

Meet the Candidates for ALA President

Vote in the Election this Spring



Sam Helmick



Raymond Pun

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 1,500 words to respond to six questions and contribute an optional opening statement. The responses are identified under each question.

Opening Statements

Raymond Pun: Thank you for the opportunity to share my ALA candidacy and vision with the ACRL membership. As a long-time dedicated ACRL member involved in sections, standing committees, and interest groups, I am thankful to ACRL for creating and sustaining a community of amazing colleagues and for supporting my personal and professional growth throughout my career.

1. As the future ALA president, please share your thoughts about what you would like to accomplish with the divisions during your presidential year.

Sam Helmick: As the future ALA President, I envision fostering intersectionality among advocacy, intellectual freedom, and engagement projects within the divisions. Intersectionality acknowledges the interconnectedness of our various identities and experiences, crucial for a holistic approach to library service. For instance, in designing my own chapter leadership to seek representation from academic, public, and school library workers in presidential elections, we ensure diverse perspectives and collaboration. I aim to facilitate initiatives that promote inclusivity, such as mentorship programs for underrepresented groups and advocating for equitable access to resources. Additionally, I prioritize supporting intellectual freedom by defending against censorship and promoting diverse viewpoints. Ultimately, by prioritizing intersectionality and collaboration, we can advance the profession and better

serve our communities. We can leverage our work for greater impact when we increase our mechanisms for tool sharing, talking point curation, and advocacy idiating together.

Pun: We are seeing critical issues affecting our colleagues and libraries simultaneously. They include artificial intelligence, censorship, climate crises, surveillance, digital content price gouging, job burnout, and workplace safety, especially questioning the value of libraries and higher education. These issues also bring us together in community and in solidarity. As ALA President, I have three goals building on what we are seeing today, what leaders have been working on, and what applies to divisions like ACRL:

- Support and showcase library workers as they confront unprecedented challenges and conditions.
- Build stronger working relationships between ALA and its chapters and affiliates.
- Expand ALA's engagement in the international library community.

Collaborating with division members and staff offers a strategic opportunity to strengthen communication externally and internally within ALA. I want to ensure that communications are open across divisions regarding timely issues affecting libraries and library workers that require advocacy engagement (e.g., contacting state/federal legislators). It is an opportunity to gather and tell our stories on a national platform to the general public on how we confront unprecedented challenges and conditions affecting libraries and library workers. We need to emphasize how our work in libraries transforms lives for the better, and to share such stories as best practices so others may learn and draw inspiration on how we endure and address these issues with and for our communities. From a student accessing their library's food security program to a community college librarian advocating for accessibility in digital content, we must also share joy wherever we go and tell our impactful stories to the community. I view ALA as a community of care and practice collaborating with members and staff across divisions, round tables, affiliates, and state chapters to define challenges and develop solutions together.

I see an opportunity for ALA to connect divisions with the work of state chapters, which may benefit us all in learning state practices and sharing essential resources such as upcoming webinars, the LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund, the Spectrum Scholarship Program, and the ALA-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA), a companion nonprofit professional organization {a 501(c)(4) whereas ALA is a 501(c)(3)} to ALA focused on promoting the interests of library workers.

Finally, I strive to increase ALA's engagement with the international library community. Based on my experiences as the ACRL convener for International Perspectives on Academic/Research Libraries Discussion Group (2018-2020), I invited academic library workers from Sri Lanka to Peru, to present their projects, challenges, and trends. There are collaborative opportunities for virtual programming with divisions like ACRL, where we can engage with library workers worldwide and ensure that divisions and their presence are known to prospective and international members.

2. What opportunities (and/or barriers) do you see for increasing member recruitment, engagement, and retention in ACRL? How can ALA and ACRL support each other to encourage member participation and investment?

Helmick: Increasing member recruitment, engagement, and retention in ACRL presents both opportunities and barriers. One opportunity lies in leveraging ALA's resources and

advocacy, particularly through ALA-APA, to emphasize the importance of professional development and workplace wellness resources for library workers. By highlighting the impact of supporting library workers in their professional development and then correlating that knowledge to the sustainability, innovation, and wellness goals of the workplace, we can impress upon institutions the value of investing in professional associations like ACRL. For instance, the inclusion of wellness initiatives in institutional strategic plans, like the Iowa City Public Library's, demonstrates a commitment that requires reporting, resourcing, and implementation. To support employee wellness and the library's future, staff are paid for their committee work and funded to attend conferences.

Of course, limited resources and competing priorities within institutions hinder our efforts to increase member recruitment and engagement. To overcome these barriers, ALA and ACRL can collaborate to provide targeted resources and support, such as funding opportunities for professional development activities and wellness programs. Leveraging the ALA Allied Professional Association to boost the signal for existing opportunities and resources to the broadest audience possible would strengthen awareness and participation as would engaging with the ALA New Members Round Table to foster an immediate sense of community and belonging within ACRL through networking events, mentorship programs, and inclusive initiatives to enhance prospective member engagement and retention.

