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# Professional Development Opportunities for Academic Subject Librarians

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# Revolutionizing the Development of Library and Information Professionals: Planning for the Future

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## Chapter 9

# Professional Development Opportunities for Academic Subject Librarians

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### ABSTRACT

*Library professionals who specialize in particular disciplines have a deep understanding of the unique needs in their area to support faculty research, enrich student learning, and manage certain collections. Librarians and staff in such positions rely heavily on the expertise of their colleagues who have similar responsibilities, as well as standards developed by library and academic professionals in their respective fields. Therefore, professional networking is a critical practice for academic librarians who manage a particular subject area in their library. This chapter will provide information on subject-specific library conferences and other professional development opportunities that are useful for both conference organizers and librarians who specialize in subject areas and have responsibilities in collection management, instruction, cataloging, and liaison duties.*

### INTRODUCTION

Subject librarians not only have in-depth knowledge of a particular academic discipline—likely holding advanced or sometimes even terminal degrees besides the library and information science degree—they also play many roles in academic

libraries. Some of the more traditional responsibilities include engaging with their assigned academic departments, developing collections, managing budgets, designing and delivering library instruction, and providing reference services. Depending on the subject areas, subject librarians may also be involved in cataloging. More recently, subject

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librarians have begun collaborating with librarians who work on digital projects by providing content and/or metadata for digital collections, or by encouraging faculty they work with to deposit their scholarly works in the institutional repository (Feldman, 2006). Because subject librarians have many different types of responsibilities, they require a diversity of development opportunities. This reality is something conference and training planners at the very least need to keep in mind when planning programming, and can even capitalize on by offering sessions that cover a variety of topics.

## **BACKGROUND**

While the duties of subject librarians have either changed or been affected by changes in areas that relate to their work (user behavior, technology, communication, etc.), there is data to support the idea that the broad topics for which they seek professional training remain relatively constant. For example, the Continuing Education Committee of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Science & Technology Section conducts a biennial survey of librarians who are subject specialists in technical and scientific fields. The survey's aim is to determine the continuing education needs of that particular constituency of librarians. Among many questions, the survey asks respondents to rate their interest level in specific topics and to indicate their preferred formats for receiving professional development training. In 2001, science and technology librarians were most interested in learning about information literacy, managing electronic resources, designing web tutorials, presentation and teaching skills, electronic reference, and coping with the serials crisis (Desai, 2002). In 2003, they wanted to learn about improving relations with academic faculty, information literacy in the sciences, the effect of electronic resources on library collections and services, subject reference sources, and presentation and teaching skills (Desai, Christianson & Bur-

right, 2003). In 2005, hot topics were information literacy, keeping current, new technologies, institutional repositories and digital archives, scholarly publishing and alternative publishing models, and marketing and outreach (Spackman, 2006). In 2007, the topics of the greatest interest included collaboration between faculty and the librarian, evaluating existing services and developing new services, future roles for libraries and librarianship, keeping current with technology, and collection development for print and electronic resources (Calzonetti & Crook, 2009). While many of the broader topics—information literacy, collection management, and liaison duties—are indicated as priority development topics in nearly every survey, some newer topics such as alternative publishing models, predicting the future of the profession, and working with technology emerge in later surveys. These survey results indicate that those planning professional development opportunities for subject librarians may want to offer forward-thinking programming like library-as-journal-publisher, assessment, digital projects, active learning using technology, and consortial cataloging arrangements, while still honoring topics that remain central to their roles as selectors, instructors, and liaisons.

Technology has presented librarians with some of the richest rewards and also the greatest challenges the profession has experienced. It has enormously complicated not only the library as a workplace but also how librarians interact with users. Likewise, technology has both opened doors for our users, and it has confused them greatly. Believe it or not, these complications go all the way back to 1960s, when library automation was first being explored, databases like ERIC and Medline were born, MARC records were implemented by the Library of Congress, and OCLC was created. By the 1980s, library users could access electronic public catalogs, but that did not necessarily mean they knew how to use them! Reference librarians—often those with subject responsibilities—had to receive training

on not only a new technology but a somewhat new concept, and they had to understand those things well enough to teach library users. Those librarians might have had superior skills as bibliographers, and perhaps they even felt very confident searching databases on behalf of someone else. But giving users uncharted access to a vast network of specialized data via a clunky and unintuitive interface with which they themselves were unfamiliar was not so easy (Thompson, 2009). Fast-forwarding to the more recent past, the first decade of the twenty-first century required subject librarians to stretch their technology skills in new ways. Lynch and Smith (2001) note that when considering the changing nature of library work:

