

Nancy Davenport and Jim Rettig

# Meet the candidates for ALA president

Vote in the election this spring

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

## Opening statement

**Davenport:** Thanks for the opportunity to address your specific questions and to seek your support for my candidacy. Most of you know that I have spent the majority of my career in the Library of Congress and in its Congressional Research Service—an organization akin to a university faculty but without a student body, so most of my work has been in the research setting. As president of the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) I worked closely with academic librarians inviting them to serve on CLIR's advisory committees, to speak at the CLIR meetings and seminars, to publish with CLIR, and through the many conferences where I have spoken. And, I'll see you in Baltimore for the ACRL National Conference when I'm part of a panel session exploring disruptive technology—and we don't mean Google!

**Rettig:** I am honored to be a candidate for ALA president. In my 30-plus years as a librarian and an ALA member, the association and you, my fellow members, have given me much. Thanks to my participation in ALA, ACRL, LAMA, and RUSA, I have been able to stay current with trends and innovations in



Nancy Davenport



Jim Rettig

academic librarianship and the field at large. I have contributed to these organizations through committee service, elected office, publications, book reviews, and conference presentations. My contributions include service on the ALA Executive Board and Council, chairing ALA's Publishing and Organization committees, chairing the *C&RL News* Editorial Board, and serving as president of RUSA.

I accepted nomination for president because I am confident I have the talent, the commitment, and the knowledge to represent all ALA members as your spokesperson. More significantly, I accepted this nomination to reciprocate for the many benefits I have received through my participation in ALA. The knowledge, professional development, leadership experiences, and lasting friendships I have gained through ALA have given me a return far greater than my investment. Please

---

Nancy Davenport is president of Nancy Davenport and Associates, e-mail: [nancydavenport@nancydavenport.info](mailto:nancydavenport@nancydavenport.info), and Jim Rettig is university librarian in the Boatwright Memorial Library at the University of Richmond, e-mail: [jrettig@richmond.edu](mailto:jrettig@richmond.edu)

© 2007 Nancy Davenport and Jim Rettig

visit my campaign Web site at [rettigforala.org](http://rettigforala.org) to learn more about my candidacy, my platform, and me.

I ask for your vote.

### **1. What do you see as the top three challenges our profession faces?**

**Davenport:** I think that relevance is the primary issue, followed by recruitment and continuing education, particularly technology training.

Most academic libraries have been in a state of transformation for several years as they navigate through the changes that ubiquitous technology has brought to the campus. Re-establishing the position of heart of the campus has led to creating digital curation labs, digital archives for the institution, centers for teaching with technology for faculty instruction, and digital presses for serials and monographs all under the wingspread of the library. These libraries have redefined relevance and reasserted themselves in both the teaching and scholarly communication fields.

Recruitment continues to lag behind retirements in some specialties such as children's librarianship, the impact is more acute than in the academic setting. Recruitment for academic libraries has a natural but mostly untapped pool of talent—the large number of new Ph.D. holders who are not finding teaching slots. Over the three academic years I was involved with the CLIR fellows, we found that more than half of each class decided to get an MLS and stay on the library side of the academy. The CLIR fellows were recent Ph.D. s in the humanities, who were given the opportunity to work in an academic library with a mentoring supervisor following an intensive library boot camp. Recruiting 50 percent of a pool of individuals already schooled in the academic setting shows that this technique can be replicated—perhaps by ACRL?

ACRL does a terrific job of looking at how to keep its members abreast of technology and its multitude of applications in the academic setting, but with the very long lead times that ALA requires for conference planning are we a couple of years behind? What about those academic librarians who don't come to confer-

ence? This is where we must continue to deliver content to members—using technology to teach technology.

**Rettig:** The top three challenges librarianship faces are recruitment, retention, and participation. The first two of these are clearly challenges; the third has great potential to be a solution.

In October 2006 ALA released its Diversity Counts report ([www.ala.org/ala/ors/diversitycounts/divcounts.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/diversitycounts/divcounts.htm)). Data in the report point to the probable retirement by 2020 of approximately half of librarians. Our profession-wide succession planning must include vigorous recruitment efforts to attract new people, both recent college graduates and career changers. We offer a cornucopia of opportunities to use one's talents in a field in which lifelong learning, both for those we serve and for us, is a way of life. As we promote librarianship's opportunities, our message needs to provide a realistic view of job opportunities. Retirements will be phased over an extended period and opportunity may include relocation.

Diversity Counts reveals the retention challenge: librarians under age 45 comprised almost a third, 30%, of the total for that category in 2000, yet accounted for 44% of credentialed librarians leaving the work force. Succession planning must include retention.

