

Lori A. Goetsch

What is our value and who values us?

The 2009–10 ACRL President's focus

As an academic librarian for nearly 30 years, I have experienced many of the challenges that we face at our home institutions. Today, the current economic climate has created a particularly daunting challenge and a sense of vulnerability. Staff are furloughed, service hours are cut, positions go unfilled, and the acquisition of materials cannot keep up with user needs.

Those of us at public institutions who have experienced declining state support for years see that trend continuing at a more rapid pace. At private institutions, endowments and other funding sources have suffered, creating significant budget reductions. Demands increase for proving our worth and justifying our existence, resulting in efforts on many of our campuses to demonstrate the value of higher education. In turn, we are being asked how libraries and librarians contribute to that value. How will we respond?

Our service ethic and professional expertise are central to answering the question, What is our value and who values us? It may be stating the obvious, but libraries and librarians do not exist for themselves. Our primary goal is to support the institution's mission. As partners in the academic enterprise, we have daily interactions with faculty, staff, and students that offer an unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate our value as members of the university community. Whether it is serving on a campus-wide committee, advising students, depositing documents in an institutional repository, teaching a class, cataloging new acquisitions, filling interlibrary loan requests, sending a tweet, or the myriad day-to-day job responsibilities we may hold, each of us can make a meaningful impact by helping individuals and the institu-

tion achieve their goals. I encourage each of you to consider how you add value as you move through your work day.

ACRL is here to support you in this effort to advocate for the value of academic libraries. One of the association's six strategic priorities is to "increase recognition of the value of libraries and librarians by leaders in higher education, information technology, funding agencies, and campus decision making." The ACRL Board of Directors recognizes the sense of urgency around this issue and is positioning the association to support our members with research as well as practical tools on measuring and demonstrating value.

Using a briefing paper prepared by board member John Lehner (University of Houston) as a springboard for discussion, the board agreed that a comprehensive approach was needed, one that looked at both quantitative and qualitative representations of our critical role in advancing the teaching, learning, research, and service missions of our colleges and universities.

There are many questions that need to be explored to determine the causal relationship between libraries and the accomplishment of an institution's mission. How do we contribute to student and faculty recruitment, retention and academic success, and how do we know that contribution has had an effect? Do the library's collections, staff, and services have a direct and positive impact on research funding and quality? Are their data or metrics avail-

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able to us that document and demonstrate our value?

To explore these questions further, a meeting on the value of academic libraries was held prior to the 2009 ALA Annual Conference with members of the ACRL leadership, ACRL staff, and library research community representatives who have studied return on investment and the value of libraries. The discussion was wide-ranging, lively, and provocative. Based on the recommendations of this “think tank,” the ACRL Board of Directors approved funding for an in-depth, comprehensive, and systematic review and analysis of the current state of research on library value and return on investment. The results of this review, expected in spring 2010, will identify research and data gaps and help the board determine tools to be developed, as well as other research that needs to be conducted.

In addition to this long-term effort, short-term actions are critical, as well. There is an immediate need for tools and resources to help members address this challenge. To that

end, a value of academic libraries toolkit will be developed and available online by the ALA Midwinter Meeting, January 15-19, 2010, in Boston. The toolkit will identify current literature and offer self-study tips and best practices as they emerge. The toolkit will not be a “one size fits all” approach, but will recognize that effective practices will vary from campus to campus, based on the local environment.

The success of the toolkit will depend, in large part, on member participation. For example, sharing best practices for local data gathering and reporting and success stories for aligning library and institutional goals will be key components.

By tackling this challenge on many fronts, we can work together to ensure that libraries and librarians remain vital and valued assets on our campuses. As we move forward on these initiatives, ACRL will continue to keep you informed of efforts undertaken by the association. In turn, I invite you to share your ideas, strategies, and successes in demonstrating the valuable resource that you are. *W*



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