*...of growing importance is the question of how computer technology is changing jobs and being assimilated into all aspects of academic librarianship and how the new technologies may be influencing change, not only in library work, but also in the profession itself (p. 407).*

Their words were a sage forecast for the mid-2000s, when the open web's "2.0" movement—with its social networking sites, crowdsourcing opportunities, blogs, wikis, and more—not only shepherded the average user into the role of "online content creator," but also changed user expectations of library systems and services. And somewhat curiously, rather than offering comprehensive programs to train librarians on new technologies, libraries have largely expected their professional staff to seek their own education in such areas (Thompson, 2009). Perhaps this strategy is because subject librarians tend to have disparate backgrounds and experiences with technology so training opportunities might lack focus, or perhaps it is because technologies have changed so rapidly in the twenty-first century that it is difficult to tell which ones will have enough staying power to merit the allocation of time and resources to formal staff training. Regardless of the reasoning, the fact that subject librarians are

not receiving all the technological training they need from their workplace means that they turn to external education providers, such as associations or training organizations, to gain strategies in keeping up with technological change and all the ancillary byproducts that come with it. No matter the level of enthusiasm with which a library worker embraces change, changing job duties and changing professions will require those workers to seek professional development.

## **Discussion**

Many librarians are constantly seeking professional growth to develop new competencies and maintain their existing skillset. Structured professional development opportunities such as conferences and webinars can be ideal support mechanisms for librarians engaged in the self-learning process. Kerbel (1986) says that a librarian who is trying to teach himself new things "assimilates experiences, seeks advice, incorporates knowledge, and has the desire to learn and change" (p. 145). Mavrinac (2005) argues that technology has created a rapidly changing environment for libraries and that consequently library professionals must learn quickly, adapt, and be flexible (p. 397). Pugh (2001) predicted that in "the future," libraries will make greater mental demands of their staff, and that librarians' psychological strengths could be "as important as technical competence or acquiring more skills." (p. 97) Librarians must not only accept change, they must become involved in it. It is easy to say that flexibility of mind and nimbleness in the face of change are essential qualities for librarians in the twenty-first century, but it is a more challenging charge to support staff in developing such mindsets.

Instead of asking what academic subject librarians want from professional development opportunities, perhaps a better question to ask is: what do they *need* out of such opportunities? Pugh (2001) points out that because librarians are adult

learners, they have different learning requirements and motivations than younger learners. Adults make a point to learn from their life experiences, they value the process of problem solving, they are motivated to continually improve the quality of their performance, and they benefit from social learning in equal relationships. Most importantly, effective adult learning has a much greater effect on the individual than simply transmitting skills; development happens to the whole person. While the acquisition of a specific skillset may be involved in librarian learning, it is likely that the skillset will end up being transferrable to another area of the librarian's expertise. In order to present successful and effective professional development opportunities for subject librarians, it is helpful if not essential to know how librarians tend to learn and what their employing organization expects them to take away from their continuing education experiences. Because librarians tend to work in a culture of learning, they often report back to their colleagues—sometimes through formal presentations at faculty or staff meetings, but often just casually in conversation—what they learned at a conference or during a training session, facilitators will want to keep in mind that they may be indirectly providing training to many more librarians than registered to attend the session.

One of the biggest reasons librarians attend conferences is to network with their peers. While networking can happen anywhere—in person at work, over the phone, over e-mail—a face-to-face conference gives attendees a context, especially in the realm of subject specialization. When a librarian attends an American Library Association annual conference, he or she expects that topics, discussions of job duties, and current issues that come up in formal sessions are going to relate somewhat to librarianship. Other librarians will be attending the conference as well, and they will have the same expectations. Attending in-person sessions is not only beneficial because of the topics that are covered, but also the ad-hoc conversations and connections that happen

between attendees who are interested in those topics. Beyond exchanging business cards or at least e-mail addresses, it is common for librarians today to take those connections from physical to virtual after the conference by becoming Facebook friends or following one another on Twitter. Because effective learning in organizations comes from colleagues sharing ideas with one another, development opportunities that allow librarians to network with one another are critical.