Participation can contribute powerfully to retention. We need to engage at-risk library workers under age 45. We can do this by providing them with new options for meaningful participation in the profession through our association. We also need to let them develop those options from the grassroots up and devise ways to bring their professional contributions to the widest possible audience through our time-tested organizational structures. A truly inclusive, vibrant ALA will accommodate new approaches that complement committee service and elected office.

### **2. Please share what leadership skills you would bring to ALA to lead and move the association forward given those challenges.**

**Davenport:** Within a work environment I've lead groups as small as 17 and as large as 300 plus—each size calling for different

skills. At ALA I've been elected to Council (as a petition candidate), to the Executive Board, and have held leadership slots in multiple divisions and roundtables, chairing the one for federal librarians. I know how the organization works. And, lastly, I've served as one of the deans of the Frye Leadership Institute during the last two sessions. The Frye Institute brings together a cohort of midcareer academic librarians and academic computing specialists for a two-week seminar on the leadership challenges facing the top levels of academic administration.

**Rettig:** In numerous articles and conference presentations since 1978, I have contributed to the rethinking reference movement. I have posited new models and suggested answers; but my most important contribution has been raising questions to further the conversation and bring more voices into it. I have developed pertinent questions through listening to other librarians, examining the environment, and looking to the future. These concurrent processes—listening, identifying trends, looking forward—are essential to leadership. Through these processes I have identified creation of new options for meaningful participation as both a challenge and a promising remedy.

Speaking from principled conviction is another leadership essential, one I have demonstrated through public stands in the online *Rettig on Reference* review column and its predecessor, articles, presentations, and on ALA Council.

### **3. Strategic planning has been a major initiative for ACRL, and now is part of the ALA Board's everyday life.**

#### **a. What experience have you had in the strategic planning process whether at your library, institution, ALA, and/or another venue?**

**Davenport:** Strategic planning is a part of every organization's life! Like Jim, I was on the ALA Executive Board when we worked with division leaders to formulate *Ahead to 2010*, and I hope to lead the next planning process. At the Library of Congress, we used cascading strategic plans—first at the institutional level,

then at the Service Unit or departmental level, then at the level of the directorates, each level becoming more detailed and specific in the goals to be achieved. At CLIR, the strategic plan was the basis for the work to be commissioned and published, the budget allocations, and it set the fund raising priorities. I've been deeply involved in strategic planning for the last ten years.

**Rettig:** Strategic planning is ubiquitous in academe. At the University of Richmond I have served on a strategic planning committee that looked at the academic programs, have worked with my library colleagues on a strategic plan, and currently serve on the SACS Leadership Team. Preparation for SACS reaccreditation has much in common with strategic planning.

In ALA I participated every step of the way as we developed *ALA Ahead to 2010*—from the initial solicitation of ideas from members, through a member planning retreat, through Executive Board approval, and through Council adoption. At that retreat I presented a synthesis of member comments that led to inclusion of the Organizational Excellence goal.

#### **b. How can ALA work with its divisions like ACRL more closely to advance ALA 2010?**

#### **c. How can ALA help ACRL advance its Strategic Plan?**

**Davenport:** I'm going to answer these two questions together as I think there is a close relationship between the two. The best way I know for ALA to help the divisions succeed is to regard the divisions as living labs and give them as much latitude as possible. The divisions, each being smaller and focused, are more agile in responding to their members, in trying new things, and parsing the policy implications. ALA learns a great deal from the divisions and can then adopt the practices that will scale up. ACRL can help ALA advance its strategic plan by making sure that your members participate in association-wide activities—particularly in diversity recruitment and mentoring, and technology planning. The

Web retreat held in December 2006 benefited greatly from the participation of the division members and staff directors as they had very specific examples of how technology is needed to serve their member groups.

**Rettig:** ALA and the divisions can help each other advance their strategic plans through collaboration. In its broader context *Ahead to 2010* emphasizes goals very similar to ACRL's: learning and education, professional development, the value of our profession, advocacy, membership, influence on public policy. Success will be incremental and multidirectional. Every success by ACRL and other divisions in furthering their strategic plans furthers ALA's plan. The division vice-presidents and the ALA vice-president form a close-knit cohort. As ALA vice-president I will encourage exchanges in this 2007-08 cohort about opportunities for cross-silo synergy among the divisions and ALA's strategic plans and ways these synergies can contribute to 2010's successor.

