

Education for professional academic librarianship

Prepared by the ACRL Professional Education Committee

A statement describing the nature of professional work

The mission of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) of the American Library Association (ALA) is to foster the profession of academic and research librarianship and to enhance the ability of academic and research libraries to serve the library and information needs of current and potential library users effectively.

This statement describes the nature of professional work. It is intended to be useful in the following ways: to serve as a supporting document for the *Standards of Accreditation of Library and Information Studies Programs*, to assist faculties in designing curricula and advising students; to aid students in understanding the demands and expectations of academic librarianship; and to aid librarians and providers of post-graduate professional education in understanding the role of various agencies in providing career-long professional education.

The nature of academic librarianship

As professionals, academic librarians are characterized by the attributes identified in accepted and tested definitions of a professional. In addition to mastery of specific areas of expertise and mastery of complex tasks, academic librarians are expected to use the principles, concepts, analytical techniques, and methodologies of librarianship to identify and address problems facing the library and its user community and to plan for the future. Innovations in the ways scholars work and inventions of

new technologies and new text forms challenge academic librarians to accept new responsibilities and to design new requirements for themselves.

Academic librarians understand the ethos, aims, and aspirations of higher education in general. As members of specific academic communities, they understand the mission and goals of their own institution, they know how their library fits in the institutional design for supporting scholarship, and they know how to manage the library as an effective, integral part of the local structure. They specialize in understanding information needs and uses in academic environments and the nature of scholarly communication so that they can support, and participate in, the processes of teaching and research. They play a major role in educating faculty and students in modes of access to information resources, including instruction in the use of relevant technologies.

Academic librarians understand, anticipate, and participate in the communicative processes of research, teaching, and learning in the academic disciplines and professional schools. Their knowledge of scholarly communication embraces understanding of its components, including the creation, production, publication, evaluation, distribution, and use of texts. As experts on the nature of the college and university as unique information use environments, they serve as consultants and instructors to scholars at every level who are information seekers.

Academic librarians are experts in the structure of knowledge as reflected in recorded texts. The term "recorded texts" is a generic reference to information which may be textual, pictorial, or numeric, stored in a variety of formats such as manuscripts, print, microforms, and electronic

Development of the statement began under the leadership of Patricia Swanson, chair of the Professional Education Committee (1989–91), and was completed during Keith Swigger's tenure as chair (1991–92). Members of the committee who participated in writing the document were Victoria Hanawalt, Camila Aliv, Celia Hales-Mabry, Emily Mobley, Rochelle Ballard, and Charlotte Hess.

media. Academic librarianship is concerned with selecting, organizing, describing, preserving, and disseminating texts or information as well as with designing effective systems of access to texts and information. Academic librarians plan, develop, and use technologies appropriate to their responsibilities.

The education of academic librarians

Education for the profession of academic librarian is a career-long process that begins in master's degree programs in library and information studies. In laying the foundation of a librarian's career, professional programs are responsible for teaching techniques for analyzing information in needs in particular environments; teaching principles related to the collection, preservation, retrieval, and use of information; and developing an individual's understanding of the nature and use of information technologies. Library schools are also responsible for educating librarians in the history and ethics of their profession and its development in the context of contemporary society.

Graduates of library school programs should have a broad understanding of the academic environment and the function of libraries within that environment. As professionals, librarians must then meet the challenge of maintaining and developing their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Major changes in higher education, the rapid development of library technologies, and substantial expansion of the tools and services offered through academic libraries are factors which combine to make continuing education imperative.

For academic librarians, post-graduate professional education might include pursuit of graduate degrees in other disciplines.

Continuing education and training are also provided through programs offered by universities and professional associations, and through informal self-education. Employers, professional associations, and graduate degree programs build on the career foundation established in library schools and offer academic librarians the opportunity to apply principles in particular settings, to maintain knowledge of state-of-the-art information technologies and their applications, and to acquire more complex knowledge and advanced skills. As academic librarians

Developing the statement

ACRL's Professional Education Committee prepared the statement "Education for Academic Professional Librarianship" to serve academic libraries and schools of library and information studies. The *Standards for Accreditation, 1992* note that "Educational policy statements are available from relevant professional organizations. Reference to these materials by schools as they plan, develop, and evaluate their programs is essential.

"Education for Academic Professional Librarianship" was endorsed by the ACRL Board of Directors at its 1992 Midwinter Meeting.

move to positions which call for increased responsibilities, further specialization, and greater expertise, all of these agencies play a role in providing appropriate educational options. In selecting career-long educational opportunities, the professional judgment and dedication of an individual academic librarian are also essential elements.

ACRL standards, statements, and guidelines relating to specific aspects of college and university librarianship may provide additional valuable guidance in identifying competencies academic librarians should have and the various functions academic librarians perform (e.g., "Standards for College Libraries," 1986, and "Standards for University Libraries," 1989). ■

Proceedings now available!

Proceedings from the Sixth National Conference of ACRL: Academic Libraries Achieving Excellence in Higher Education is now available from ALA. It includes 52 refereed contributed papers and reports on 36 programs offering practical examinations and solutions to current academic library problems. Provides complete text of provocative presentations by Julian Bond (leader for social change), W. David Penniman (president of the Council on Library Resources), Paul Saffo (technology consultant and futurist), and Catharine R. Stimpson (women's studies scholar and academic administrator). Inspiring and informative, these proceedings reflect the vitality of the conference and the variety of issues explored.

Edited by Tom Kirk, the 522-page proceedings (ISBN: 0-8389-7622-0) can be ordered from: ALA Order Department, (800) 545-2433, press 7. Cost: \$49.95; ACRL members \$44.95.