Whether the librarians are at the same institution or different institutions, the ability for colleagues to exchange information and experiences with each other not only allows for communication of ideas but also gives participants the opportunity to reflect on and analyze their own professional priorities and skills (Kerbel, 1986). One form of networking—mentoring—has enjoyed a long and generally successful history in academic libraries (Mavrinac, 2005; McGuinness, 2011). Mentoring is an important vehicle for facilitators of professional development to consider when planning events or programs because it encourages the formation of deep relationships within a professional niche or an organization, and therefore it can help build a strong sense of community (Mavrinac, 2005). A strong community (or a robust network of sub-communities) is crucial to the on-going success of any professional association for several reasons. People find value in connecting with others, so they keep renewing their memberships and attending conferences. People believe in the purpose of the organization and they want to see it succeed, so they participate in the association's administrative structure. People have acquired skills or were exposed to new theories, methodologies, or concepts through the organization, so they encourage others to take advantage of and contribute to those opportunities by joining and becoming involved in the association. Traditional mentoring in libraries involves a dyadic relationship between an experienced librarian and a librarian who is new to the profession (McGuinness, 2011). Though it may seem that

the mentee has more to gain from this arrangement, there are benefits to both participants. The mentee is able to see a model of professionalism, receives emotional and professional support (from someone who is not his supervisor), and receives guidance for career development. The mentor—aside from any personal satisfaction he might enjoy from the relationship—is able to influence the profession continually through the success of his mentees (Mavrinac, 2005). The one-on-one, expert/novice mentoring model has its plusses—providing support and advice to new professionals to help them be productive in and retained by an organization—but with a deluge of retirements and an increase of new librarians entering the profession (Davis, 2009; Snyder and Dillow, 2010), there are not enough mentors to go around and simply the logistics of the one-to-one ratio have become unsustainable (Level and Mach, 2005). Moreover, other factors point to the idea that this traditional way of mentoring no longer fits with today's ever-evolving, increasingly interdisciplinary and multi-faceted academic library (Henrich and Attebury, 2010).

The literature suggests that mentoring opportunities—especially those that are facilitated by professional associations or conferences—do not necessarily need to be hierarchical or traditional. (For instance, a library staff member who has worked for ten years as a copy cataloger has been asked to perform original cataloging for special formats. That person may seek advice from colleagues who have been librarians for a shorter period of time than he, but who have specialized knowledge in cataloging sound and video recordings, musical scores, or materials in foreign languages.) An alternative to traditional mentoring, peer-mentoring arrangements involve pairs or groups of colleagues with similar professional statuses who provide each other with emotional and professional support. Mavrinac (2005) outlines several positive characteristics of a peer-mentoring arrangement among librarians, including but not limited to inclusivity, a demo-

cratic nature, high availability, learner-driven, and the facilitation of a learning forum that allows librarians to grow, develop initiative, and think creatively (p. 399). Peer-mentoring is an effective professional support method for librarians because it is participative, it places responsibility on each learner and it facilitates professional development as a two-way communication stream (Pugh 2001). This collaborative approach supports the idea of a learning culture and the librarianship values that come with it (Henrich and Attebury, 2010). Mavrinac (2005), defines a learning culture as a culture in which “learning is continuous in order to meet the challenges of [a] fluid and rapidly changing environment” (p. 391). Unlike the exclusive arrangement of traditional mentoring in which only a select number of librarians can be involved, participants in peer-mentoring are on more equal footing and more librarians are able to participate. In addition, Harris (1993) points out that characteristics associated with mentoring—listening, motivating, providing support and encouragement, sharing knowledge—are all qualities possessed by effective supervisors. (I would add that these are desirable if not required qualities of a successful subject librarian, especially those with reference and instruction responsibilities.) Finally, peer-mentoring may simply be a more realistic and sustainable model since the number of librarians seeking mentorship is right now greater than the number of librarians who are available or willing to act as mentors (Mavrinac, 2005). All the positive aspects outlined here in both traditional and peer mentoring have the potential to increase an academic library's efficiency, foster innovative projects and ideas, improve communication among colleagues, develop new skill sets among library workers, and enhance self-learning. Peer-mentoring, in particular, not only aligns well with the democratic values of librarianship but perhaps more importantly it could play an important role in any library that seeks to become a learning culture (Mavrinac, 2005). Planners of professional development opportunities would be wise

to incorporate virtual and in-person mentoring programs, not only to nurture the interest of new librarians to the organization, but also to reap the benefits of potentially creating a micro-learning culture within the organization.

In the interest of both audiences and presenters, it is essential for conferences to offer a variety of session formats. Having such variety keeps things interesting for the attendee, and allows presenters with different strengths, skills, comfort levels, and job duties to participate in the conference. A librarian who wants to present on an emerging technology in their library might not need an allotment of 45 minutes—roughly the standard amount of time given for an oral presentation or paper—but such a topic would be perfect combined with other presentations in a fast-paced, pecha-kucha style session or lightning round (in both cases each presenter is given a limited amount of time before an unsympathetic moderator cuts them off and the next presenter speaks). Panel presentations are a common session type at conferences; this format involves a group of presenters who each share their views and experiences on a particular topic. Often panel presenters respond to direct questions from a moderator or the audience, making this format more fluid, more conversational, but less predictable than a formal paper. Poster presentations—the asynchronous exhibition of posters by multiple presenters—are an ideal opportunity for librarians to describe a project or idea in a visual way. Finally, another type of development setting that should be considered by conference facilitators is a pre-conference or a hands-on workshop, both of which typically involve a long period of time (ranging from two hours to an entire day) dedicated to a particular topic and are often led by a recognized expert trainer in that topic. By offering an assortment of presentation opportunities for subject librarians, facilitators will open the door for a greater number of attendees to present at the conference.

