

# Linke and Walter share plans for ACRL

Cast an informed vote in the election this spring

**E**d. note: *C&RL News* offered candidates for vice-president/president-elect, Erika Linke and Scott Walter, this opportunity to share their views with the membership. Although many of the issues facing ACRL are discussed informally at meetings, we want to use this venue to provide a national forum to all members. We hope this will assist you in making an informed choice when you vote in the election this spring.

## ERIKA LINKE

When first asked to accept the nomination to stand for election as vice-president/president elect of ACRL, I was honored and excited. Those thoughts quickly gave way to some serious thinking about the purpose of ACRL, its vision, what it means to lead this organization, and why I think I could make a contribution to its future. At the most basic level, the value of ACRL is found in the interactions among its members. This is obvious, but that does not make it any less important. The key themes in *Charting Our Future: ACRL Strategic Plan 2020* outline exciting and critical directions for our future. I believe that I have the experience, commitment, and enthusiasm to work with you to build on our strengths and shape our future.

ACRL is distinguished by a multifaceted organizational structure that creates opportunities for members to interact, learn, grow, and contribute. Members find like-minded colleagues to share their professional interests, aspirations, successes, and sometimes setbacks. For me, as for most of you, the professional colleagues met



Erika Linke



Scott Walter

and friendships established are important personally and professionally. The variety of skills within the membership enables us to advance our professional development through education, conference programming, and publication. The association provides support and infrastructure that brings members together and increases member effectiveness. These valuable interactions may be the greatest asset that any professional organization has to offer its members. But are they sufficient, in themselves, to ensure a vibrant future for academic libraries and librarianship?

From my office window at Carnegie Mellon University, I can see a recently installed sculpture on campus entitled *Walking to the Sky* by Jonathan Borofsky. In this large work, ten people of various types walk toward and up a large pole that juts from the ground, almost straight into the air, effortlessly striding up its slick surface in a gravity-defying manner. Jokes are easily made about this unusual image, but it also strikes a positive chord with most people. At the Web site for the Manhattan

installation of this piece, the artist states that the sculpture is a celebration of the human potential for discovering who we are and where we need to go.<sup>1</sup>

The ACRL strategic plan is the *Walking to the Sky* for academic and research librarians. It is part inspiration and part direction. It sets a path for where we need to go. It lays out an ambitious agenda for the association. This plan, combined with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency, sets the stage for ACRL to continue having a purposeful impact on academic and research libraries and librarians, and to further our engagement with higher education and research.

I have heard many strategic plans for libraries, for universities, or for similar organizations, criticized for containing too long a list of goals and objectives. But ACRL's plan is appropriately ambitious. These are times of rapid and profound changes in higher education. Our plan can help us to shape those changes. Our strategic plan, developed with strong member input, reflects the variety of talents and hopes within the membership. It can engage each member in some way and, because of that, it is capable of directing the association today and building for its future. Our association's plan is complemented with a strong membership base, organizational structure, and action-oriented governance that transforms the plan from paper into action.

ACRL must continue to lead academic and research librarians and libraries by its chosen activities and emphases. Challenges and opportunities need to be addressed and taken up as they arise. I think these highlights from the ACRL strategic plan address both the need for continuity and change. ACRL will:

Continue fostering personal and professional aspirations of librarians by providing opportunities for learning, development, networking, and leadership.

Continue to maintain high-quality professional development, education, and publication opportunities.

Position librarians as partners in developing the new future for learning.

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Every day at institutions of higher education, librarians make a difference. ACRL is their partner, a source of expertise and advice, an association they can turn to for advocacy, affirmation, learning, and growth.

—**Erika Linke**

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Use technology smartly to manage association activities, foster member participation, and facilitate communication and organizational transparency.

Engage in outreach both to attract new librarians to academic librarianship and to foster diversity in academic librarianship and the association.

Promote and offer learning opportunities that enhance effectiveness on campus and in higher education.

Help to inform campus communities about scholarly communication, copyright, and the library's role in learning.

Position librarians as key partners in new, more sustainable approaches to research and its dissemination.

Be an incubator for library leadership.

Value partnership with other campus services and with standards and accreditation agencies as advocacy for public policy.

Celebrate our accomplishments and keep focused on the big issues.

