from the various ALA divisions and to weigh that input to represent effectively and accurately the views of librarians to the general public and the press, to local and state governments, and to the national government?**

**Berry:** ALA presidents speak for the established goals, values, and policy positions of the whole association. I intend to stay in close working contact with ALA unit leaders to be sure I understand what our diverse association is feeling and thinking on the many issues we currently face. We have just begun

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— **Claudia B. Sumler**

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to use electronic networks to share information with members and solicit responses to issues. As ALA president, I intend to hold three open town meetings to encourage and solicit information from members and allow issues to be aired in a public arena. I would also like to see us have a free teleconference town meeting once a year for face-to-face contact with members, particularly those who are unable to attend conferences. My experience on the ALA staff and as a councilor-at-large have helped me build a network of state, regional, national, and international relationships that will serve ALA well.

**Sumler:** The day-to-day business of ALA is effectively run by the headquarters staff. The staff of each division is well aware of the issues that most affect their constituents. In addition, each division or round table has elected leaders who are also knowledgeable of the issues and concerns. At the state and local levels, input may be sought from state librarians, executive directors, or elected officers of state associations.

When called upon to speak for librarians, I would rely on that expertise to give me needed background information and to assist in framing the most appropriate answer or testimony. It is also possible that there will be times when it would be more suitable for someone else to respond. If the issue relates directly to academic libraries, it might be more relevant to have the President of ACRL speak than for the President of ALA. It must be recognized however, that when time is a factor in framing a response, it might not always be possible to contact a wide range of people before speaking on an issue.

**3. What do you see as the opportunities and challenges technology offers ALA in**

**allowing members to participate at a distance electronically to obtain information on their views and to engage in the association?**

**Berry:** My current position as a multi-type library consortium director deeply involved in distance (distributed) learning has convinced me that ALA must continue to strengthen our presence to enable all members to participate in ALA activities and continuing education opportunities from their desktops. We have an unparalleled chance in the next few years to fundamentally change the way members interact with one another and with the association as a whole. Electronic voting, member discussions lists, Web-based instruction, and CE are all evolving very rapidly and we need to take full advantage of them. Why not provide listings of all online library courses, costs, requirements, and outcomes? Let's take ALA to the global marketplace.

**Sumler:** I think we are just beginning to explore the possibilities of technology as an aid to improving communication and enabling members to participate in ways not previously possible. There are ongoing lists for ALA Council and for many of the associations and roundtables that currently permit elected officers and committee members to receive information and give feedback. Some divisions have introduced electronic membership for its committees so that people who are interested in being active but are not able to attend conferences can still participate.

The ALA and division Web sites offer another opportunity for requesting information from members on various issues. The possibilities of distance learning for continuing education for librarians is just beginning to be explored. All of these options are still in a rudimentary form, and we are just beginning to learn how to use them effectively. Today, for many librarians, access to the necessary equipment is still sometimes difficult and cost is often an issue. I expect that when we look back five years from now, we will be amazed at how far we have come in effectively using the technologies to involve the membership more fully in division activities.

**4. How would you, as president, lead the ALA in ways that would simultaneously provide the stability that some members seek while also providing the innovation**

**and forward development sought by other members? Is such a balance possible, or will you place more emphasis on one or the other of these aspects (stability or innovation) of ALA's culture?**

**Berry:** The stability that some members seek is found and fostered in the core values we share—the connection of people to ideas; unfettered access to ideas; learning in all its contexts; freedom for all people to form, hold, and express their own beliefs, and respect for the individual person. As an association, we are a purposeful and thoughtful community. We share common goals and work together to strengthen the association, the profession of librarianship, and libraries. At the same time, we have to think innovatively and creatively to be as entrepreneurial as our private sector colleagues. We need to encourage and reward risk-taking. In short, we have to imagine the future we prefer—then build it. We have the professional opportunity this decade to become much more than we are now, or end up becoming less.

**Sumler:** We are living in a time of rapid change. To expect a sheltering stability in a professional association while at the same time expecting association leaders to be proactive in ensuring continuing existence and growth will lead to a “no win” situation. If librarians expect libraries to exist by mid-century and if we hope to continue to deliver services that reflect our core values, ALA has to be at the forefront in encouraging innovation and professional growth.

At the same time we need to recognize our heritage and know that where we are going is connected to our past. I think it is important that the leaders at all levels of the association be grounded in the various phases of change. A basic ground rule of leading during times of change is the need for constant communication so that concerns are heard and addressed. As President of ALA, I would work with all committees, divisions, and round tables to make sure that the membership knows how and why we are changing for the future.