Making the presentation slides available online after the conference is becoming a standard

practice and therefore is almost expected by attendees. Whether the conference planner makes those resources available just to registrants, or to anyone who finds them on the open Web, it is highly recommended that the facilitator collect presentations from speakers as soon as possible after the completion of the training or conference. Doing so may drive visitors to the association/conference website because they found a presentation in a Google search; it will also increase findability and recognition of the presenters by having their names and topics displayed in one more location online. Another practice that has become almost standard at library conferences is the use of Twitter by presenters and planners alike. Often conference organizers establish or specify a particular hashtag for a conference and encourage attendees to live-Tweet notable points of the presentations. These tweets are often re-Tweeted by attendees, and sometimes by those not in attendance, which can increase visibility for the conference beyond the core group that typically attends. Live-sharing of conference proceedings over social media can help engage those in attendance while also providing a basic, virtual outline of the conference for those who are not present.

## **Subject Conferences**

This section provides a detailed, annotated (but not exhaustive) list of active subject-specific library conferences and roundtables within larger library professional organizations.

### **Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)**

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/>
- About – The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), a division of the American Library Association, is a professional association of academic librarians and other interested individuals. It is dedicated to enhancing the ability of

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academic library and information professionals to serve the information needs of the higher education community and to improve learning, teaching, and research.

- Size of Membership (approximate) – 12,000
- Size of Conference (approximate) – 5,000
- Dates of Conference – April
- Recent Conference Locations – Indianapolis, IN (2013); Philadelphia, PA (2011); Seattle, WA (2009); Baltimore, MD (2007); Minneapolis, MN (2005)
- Virtual Conference – Real-time webcasts and asynchronous recordings of presentations; lower cost of \$185
- Themes – Imagine, Innovate, Inspire (2013); A Declaration of Interdependence (2011); Push the Edge: Explore, Engage, Extend (2009); Sailing Into the Future: Charting Our Destiny (2007); Currents and Convergence: Navigating the Rivers of Change (2005)
- Registration Cost – \$450

### **Special Libraries Association**

- Website – <http://sla.org/>
- About – The Special Libraries Association (SLA) is a nonprofit global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners.
- Size of Membership (approximate) – 9,000
- Size of Conference (approximate) –
- Dates of Conference – June
- Recent Conference Locations – San Diego, CA (2013); Chicago, IL (2012); Philadelphia, PA (2011); New Orleans, LA (2010); Washington, DC (2009)
- Themes – Connect, Collaborate, Strategize (2013); The Future is Now! (2012); Make Your Future Happen (2009)
- Registration Cost – \$699

### **International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)**

- Website – <http://www.ifla.org/>
- About – The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. It is the global voice of the library and information profession.
- Dates of World Library and Information Congress – Mid-to-late August
- Recent Congress Locations – Singapore (2013); Helsinki, Finland (2012); San Juan, Puerto Rico (2011); Gothenburg, Sweden (2010); Milan, Italy (2009)
- Themes – Future Libraries: Infinite Possibilities (2013); Libraries Now! – Inspiring, Surprising, Empowering (2012); Libraries Beyond Libraries: Integration, Innovation, and Information for All (2011); Open Access to Knowledge: Promoting Sustainable Progress (2010); Libraries Create Futures: Building on Cultural Heritage (2009)
- Registration Cost – €535

### **Medical Library Association (MLA)**

- Website – <http://www.mlanet.org/>
- About – Founded in 1898, MLA is a nonprofit, educational organization committed to educating health information professionals, supporting health information research, promoting access to the world's health sciences information, and working to ensure that the best health information is available to all.
- Size of Membership (approximate) – 4,000
- Size of Conference (approximate) – 2,000
- Dates of Conference – Mid-to-late May

