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Collaboration as a Key Component of Library Service: A Presidential Perspective

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Abstract

Collaboration has been a vital part of my professional career and has been essential in every position I have had in higher education and now as President of the American Library Association, 2014-2015. The successes that collaboration has fostered underscores my resolve for it to have a continued role in my work.

Keywords: Professional success; ALA presidency

Courtney Young, Head Librarian and Professor of Women's Studies at Pennsylvania State University, Greater Allegheny campus, was inaugurated as president at the 2014 ALA Annual Conference in Las Vegas.

Her past activities include serving as a member of the ALA Executive Board (2009-2012) and ALA Councilor-at-large (2008-11, 2012-15), as well as the Awards Committee (2012-14), the Planning and Budget Assembly (2012-14) and the ALA-APA Fundraising Committee (2012-2013). She has also been a member of the ALA Resolutions Committee (2008-09) and the ALA Task Force on Electronic Member Participation (2007-09).

She has served as New Members Round Table (NMRT) president (2009-10), councilor (2005-08), Diversity Committee chair (2003-04) and Student Chapter of the Year Award chair (2004-05). She was a *Library Journal* Mover Shaker in 2011. Young received a B.A. in English from The College of Wooster (1996) and an MLS from Simmons College (1997).

For more information about Courtney Young, see the ALA President's Page: <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/presidents-page>

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I am fortunate that collaboration has always been a part of my professional career. In my first

position as the Diversity Intern Librarian, I was mentored by all the members of The Ohio State University Libraries' Diversity Committee. These librarians and support staff worked with the Dean of Libraries to shape my experience, and ensured the success of what would be the foundation of my professional career. By rotating through different departments in public services, technical services, and administration, I learned about the work of all the libraries' employees, collaborating with people in a variety of roles to serve a diverse user population. As I went from department to department and library to library, I also helped strengthen and foster collaboration between units by sharing what I learned.

Collaboration has remained an essential component of my professional practice and development in every position I have had, whether it be working with faculty to provide course-related instruction, one-on-one reference consultations with students, or serving on library and campus committees. It has also proven to be foundational to serving the profession. My role as American Library Association (ALA) President in innumerable ways depends on working with members, association staff, and stakeholders whose values support our mission "To provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."¹



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While campaigning for the position I stressed the collaborative approach I take in my work on a daily basis with students and faculty and how that approach extended to my service and leadership roles in ALA. Shortly after my election, and during my year as ALA President-Elect, it became clear that collaboration is a thread that runs through every aspect of the role. Even with this realization, there were still new ways for me to create partnerships.

At the start of my term as the 2014-2015 ALA President, I noted that “partnerships and collaborations” are one of things that library and information professionals do well. It has been my goal to continue that tradition both for the profession and the association.

Established Collaborations

ALA is made up of eleven divisions, twenty-one round tables, eighteen offices, and 55,000 members. The association brings together a variety of stakeholders – librarians, library support staff, library trustees and friends, library vendors, LIS students, and LIS faculty – to work together towards a common goal.

The Association works on behalf of libraries, its members, and the public. That work is accomplished through collaboration with the divisions, round tables, committees, and offices of the Association. These partnerships include doing research to put together white papers and reports, providing funding to launch and sustain programs, and developing a legislative agenda in support of all types of libraries.

While the ALA presidency is often perceived as a year in which the Association follows the direction of that President, successful terms rely on collaboration. My presidential year coincided with the strategic planning process. ALA’s five-year plan expires June 30, 2015. The planning process, as well as the plan’s implementation, is necessarily a collaborative one. The ALA Executive Board works with the boards of the ALA divisions to begin the planning conversation, then continues that discussion with round tables, committees, and ALA Council, the association’s governing body. The ALA president plays

a vital role in facilitating those conversations and helping the association move forward.

I had the opportunity to present a keynote in support one of ALA’s newest partnerships, the first annual Sharjah International Book Fair/American Library Association Library Conference, which took place in the United Arab Emirates in November 2014. Over six hundred participants representing twenty countries attended presentations by leaders in the field, met with vendors, and networked.

Purposeful Collaboration

I have woven collaboration into my presidential term with a focus on allowing ALA to exist for members in practical, relevant ways and highlighting my particular areas of interest and emphasis within ALA’s Mission and Vision: diversity, career development, engagement, and outreach.

The association’s official publication, *American Libraries*, always features a column from the ALA President. I used my column as an opportunity to brainstorm with staff in ALA offices and advance conversations around advocacy, international librarianship, and diversity. I feel that a never-to-be-forgotten ingredient in successful partnerships is identifying a range and multiplicity of viewpoints and talents and using those as the buttresses for team efforts.

My presidency followed two major Presidential initiatives, namely the *Declaration for the Right to Libraries*² and *Transforming Libraries*.³ While most presidents decide on a presidential theme to guide their year, I did not. Each of these previous presidential initiatives took a year to launch and when I took office they were really starting to take root. It was clear to me that sustained support for these efforts was the direction that I wanted to take as a President and as an association.

While I was committed to support moving the work in these areas forward, there were still sure to be other opportunities for initiatives. Not selecting one central presidential theme meant we could be open and responsive to those opportunities. To that end, I collaborated with



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ALA staff to set up my presidential budget to do just that. Approximately sixty-one percent of my presidential budget allocation would go towards supporting association-driven initiatives and recent presidential initiatives, with a focus on opportunities fostering collaboration and partnerships across the association.

One of the projects I have supported is a pilot of the Career Development Facilitators Program (ALA 2014), an alliance between ALA's Human Resource Development and Recruitment (HRDR) Office and the ALA state chapters. The program, launched during the 2015 ALA Mid-winter Meeting, provides participants from twenty-two states with an opportunity to develop and improve their skills and become certified in supporting job seekers at the library.⁴ The career development facilitators will not only be able to better assist job seekers in their libraries, but they will train others in their state associations to do the same. This pilot was an opportunity not only to support an area of real need across the country, but also to facilitate teamwork between HRDR and the state association chapters.

As ALA president, I have championed opportunities for collaboration. Librarians and library workers should be inspired and invigorated as a result of participating in ALA-supported and ALA-motivated connections. Serving the profession is an honor and a privilege and can only truly succeed if one hears the voices of its members and stakeholders. This experience as president underscores for me collaboration's vital role, and reinforces my resolve to continue to use it as one of my key professional trademarks and touchstones.

Endnotes

¹ American Library Association, *Mission & Priorities*. Accessed January 5, 2015.
<http://www.ala.org/aboutala/missionpriorities>.

² American Library Association, *Declaration for the Right to Libraries (2013)*. Accessed January 6, 2015.

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/declaration-right-libraries>.

³ American Library Association, *Transforming Libraries*. Accessed January 6, 2015.
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⁴ ALA. 2014. *ALA President Courtney Young selects 22 chapters to participate in career development facilitator training*. September 30. Accessed January 5, 2015.
<http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2014/09/ala-president-courtney-young-selects-22-chapters-participate-career>.