I think these are exciting goals. The challenges and opportunities are many, and I have confidence that through our efforts we can address them. My personal confidence comes from serving ACRL in several capacities, as a member of the Board of Directors, as a member and then chair of the Copyright Committee, and again as member and then chair of the Budget and Finance committee. I am well acquainted with financial matters through additional service on the Friends Fund Committee and through chairing the Long-Term Investment Fund Task Force. I have experienced ACRL as a dues-paying member, a committee and section member, committee chair, board member, and a chapter officer. Each role has given me a different

experience and a different perspective of our association. These activities have helped me to develop an overview of the breadth and variety within our organization. I have been active in other library organizations such as PALINET, where I currently serve on the board of trustees and as a member of both the executive and finance committees. From my association with PALINET as well as service to ACRL regionally and nationally, I know firsthand that collaboration, commitment, and building trust are crucial to leading an organization. I can bring to ACRL leadership a strong belief in the importance of academic and research librarians, a personal commitment to ACRL, and a desire to further the association's vision for the future.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to work with a few colleagues here in western Pennsylvania and West Virginia to resuscitate an inactive ACRL chapter. We were certain we could get it restarted; we were uncertain about its long-term viability. Within the first two years we knew that our chapter filled a need in our region. We listened to inactive members. We heard what they needed and wanted. Through collaboration and hard work, we brought the chapter back to life and then stepped aside so others could take on leadership roles. I learned several things from this experience. The interactions we value so much in our association are fragile. They require maintenance. We must continually ask ourselves if yesterday's procedures suit today's needs.

If elected vice-president/president-elect, I would work with the Board to establish an agenda linked to the ACRL strategic plan, while taking into account changes in the library environment and incorporating member input. The academic and research environment faces challenges from many quarters, and these challenges are opportunities for academic and research librarians. We need to be poised to respond effectively to emerging issues. That being said, I would reiterate my commitment to advocacy for academic and research libraries in higher

education and wherever our voice is needed. Scholarly communication is an area that calls for our attention and effort; research and scholarship are at the heart of academic libraries. Succession planning in the broadest sense—not for the association, but for attracting the next generation of academic and research librarians—is important to me. What role can or should ACRL play in ensuring the development and success of a new generation of librarians? Strengthening the academic and research librarian community is crucial for advocacy, is important for drawing new librarians into our community, and is essential to forging our future.

Every day at institutions of higher education, librarians make a difference. ACRL is their partner, a source of expertise and advice, an association they can turn to for advocacy, affirmation, learning, and growth. I want to lead ACRL by fostering an environment that encourages member participation, provides learning opportunities, addresses the critical issues, and shapes the future of academic librarianship.

#### **SCOTT WALTER**

There is a moment at the end of the film, *Castaway*, in which Tom Hanks stands at the crossroads. He has fulfilled his last responsibility to his old life, and his future is laid out before him as far as the eye can see. Which path will he take? There are few metaphors as powerful as that of the crossroads—whether your taste runs toward Tom Hanks, Robert Johnson, or Robert Frost—and the crossroads is where we academic librarians find ourselves. Which road will we take?

Academic librarians stand at the crossroads of two institutions facing challenges that come from unprecedented change: the library and the university. Both face the challenge of adapting to new models of teaching and learning, as well as new models of scholarly communication. Both face the challenge of providing traditional services while supporting innovations embraced by their constituents and made possible by tech-

nology. Both face the challenge of meeting new demands made by a diverse community of students and scholars—diverse not only in its racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background, but in its learning styles, preferred media, and approaches to information use. Both face these challenges under the scrutiny that comes with concerns for assessment and accountability. What does the academic library bring to the broader campus missions of teaching, research, and service? How do we communicate our value to our colleagues?

These questions are at the heart of the ACRL Strategic Plan—a plan promoting a vision of our profession as fully integrated into the broader landscape of higher education. In this vision, librarians are recognized as key partners in discussions of student learning, scholarly publishing, digital content, and information technology. In this vision, librarians collaborate with colleagues across campus to prepare members of the academic community for the new literacies required in the 21st century. In this vision, ACRL is a key player in national discussions of higher education and draws strength from the expertise of its members. Our future is laid out before us as far as the eye can see. How do we get there from here?