- Recent Conference Locations – Boston, MA (2013); Seattle, WA (2012); Minneapolis, MN (2011); Washington, DC (2010); Honolulu, HI (2009)
- Virtual Conference – e-Conference registration provides asynchronous access to meeting proceedings and related content; lower cost of \$130
- Themes: One Health – Information in an Interdependent World (2013); Growing Opportunities: Changing Our Game (2012); Rethink [service, technology, space, leadership, engagement, research, outcomes] (2011); Reflect & Connect (2010) – “an opportunity to reflect on the past, present, and future of the profession and association, while the meeting allows time to renew the connections members have developed over the years and make new connections within the profession; iFusions (2009) – “iFusions theme is especially fitting as members would be provided with an opportunity to explore new trends and paradigms and be transported to unimagined and unparalleled ‘I’nformation, ‘I’ndividual, and ‘I’nnovative fusions.
- Registration Cost – Around \$600 for the full conference package (admission to all sessions, exhibits, and official receptions)

### International Congress on Medical Librarianship

- Website – <http://www.ifla.org/health-and-biosciences-libraries>
- Affiliated with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Health and Biosciences Libraries Section
- About – The Section of Health and Biosciences Libraries represents and acts as a forum for special libraries concerned with all aspects of information dissemina-

tion and services in relation to the health sciences and biological sciences. The Section’s general aims include the promotion of cooperation between biological and health sciences libraries; the facilitating of the development and the application of new technology relevant to those libraries; the consideration of means for better provision for health care information to health care consumers; the promotion of cooperative activity between national and international library associations of biological and medical sciences libraries and the promotion of cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant international bodies.

- Size of Conference (approximate) – 500
- Dates of Conference – Mid-August
- Recent Conference Locations – Boston, MA (2013); Brisbane, Australia (2009); Salvador, Bahia, Brazil (2005); London, UK (2000); Washington, DC (1995)
- Themes – One Health: Information in an Interdependent World (2013); Positioning the Profession (2009); Commitment to Equity (2005); Converge on London (2000); Health Information for the Global Village (1995)

### Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL)

- Website – <http://www.aahsl.org/>
- About – The Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries supports academic health sciences libraries and directors in advancing the patient care, research, education and community service missions of academic health centers through visionary executive leadership and expertise in health information, scholarly communication, and knowledge management.

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- Conference held in conjunction with Association of American Medical Colleges Annual Meeting
- Size of Membership (approximate) – 160 academic medical libraries
- Recent Conference Locations – Philadelphia, PA (2013); San Francisco, CA (2012); Denver, CO (2011); Washington, D.C. (2010); Boston, MA (2009)

### **Music Library Association (MLA)**

- Website – <http://musiclibraryassoc.org/>
- About – Founded in 1931, MLA is the professional organization in the United States devoted to music librarianship and all aspects of music materials in libraries. MLA is also the United States branch of the International Association of Music Libraries (IAML).
- Size of Membership (approximate) – 1,000
- Size of Conference (approximate) – 450
- Dates of Conference – Mid-to-late February
- Recent Conference Locations – San Jose, CA (2013); Dallas, TX (2012); Philadelphia, PA (2011); San Diego, CA (2010); Chicago, IL (2009)
- Themes – Born Digital: A New Frontier for Music Librarians (2011)
- Conference Registration Cost – \$360

### **Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA)**

- Website – <http://www.arlisna.org/>
- About – ARLIS/NA is a growing, dynamic organization promoting the interests of more than 1,000 members. The membership includes architecture and art librarians, visual resources professionals, artists, curators, educators, publishers, students, and others throughout North America interested in visual arts information. To

serve this diverse constituency, the Society provides a wide range of programs and services within an organizational structure that encourages participation at all levels.

- Size of Membership (approximate) – 1,000
- Dates of Conference – Mid-to-late Spring
- Recent Conference Locations – Pasadena, CA (2013); Toronto, ON (2012); Minneapolis, MN (2011); Boston, MA (2010); Indianapolis, IN (2009)
- Themes – Crafting Our Future (2013); Coloring Outside the Lines (2012); Collaboration: Building Bridges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (2011); Revolution and Innovation: At the Hub of Discovery (2010); Circle City Convergence: stArt Your Engines (2009)
- Conference Registration Cost – \$360

### **Art Libraries Section, International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)**

- Website – <http://www.ifla.org/art-libraries>
- About – The Section endeavors to represent libraries and organizations concerned with all formats of textual and visual documentation for the visual arts, including fine arts, applied arts, design and architecture. The Section strives to improve access to information about these subjects for users of independent research libraries, museum libraries, art libraries attached to educational institutions art departments within national, college, university and public libraries, government departments and agencies, libraries in cultural centres and other collections of art information. The Section is also concerned with the creation, study and enjoyment of the visual arts through these libraries and with the encouragement of activities of national and regional societies of art librarians and visual resources curators. It provides an international forum

for the free exchange of information and materials on art and furthers the aims of the Core Activities of IFLA.