By working together, ALA and ACRL can mutually support each other's efforts to encourage member participation and investment. ALA can provide advocacy, resources, and visibility for ACRL initiatives, while ACRL can offer specialized support and opportunities for professional growth within the academic library community. This collaboration strengthens the profession as a whole and enhances the value proposition for membership in both organizations.

Pun: Membership recruitment, engagement, and retention are a significant priority for ALA. An opportunity to increase membership is to offer a monthly subscription payment price as an option. Not everyone can afford an annual or semi-annual due upfront, but monthly payments might enable members to stay involved. I also see an opportunity for conferences where ALA, ACRL, or other divisions are hosting to engage with local state/student/ACRL chapters. For example, the next ACRL conference will be in Minneapolis. Can we reduce rates for these groups to attend the ACRL conference? Is it also possible to create a track for these groups, especially student and state chapter members, to meet and present at the conferences?

We see more opportunities to host ACRL orientations to engage with prospective, new, and seasoned members. The New Members Round Table (NMRT) does an incredible job in leading mentorship and resume review programs; divisions may also want to consider partnering with round tables to host these sessions. Of course, the barriers are that we need more time, capacity, and labor. We need to build strategic partnerships internally and demonstrate how our association supports professional and personal growth externally. I also want to acknowledge ACRL's approval of the Speaker Honoraria Policy (<https://acrl.ala.org/acrlinsider/acrl-speaker-honoraria-policy-updates/>), which recognizes our labor and time in providing learning opportunities. This policy serves as a model within ALA to recognize members' time and commitment.

3. What opportunities do you see for collaborating with the divisions to increase ALA's overall financial stability and budgetary health?

Helmick: As ALA President, I see significant opportunities for collaborating with the divisions to enhance ALA's financial stability and budgetary health. Drawing from my experience as a fiscal officer on the ALA Executive Board, I advocate for returning to a staffing model reminiscent of the pre-2000 era, featuring both an Executive Director and a Director of Development. This model can provide the essential human capital needed to effectively engage divisions, learn from their initiatives, and develop shared goals to advance our collective mission.

By fostering collaboration with divisions, we can explore avenues for revenue generation, such as joint fundraising efforts, sponsorship opportunities, and grants. Additionally, leveraging the expertise and resources within divisions can enhance ALA's programming and services, thereby increasing membership engagement and attracting new members.

Prioritizing budgetary health requires a collaborative approach. As ALA President, I would support the Executive Board and the new Executive Director in creating a robust foundation and staffing structure focused on budgetary priorities. This collaborative effort ensures that financial decisions are made with input from all stakeholders and aligned with the organization's strategic goals. I imagine we will explore what this work can look like as we develop ALA's 150th Anniversary fundraising initiatives across our networks and communities.

By working closely with divisions, prioritizing staffing needs, and fostering collaboration at all levels, we can enhance ALA's overall financial stability and budgetary health, ensuring the long-term success of the organization and the profession.

Pun: Since we are now in the middle of the ALA Pivot Strategy 2021-2025, divisions may consider thinking collaboratively to enhance ALA's financial stability. Generally, membership, publishing, and conferences are ALA's main revenue streams. Divisions may want to strategize how to minimize costs and maximize opportunities through partnerships. Some are struggling due to COVID-19 and other factors. We may wish to explore co-hosting conferences together. Another possibility is to engage with international/prospective members through virtual programming with groups like the International Relations Round Table (IRRT), potentially increasing membership. For publishing and courses, we can explore critical trends presented or proposed in conferences and promote division members' expertise like artificial intelligence, open science, or evidence synthesis to offer reasonably priced learning opportunities. Active listening and dialogue on strategies are needed and I would welcome the opportunity to hold such conversations.

4. Please share specific ideas you have for partnering with ACRL (and other divisions) to advance equity and inclusion and to grow the diversity of our membership.

Helmick: As President, I believe partnering with ACRL and other divisions is vital for advancing equity, inclusion, and diversity within our membership. Association leadership mirrors workplace leadership, where every individual can choose to uplift, support, and include others regardless of their position within the institution. Drawing from my experiences in inclusive and diverse leadership, I would cultivate an environment where members openly support and include each other, foster productive discourse and disagreement, and routinely celebrate success stories.

One specific idea for partnering with ACRL and other divisions is to proudly promote initiatives focused on equity and inclusion. For example, I hope each of the ACRL Communities

of Practice will feature prominently in the ACRL RoadShows series to demonstrate the positive impact of their work but also occasionally show the intersectionality of their work with school and public libraries. Those intersectional stories demonstrate the breadth and depth of our work. Sharing them provides a greater opportunity to amplify awareness.