### **Recruitment and retention**

Recruitment and retention have long been recognized as critical concerns for our profession. How do we recruit new professionals into academic librarianship? How do we recruit them into ACRL? How do we assure that the benefits of membership are plain enough that we retain our members as effectively as we recruit them? We know that we must work every day to demonstrate the value of the academic library to the campus. We must work just as hard to demonstrate the value of ACRL to its members. How do we make certain that ACRL remains relevant in the minds of the information professionals who are its future?

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I believe that ACRL must commit to a broad view of professional development for its members—one that makes them not only expert librarians, but informed contributors to broader academic discourse.

—**Scott Walter**

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The recent ACRL Members Survey tells us that among the most important benefits of membership are opportunities to network with colleagues and opportunities for high-quality professional development programs. ACRL has a tradition of excellence in the design and delivery of professional development programs, but it must make better use of opportunities provided by its chapters to bring programming to the people. For many members, ACRL means the local colleagues, the state chapter, and the regional network, rather than the national organization. ACRL chapters and local groups provide opportunities to deliver programming and member benefits in the environment of greatest significance to librarians. Our chapters and our libraries form a powerful network not only for fostering involvement with ACRL at the national level, but for demonstrating the value of ACRL membership to those who choose to make their mark at the local one. I have had the opportunity to participate in ACRL programs in Ohio, Washington, Oregon, and Kansas, and I believe that we must act locally if we wish to remain strong nationally.

### **New leaders**

ACRL has a tradition of providing strong leadership for our profession. To maintain that tradition, we need new leaders. We need a clear path by which those wishing to lead can gain the experience they need to take the profession into the future. We have seen high-level leadership recruitment and development programs sponsored by ALA (Emerging Leaders) and by other divisions (LAMA's Leaders of the Pack).

These programs meet not only the individual needs of ALA members, but also the need for new voices in the leadership of our profession. How do we encourage the next generation of ACRL leaders and assure that they have opportunities to gain the experience and mentoring they need to succeed?

ACRL must continue its tradition of growing leaders from within by adopting practices from across ALA that support active involvement by our own emerging leaders. We must provide opportunities for leadership from all parts of the association, and we must provide opportunities for mentoring. ACRL must continue its tradition of providing national leadership on issues such as information literacy and scholarly communication, but also be nimble enough to move quickly into leadership roles on the issues that will emerge in the coming years. I have benefited greatly from the opportunity to learn from my colleagues, and I believe that ACRL must commit to an active program of leadership development that embraces multiple forms of leadership and assumes that leadership in our profession comes from the top, the middle, and the grassroots.

### **Navigating the academic environment**

Librarians must lead not only in the library, but across campus. Collaboration is the key. Collaboration has been essential to the success of the information literacy movement, and ACRL members have played leading roles on campus by collaborating on initiatives, including Writing Across the Curriculum, First-Year Experience, and Undergraduate Research. True collaboration requires us to become expert practitioners of new skills that allow us to move smoothly between the library world and the parallel worlds of classroom faculty members, student affairs professionals, and others. How can ACRL support librarians as campus leaders?

ACRL must maintain its focus on collaborating with other professional and

scholarly associations. We need more efforts like those of the First-Year Experience Task Force, focusing on building bridges among the many communities in higher education. ACRL must provide opportunities for members to learn more about the broader academic environment of which we are a part. Such an examination was the focus of my doctoral study in Higher Education Administration, and my successful experience collaborating with academic departments, faculty development programs, and student affairs was enriched by the holistic approach that study allowed. I believe that ACRL must commit to a broad view of professional development for its members—one that makes them not only expert librarians, but informed contributors to broader academic discourse.

### **An engaged association**

In his *Twilight Librarian* blog, Jim Rettig advanced a vision for ALA 2.0 as an association drawing on the interest and expertise of its members to address emergent issues in agile fashion; making creative use of technology to engage members in development of programs, services, and a collective vision of the future. ACRL has made strides in this direction with its support for e-learning and ACRLog, but much remains to do. How can we engage ACRL members in the substantive work of the organization given the realities of limited time and resources for travel to conferences? How can we foster a robust model of virtual membership?