- Section meetings are held in conjunction with IFLA World Library and Information Congress

### Arts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/arts/artswebsite>
- About – Arts is a section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association. The Arts Section represents librarians and specialists working in or interested in the fields of visual and performing arts. Arts provides an umbrella organization for the promotion of library service in this field through discussion of current issues, the exchange of information, and the carrying out of suitable projects.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 850

### Theatre Library Association

- Website – <http://www.tla-online.org/>
- About – Founded in 1937, the Theatre Library Association supports librarians and archivists affiliated with theatre, dance, performance studies, popular entertainment, motion picture and broadcasting collections. TLA promotes professional best practices in acquisition, organization, access and preservation of performing arts resources in libraries, archives, museums, private collections, and the digital environ-

ment. By producing publications, conferences, panels, and public events, TLA fosters creative and ethical use of performing arts materials to enhance research, live performance, and scholarly communication.

- Conferences are held in coordination with the American Society for Theatre Research
- Size of Conference (approximate) – 400
- Dates of Conference – November
- Recent Conference Locations – Dallas, TX (2013); Nashville, TN (2012); Phoenix, AZ (2011); Chicago, IL (2010); Las Vegas (2009)
- Conference Themes – The Post-Thematic Conference (2013); Theatrical Histories (2012)

### International Association of Law Libraries

- Website – <http://iall.org/>
- About – The International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) is a worldwide, cooperative non-profit organization of librarians, libraries, and other persons and institutions concerned with the acquisition, dissemination and use of legal information from sources other than their own jurisdictions.
- Size of Membership (approximate) – 400
- Dates of Conference – September
- Recent Conference Locations – Barcelona, Spain (2013); Toronto, Canada (2012); Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2011); The Hague and Rotterdam, Netherlands (2010); Istanbul, Turkey (2009)
- Conference Themes – Catalan Law and Legal Information in a Global Context (2013); Canada: The Cultural Mosaic and International Law (2012); The Dynamics of Malaysian Law in the Global World (2011); Dutch Gateways to International

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Law (2010); Turkey in a Global Context: Law and Legal Information (2009)

- Conference Registration Cost – \$500

### **American Association of Law Librarians (AALL)**

- Website – <http://www.aallnet.org/>
- About – The American Association of Law Librarians is a thriving professional association whose members and libraries—whether physical or virtual legal information services—are recognized as critical to the success of their organizations and as central to society. AALL members possess the knowledge and skills to maintain effectiveness in a constantly changing legal environment. Since the ready availability of legal information is a necessary requirement for a just and democratic society, AALL and its members advocate and work toward fair and equitable access to authentic current and historic legal information, and educate and train library users to be knowledgeable and skilled legal information consumers.
- Size of Membership (approximate) – 5,000
- Dates of Conference – July
- Recent Conference Locations – Seattle, WA (2013); Boston, MA (2012); Philadelphia, PA (2011); Denver, CO (2010); Washington, DC (2009)
- Conference Themes – Rethink Your Value (2013); Learn, Connect, Grow (2012); Summit 2010: Mapping Our Future (2010)
- Conference Registration Cost – \$650

### **Law Libraries Section, International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)**

- Website – <http://www.ifla.org/law-libraries>
- About – The Law Libraries Section promotes understanding and cooperation

among law libraries, and increases awareness of the value and importance of law libraries to the world; encourages growth in the development of new law libraries, with a particular focus on emerging nations; fosters the profession of law librarianship and legal research competencies worldwide; develops professional standards and practices; and provides leadership in the field of legal information policy, recognizing that equitable and permanent public access to authentic legal information is a necessary requirement for a just and democratic society worldwide.

- Section meetings are held in conjunction with IFLA World Library and Information Congress

### **Law & Political Science Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)**

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/lpss/acr-lpsec>
- About – The Law and Political Science Section (LPSS) was formed in 1975 and is a section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, which is a division of the American Library Association. The purpose of LPSS is to serve as an educational forum and information exchange for librarians with an interest or subject expertise in law or political science. Our activities include producing literature guides and resource reviews as well as sponsoring conference programs, discussion groups, a newsletter, and listserv. We welcome interested librarians to join our efforts.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 500

### Legal Division, Special Libraries Association

- Website – <http://www.slalegal.org/>
- About – Founded June 11, 1993, the Legal Division serves as a forum for the exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge among law and regulatory affairs librarians. We address concerns unique to librarians practicing in private law firms, businesses, and government libraries.
- Division meetings are held in conjunction with the Special Libraries Association Annual Conference