In the words of Maya Angelou, “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value.” Celebrating the diversity of our membership and actively promoting inclusion is not just important; it’s essential for the growth and vitality of our association. Together, through collaborative efforts and a commitment to inclusivity, we can create a stronger, more diverse, and equitable community within ACRL and across all ALA divisions.

Pun: As a leader who collaborates across organizations, I believe there are opportunities for divisions to partner within ALA and with various groups like the National Associations of Librarians of Color (NALCo) (American Indian Library Association, Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association, Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Chinese American Librarians Association, and REFORMA: The National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking), Association of Jewish Libraries, Society of American Archivists, or Library Freedom Project, to co-develop professional development training and resources relevant to academic library workers.

I am invested in mentoring LIS students and library workers, especially those that identify as BIPOC in the field, and have a history of doing this work. When I was President of APALA, I collaborated with public and academic library leaders in securing IMLS funds for a national forum for Asian and Pacific Islander American library workers and leadership development. We received letters of support from ALA, ACRL, ARL, ALISE, and other groups. It became clear that this is collaborative work, even if it’s writing a letter of support.

We invited ACRL board members to participate at the APALA Executive Board meetings and intentionally tried to sustain that connection. Collaboration can support and advance equity and inclusion in the membership. When I was the ACRL convener for the Leadership Discussion Group (2017-2020), I organized webinar panels featuring academic library leaders of color. I shared these webinars with the NALCos. My goal was to support academic library leaders of color, to connect ACRL and these groups, and to foster ACRL membership recruitment. I also appreciate PLA’s discounted registration for their upcoming conference in Columbus for NALCo members. I can see other division conferences considering this to strengthen these relationships.

5. In what specific ways would you seek to support academic library workers, particularly in light of legislation and other efforts that challenge equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts in higher education?

Helmick: As ALA President, my commitment to supporting academic library workers, especially amidst challenges to equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education, remains steadfast. When I joined the ALA Executive Board, I held two priorities: intellectual freedom and incorporating our core equity, diversity, inclusion, and access standards into the ALA accreditation process.

I sought the prioritization to develop intellectual freedom tools tailored to public, school, and academic settings which could empower library workers to uphold principles of free inquiry and access to information. Our work with United Against Book Bans is just beginning

and I believe there are many opportunities for ACRL to shine brightly with efforts like the RoadShow to impart the impact. We need to share our stories with the general public in order to build affinity, organize support, and push against historic levels of library and intellectual freedom adverse legislation.

I advocated for initiatives aimed at increasing equity, inclusion, access, and diversity within both faculty and student populations in ALA accredited institutions. This includes actively promoting diversity in recruitment and hiring processes, advocating for equitable access to resources and services, and supporting curriculum development that reflects ALA's core values. Working towards incorporating these values into ALA accreditation standards is long and complex work. Unfortunately, legislation moves much quicker which is why we must all become storytellers to our public.

My campaign slogan is "Our Stories Are Worth Sharing" because the stories our communities write each day with library resources, the stories we defend and protect on our shelves, as well as the incredible stories of library workers create through their partnerships and innovation hold meaning to those who can voice their priorities at the ballot box.

Let's play some "joyful offense" together and share by sharing our library stories!

Pun: As a former ACRL Government Relations Committee member (2021-2023), I've reviewed and offered suggestions on what ACRL legislative priorities should be. As a community, we could advocate for specific stances on issues such as surveillance or data brokering, so this is a timely question. I am grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with Sonya M. Durney and Tarida Anantachai on an upcoming ACRL edited book regarding academic library workers' roles in legislative advocacy efforts. We saw a gap in this area and wanted to illuminate how academic library workers support public policy and legislative advocacy issues impacting academic libraries and higher education. From copyright to intellectual freedom to open access mandates, these case studies may inspire academic library workers to take the lead in addressing these public policy issues in their institutions and communities. I encourage all academic library workers to sign up for the ALA Public Policy and Advocacy Office's updates (<https://confirmsubscription.com/h/i/463208600EB4D89A>) such as supporting IMLS funding. You'll see the priorities that ALA advocates for and how we can be part of that to shape a better future.

The efforts that challenge EDI values in higher education are disheartening to see. I think about our colleagues working in such institutions and how they are affected in many ways. It is important that we at ALA continue to share information and connections and to strengthen our ALA/ACRL state chapters with academic library workers experiencing these matters. I've met academic library workers leading their state chapters and learned that what might work for one state may not work for another. As ALA President, I would listen and engage with academic library workers by sharing resources such as media/press training and op-ed writing workshops that ALA may be able to support. ALA can partner with division and state chapter members to address these issues collectively and in solidarity through crucial messaging, training, and learning about successful advocacy strategies. There is strength in numbers. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts! You can learn more about my experiences at raypun.info. 🐉