ACRL must provide opportunities for engaging members outside the framework of traditional committees, task forces, and conferences. It must learn from the successful experience of virtual membership in sections like CLS and IS and make use of new media to foster communication between the ACRL grassroots and its state and national leadership. Finally, ACRL must improve the ways in which ideas and initiatives come from the sections and chapters onto the national stage.



## Why me?

I came to librarianship later in life than some, but not as late as others. I am new enough to have taken a Web Design course in library school, but old enough that I can count the number of text messages I have sent. I know what Second Life is, but I don't have an avatar. I have stood at the crossroads and seen my future laid out before me.

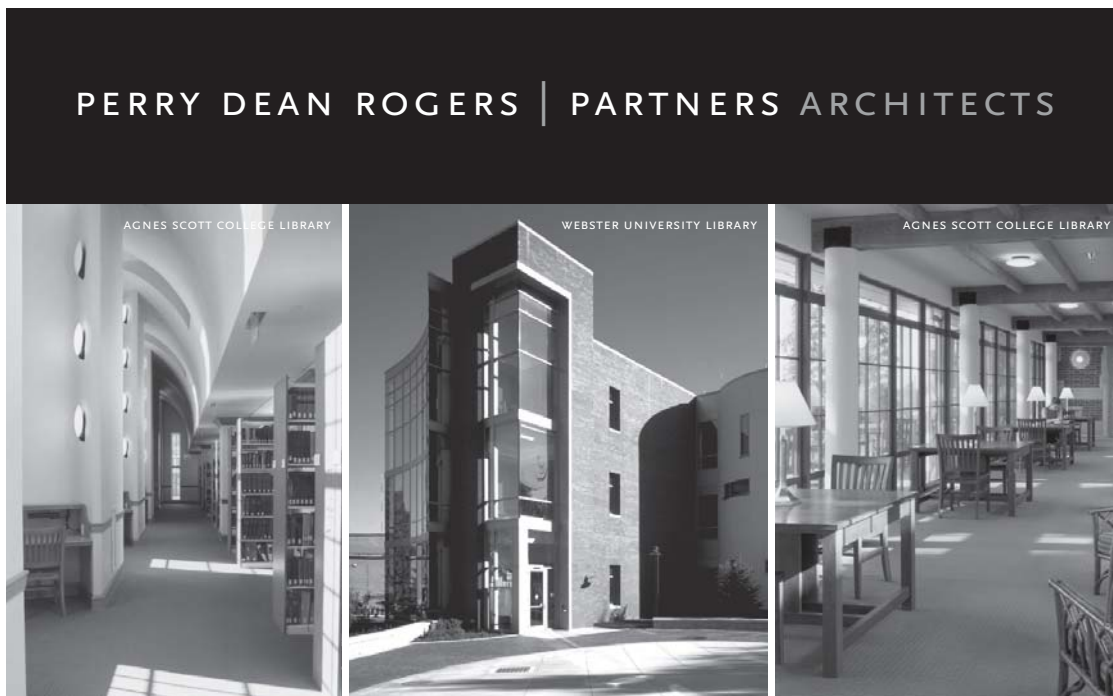
Over the past decade, I have had the opportunity to contribute to the work of national initiatives, such as the Institute for Information Literacy, the First-Year Experience Task Force, and ACRLog. I have served as IS program committee chair and as EBSS section chair. I have presented at national meetings of ACRL and ALA, and have been an evangelist for collaboration at meetings of AASL and the American Educational Research Association. I have seen the success that comes to those willing to stretch beyond traditional bounds and explore opportunities for working across the curriculum in new ways. I believe that

we make our way toward the future every time we recognize and reward those who are willing to stretch.

I have identified a handful of key issues on which I would focus, if elected: recruitment and retention, professional and leadership development, active engagement with the grassroots of our organization, and new models for communication, collaboration, and participation. I look forward to working with the ACRL Board and the members of committees, sections, and chapters to identify initiatives and programs we should support in order to shape our future. I am honored to have been asked to stand for election, and I believe that my experience across a variety of institutions of higher education and a number of ACRL committees and initiatives will allow me to meet the challenges of office.

## Note

1. [www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/04/borofsky\\_04.html](http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/projects/04/borofsky_04.html). *WR*



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