### Science and Technology Libraries Section, International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

- Website – <http://www.ifla.org/about-the-sci-tech-libraries-section>
- About – The Science and Technology Libraries Section brings together special libraries involved in collecting and providing access to information and data about the physical sciences and technology to users in science and technology departments of national libraries, university and polytechnic libraries, public libraries and corporate and government research libraries. A major focus of the Section will be on digital information for professional and scholarly communication. The Section collaborates with various national and international science and technology library associations.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with IFLA World Library and Information Congress

### Science and Technology Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/sts/acr-stsec>
- About – The Science and Technology Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries provides a forum through which librarians in scientific and technical subject fields can achieve and maintain awareness of the impact and range of information with which they work; and promotes improved accessibility to and active use of this information.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 1,350

### Physics-Astronomy-Math Division, Special Libraries Association

- Website – <http://pam.sla.org/>
- About – The Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics Division of the Special Libraries Association (PAM for short) was founded in 1972. The Division is focused on all aspects of librarianship in the fields of physics, astronomy, and mathematics, with particular emphasis on the control, dissemination, and retrieval of knowledge and information in those areas.
- Division meetings are held in conjunction with the Special Libraries Association Annual Conference
- Size of Division Membership (approximate) – 500

### Engineering Division, Special Libraries Association

- Website – <http://engineering.sla.org/>
- About – Established in 1941 as the Engineering-Astronautics Section, and attaining Division status in 1968, the Engineering Division of SLA encompasses diverse subjects that represent the interests of the various disciplines of engineering and is concerned with the broad spectrum of technical knowledge pertinent to industry, engineers, and engineering education.
- Division meetings are held in conjunction with the Special Libraries Association Annual Conference

### Social Sciences Libraries Section, International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

- Website – <http://www.ifla.org/about-the-social-science-libraries-section>
- About – Social Science Libraries are special libraries supporting research and practice in the broad domain of the Social Sciences. Thus the section includes for example big Business Libraries as well as small research institute libraries in the fields of linguistics or anthropology. The Social Sciences include the following disciplines: anthropology, communication science, criminology, demography, economics, education, environmental planning, futurology, geography, history, labor science, law, library and information science, linguistics, management science, philosophy, political science, public administration, psychology, social policy, sociology, statistics, science of religion, and science of science.

- Section meetings are held in conjunction with IFLA World Library and Information Congress

### African American Studies Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/afas/acr-afaec>
- About – The African American Studies Librarians Section (AFAS) is the outgrowth of a discussion group consisting of dynamic librarians with interest in and concern for African American studies and librarianship.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 225

### Anthropology & Sociology Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/anss/acr-ansec>
- About: The Anthropology and Sociology Section brings together librarians and information specialists to discuss common issues; publish news, bibliographies, and reviews of important resources; and communicate with organizations devoted to scholarship in anthropology, sociology, and related fields.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate): 445

### Asian, African, and Middle Eastern Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/aames/acr-aamec>
- About – AAMES represents librarians and specialists in the fields of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern area studies and acts for the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), in cooperation with other professional groups, in those areas of library service that require knowledge of Asian, African and Middle Eastern languages and cultures.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 319

### Slavic and Eastern European Studies Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/sees/acr-seeec>
- About – The Slavic and East European Section (SEES) represents librarians and specialists involved in Slavic and East European studies. In addition to Russia and the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, the section is concerned with those aspects of library service relating to the study of the Baltic, Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 187

### Western European Studies Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/wess/acr-wesec>
- About – The Western European Studies Section (WESS) represents librarians and others who specialize or are otherwise professionally involved in the acquisition, organization, and use of information sources originating in or related to Western European countries. Our aim is to promote the improvement of library services supporting study and research in Western European affairs from ancient times to the present.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 454

### Women & Gender Studies Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/wgss/acr-wgssec>
- About – The Women & Gender Studies Section (WGSS) of the Association of College & Research Libraries was formed to discuss, promote, and support women's studies collections and services in academic and research libraries.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 409

### Education & Behavioral Sciences Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/ebss/acr-ebsec>
- About – Serves the common interests of education and behavioral sciences librarians, including communications studies, psychology, and social work librarians. Members explore a host of issues in the areas of information literacy, effective use of technology in the classroom, collection development, scholarly communication, research, and other concerns pertaining to education and behavioral sciences librarianship.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 839

### Literatures in English Section, Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

- Website – <http://www.ala.org/acrl/about-acrl/directoryofleadership/sections/les/acr-lesec>
- About – Represents members of ACRL who specialize or are otherwise professionally involved in the selection, acquisition, organization, and use of information resources related to literatures in English.
- Section meetings are held in conjunction with ACRL Annual Conference
- Size of Section Membership (approximate) – 456