**5. In our environment of rapid change, what are your views on the future of librarianship and future roles libraries will play in the information society? How will ALA continue to support librarians and libraries and to attract highly capable indi-**

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**—John W. Berry**

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**viduals to our profession? Why would a librarian want to join ALA in 2010?**

**Berry:** A decade from now, as an association of library/information/knowledge workers, ALA will be a leader among associations in electronic participation of its large and increasingly diverse membership. All library and knowledge workers will be engaged in online and other distributed learning and teaching from a wide range of sources, including ALA and its constituent units. ALA's federated structure and its conference venues, though more streamlined and technology-based, will still be recognizable to today's members.

In terms of recruitment, we need to do at least these three things. First, use the \$3 million “windfall” from ALA's headquarters property to permanently endow the “Spectrum Initiative” that will fund scholarships for people of color and those with disabilities. Secondly, step up our recruitment efforts with a focus on community college and university students, and reach down into the K–12 level in a sustained campaign to demonstrate the attractiveness of our share of the information marketplace. And finally, establish a kind of service corps of retiring librarians who will mentor younger members of the profession so we don't entirely lose the expertise we have built over the last four decades.

Librarians and other information workers are indeed being drawn to the private sector due to higher salaries and seemingly attractive entrepreneurial environments. This will continue, but will likely slow as competition in e-commerce settles out—that is, many companies will not survive in a very competitive marketplace. We need to instill the value of libraries as an essential public good unlike any other resource. This is not an easy sell in the emerg-

ing global information economy. At the same time, we must raise salaries to stop the "brain drain" of some of our best and brightest recruits.

**Sumler:** I believe that librarians have important roles to play in the future. No matter how sophisticated computers become, the people who will be the decision makers will be the ones who are best educated. Libraries' role in education will continue beginning with pre-reading programs for babies at the local public library. Studies are showing that the best-prepared students are those who have access to a fully developed school media program. College libraries will still link students and faculty with the full range of resources they need. Lifelong learning is a current reality.

Technology will mean that education will be available in a variety of formats at a variety of locations, including libraries. Instead of dispensing information, librarians are becoming trainers, demonstrating how to best access the wide range of resources available as well as how to evaluate what is found. In a world of

too many choices, librarians will be the information mediators, working in person or via computer to assist customers in locating the information they need. The day of 24/7 live reference service is on the horizon.

As wonderful as home computer access is, people are still gregarious. The library as community center will expand in both real time and by virtual reality. Libraries will continue to exist although the delivery of services will change. The people who will lead our profession as libraries evolve are the ones we have yet to hire. It is imperative that we become aggressive in our efforts to recruit a diverse workforce with a variety of backgrounds and skills to shape the libraries of tomorrow.

It is important that as libraries change, ALA is ready to adapt to what the new professionals will want from a professional association. The way people want to interact with ALA may change, but I expect that the desire for professional development, for a united voice on the issues that are important, and for communicating with others who have a common interest will not. ■

## ACRL members running for ALA Council

The following ACRL members are either nominated or petition candidates for ALA councilor in the spring 2000 elections. ACRL members are encouraged to vote for these candidates to increase ACRL's voice in ALA's affairs.

**Kathleen Bethel**, African American Studies Librarian, Northwestern University.

**Tyrone H. Cannon**, dean of the University Library, University of San Francisco.

**James V. Carmichael Jr.**, associate professor, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

**John W. Collins III**, librarian, Harvard University.

**Lynn Silipigni Connaway**, vice president of research and library systems, netLibrary, Inc.

**Bernard Fradkin**, dean of Learning Resources, College of DuPage Library, Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

**Julie G. Huiskamp**, coordinator of learning resources, Northeast Iowa Community College.

**Thomas Leonhardt**, director of the Library, Oregon Institute of Technology.

**Beverly P. Lynch**, professor, Graduate School of Education & Information, University of California, Los Angeles.

**Steve R. Marquardt**, dean of Libraries, South Dakota State University.

**Richard W. Meyer**, director of the Library, Trinity University.

**Maureen D. Pastine**, university librarian, Temple University.

**Sarah M. Pritchard**, university librarian, University of California, Santa Barbara.

**James Rettig**, university librarian, University of Richmond.

**Larry Romans**, head of Government Information Service, Vanderbilt University.

**Mark Rosenzweig**, chief librarian, Reference Center for Marxist Studies.

**David A. Tyckoson**, head of reference, California State University, Fresno.

**Elayne S. Walstedter**, outreach librarian, Fort Lewis College.

**Thomas Wilding**, director of libraries, University of Texas at Arlington. ■

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