#### **4. As president of ALA, how would you respond to this comment:**

The time may be right to offer a form of membership for the digital (call it membership 2.0 if you like) age. And while we're at it, we'll need leaders for this digital age who can figure out what makes sense for the future of our professional associations. Perhaps some of them will come from the ranks of virtual members. (StevenB, *New Members for the Digital Age*, ACRL Blog, December 4, 2006)

**Davenport:** This comment is a perfect example of the best place for the divisions to take the lead and test the virtual member concept. Most members are more active within a division or a roundtable than they are in the association as a whole and finding out how virtual members can be recruited into a division and served by it is certainly worthy of experimentation. I do expect that in the long run we will find that active virtual members will participate in person as well, and we need for them to do so bringing with them their conference presentations and local best practices.

**Rettig:** A post on my *Twilight Librarian* blog about characteristics and desiderata for ALA 2.0 ([tinyurl.com/yggua7](http://tinyurl.com/yggua7)) was the catalyst for Steven Bell's November 12, 2006 post about *Making ALA/ACRL Better* on the ACRL blog ([acrlblog.org/2006/11/12/making-alaacrl-better-its-up-to-you/](http://acrlblog.org/2006/11/12/making-alaacrl-better-its-up-to-you/)). Readers' responses prompted him to revisit the topic in the post quoted above.

This citation chain illustrates the way I raise questions that stimulate important conversations about familiar practices. Furthermore, Bell's proposal exemplifies the spirit of my call for bold experimentation throughout ALA to develop new options for meaningful member participation and contribution.

In some ways ACRL's College Libraries Section (CLS) already models this membership option. Nearly all CLS committees do their work between annual conferences virtually. Other divisions and round tables are also experimenting with virtual participation. The next step is experimentation with virtual membership. CLS is well positioned to take the lead in this. I encourage ACRL to support experimentation with a new membership model. If current ALA policies present hurdles to this, as ALA president I would be delighted to work with ACRL and the ALA Membership Committee and others to allow such an experiment to go forward. If we don't try it, we'll never know whether or not it is a good idea for our members and for ALA.

#### **5. ALA prides itself as a strong advocate for diversity,**

**a. What experience have you had with advancing diversity; and**

**b. If elected president, what would you do to increase diversity within our profession?**

**Davenport:** Diversity and recruitment of new librarians will be a focus area if you elect me. My experience in advancing diversity includes having the concept be an integral performance requirement at the Library of Congress and finding ways to make it real in everyday work life. I've served as a mentor to three African-American women who chose me as their mentor. For one we focused on bringing her



to the decision-making meetings to learn how complicated the factors are in running a very large organization. With another we worked on presentation skills from the formal speech to the briefing on the run that an analyst has to do in prepping a Member of Congress. And for the third, we laid out a career path, that incorporated lateral moves to broaden her base of experience on the way up the ladder.

For ALA, I think we are missing an obvious opportunity to recruit for the profession. Twice a year we meeting in major urban areas of the country and we don't host a job fair. This is the perfect opportunity to show college juniors and seniors how exciting, edgy, and rewarding a career can be in the library and information field. I hope ACRL will want to be deeply involved in a fair I'll host in January 2009.

**Rettig:** I have contributed in a variety of ways to the University of Richmond's efforts to increase diversity and cultivate its benefits for our academic community:

I am a member of the university's chapter of Safe Zone ([www.richmond.edu/~safezone/](http://www.richmond.edu/~safezone/)), an organization whose purpose is to reduce homophobia and heterosexism on our campus.

Several years ago when the university launched Common Ground, a major diversity initiative, I volunteered and served on a committee that examined policies, programs, and practices to identify ways in which these either impeded or promoted diversity.

I was one of the first administrators to invite the new head of Common Ground to speak with the staff of a major unit in the university. Library-sponsored diversity programs grew out of this discussion.

The library advertises vacant positions in media that reach underrepresented groups.

Every major library association (ALA, AALL, SLA, MLA, ARL) has an independent diversity initiative. Surely we can achieve more together than apart. As ALA president I will bring these groups together to collaborate on our common goal of developing a library workforce that reflects the diverse society we serve. //

PEABODY PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTES  
ENGAGE | EXPAND | ENHANCE

Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, ranked among the nation's top five schools of education, offers innovative summer programs for education professionals.


## The 2007 Summer Institute for Academic Library Leadership

**July 8-12, 2007**  
**Nashville, Tennessee**


For additional information or to begin an application for consideration as a summer fellow, view our Web site at [peabody.vanderbilt.edu/ALL07.xml](http://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/ALL07.xml) or contact us at (615) 343-6222.

PPI has a limited number of IMLS-funded scholarships available for librarians from underrepresented groups.

*For priority consideration, applications are due by March 1, 2007.*



INSTITUTE of  
Museum and Library  
SERVICES



VANDERBILT  
PEABODY COLLEGE