### Other Professional Development Opportunities

Of course, there are professional development opportunities outside of conferences that both attendees and facilitators should be aware of. Some opportunities are quite structured in terms of their organization and delivery, while others offer a more capricious avenue for professional learning. Gordon (2003) encourages librarians to develop and promote themselves by engaging in public discourse in online communities. Stranack (2012) recommends that librarians take advantage of the networking opportunities afforded to them by emerging technologies to develop their own personal learning network, which he describes as an online community that each librarian can customize as he or she sees fit. This community—made up of “blogs, wikis, Twitter, LinkedIn, forums, open access journals, open courses, webinars, and a wide variety of social media tools (p. 1)—is a low-to-no-cost support system for librarians to keep current, and it is especially relevant for subject specialists with many and potentially disparate responsibilities because it is highly customizable. Facilitators of professional development opportunities are strongly encouraged to consider emerging technologies and social media as part of their programming so subject librarians can incorporate those components into their personal learning networks.

Webinars, web casts, and web conferences are all very structured learning experiences in which librarians may participate online. Coiffe (2012) differentiates these three types of training in terms of their potential for interaction: a webinar involves a group of people meeting synchronously online to study or discuss a topic, and a web conference is an extension of that ar-

rangement as it seeks to replicate the experience of a full conference in a virtual environment. Web conferences often involve multiple presenters, concurrent sessions, committee meetings, and paid registration over the length of a day or even several days. In comparison, webcasts—which are typically pre-recorded, asynchronous multimedia presentations that may be watched by the viewer at any time—are not interactive (p. 38). Each of these online training vehicles is not necessarily preferred or recommended over the others, but facilitators will want to consider factors like the topic(s), the objectives of the session, the likely audience, and so on, when making decisions about the most appropriate web-delivery method for training subject librarians. A less-organized but equally valuable avenue for a subject librarian's virtual education is participation in e-mail discussion groups. These e-mail lists—which have been a mainstay in the academic library community for many years—are often sponsored by a library association that, like the conferences outlined earlier in this chapter, specializes in a particular subject area that is directly relevant to an academic liaison librarian's duties. While the lists are often moderated, they are typically a very democratic environment that encourages open conversation among the librarians, vendors, publishers, and administrators who subscribe and participate.

In addition to virtual development opportunities, there are also emerging in-person models that have proven popular with librarians who specialize in either the humanities or the sciences. Unconferences, such as THATCamp, are face-to-face discussion and brainstorming sessions that—unlike a structured and regimented conference—use an organic and participatory process to achieve the outcomes of the gathering. THATCamp meetings typically cover topics related to the humanities and technology, while a more formal gathering called the Science Boot Camp for Librarians is gaining momentum with librarians who are interested in topics such as bioinformatics, data management, and geodata. While the subjects discussed at the

THATCamp unconference and the Science Boot Camp are quite different, both events seek to keep costs at a minimum while providing an immersive and collaborative professional development experience.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

There are a number of factors that suggest professional development offerings will continue to move into the virtual realm and away from physical, face-to-face meetings. Technology for web conferencing is becoming more reliable. Decreases in institutional funding for professional development travel have created a domino effect: decreased financial support for conference attendance has led to lower attendance at subject-specific society conferences, which causes financial difficulties for the societies putting on conferences. However, while there is no denying the convenience and cost-effectiveness of online development opportunities, the model of the face-to-face, physical conference is likely to remain in place for some time. Many librarians who specialize in particular subject areas rely on their community of peers at other institutions for inspiration and education, and those relationships seem to be best maintained through a combination of regular in-person interactions and electronic communications.

## **CONCLUSION**

Conferences and online networking opportunities create lasting personal and professional connections that can help librarians solve problems, start and complete innovative projects and programs, or even just share points of view that others potentially hadn't considered. The topics change over the years but the librarians who talk about those topics are the same and they have relied on their professional, often subject-focused networks to broach, mediate, and resolve those topics. The

same librarians who were talking about automation thirty years ago started talking about digitization five or ten years ago and those are the same librarians who today talk about digital preservation, scholarly communication, and discovery systems. Subject librarians have diverse job responsibilities, and therefore have unique needs for continuing their education in this exciting, ever-changing profession.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Conference:** In-person or virtual gathering of professionals in a particular occupation.

**Continuing Education:** Pursuit of knowledge after entering a profession.

**Development:** Furthering one's professional skillset and knowledge base.

**Mentoring:** Practice of a novice receiving continuous advice from a veteran over a period of time.

**Professional Networking:** Sharing of information among those in similar occupations.

**Subject-Specific Librarianship:** Specialization in a particular academic area of study.