Dawn Behrend and Alexia Hudson-Ward

Dawn Behrend and Alexia Hudson-Ward Share Plans for ACRL

Cast an Informed Vote in the Election this Spring

Ed. Note: C&RL News offered the candidates for ACRL vice-president/president-elect, Dawn Behrend and Alexia Hudson-Ward, this opportunity to share their views with the membership. Although many of the issues facing ACRL are discussed informally at meetings, we want to use this venue to provide a forum to all members. We hope this will assist you in making an informed choice when you vote in the election this spring.

Dawn Behrend

I am a first-generation college student and second career librarian who, after many years as a master's level clinical psychologist, found my way to the career that has been a lifelong calling. Beginning in instruction and outreach, I am now the Dean of University Libraries at my institution. While I had a successful and rewarding career as a mental health professional, my passion for libraries as institutions to promote literacy and intellectual freedom along with a drive for lifelong learning, led me to take the leap into librarianship, which is a choice I have never regretted.

I first became a member of ACRL as a library science student and have been a member for 11 years. For me, ACRL represented the pinnacle of a professional organization dedicated to academic librarianship with opportunities for collaboration, exposure to innovative ideas, and advocacy. Early in my career as an academic librarian, I actively sought opportunities to become involved in ACRL through committee membership and later chairing various committees, the College Libraries Section (CLS), and Chapters Council. Additionally, I have been active with the Education and Behavioral Sciences Section (EBSS) serving as member-at-large and other roles. I found such service to dovetail nicely with my involvement at the state level where I currently serve as president of the North Carolina Library Association, a role which has involved everything from conference planning to congressional fly-ins to advocate for the federal funding of libraries. My commitment to professional service and advancement in the field of academic librarianship is evident in my service history which has given me the perspective of leadership from the state to national levels.

ACRL has consistently provided me with the support I need to be an active member of the profession, and the skills to make valuable contributions at my home institution. I am honored to be a candidate to serve as ACRL's vice-president/president-elect. If elected, I plan to focus on three primary initiatives: the value of academic libraries (VAL), artificial intelligence (AI) literacy, and mental wellness.

Value of Academic Libraries

For nearly two decades, ACRL has strove to assist its members in demonstrating the value academic libraries bring to their constituents including making VAL part of ACRL's strategic plan in 2011 and crafting the Value of Academic Libraries Statement in 2016. Much work has been done by the VAL Committee, which has most recently been charged with completing reviews and revisions of ACRL's Standards for Libraries in Higher Education. ACRL members have several excellent tools available to support VAL at their institutions, such as the Academic Library Advocacy Toolkit, Project Outcome for Academic Libraries, and more. I plan to bring renewed energy and focus to supporting members of all institutional sizes in demonstrating the value their libraries provide to stakeholders. Higher education has changed dramatically in a post-COVID world marked by declining enrollments, campus closures, and shrinking budgets. This makes it essential to advocate for VAL to support adequate staffing, collection development, facilities, and professional development funding. Some of the areas I will concentrate on regarding VAL include: communicating VAL to attract and recruit diverse, talented professionals to the field; connecting VAL not just to student success and retention, but to supporting the pillars of academic freedom and the funding of libraries; identifying academic libraries as contributing value as a partner in open scholarship and affordable textbooks; scaling existing ACRL resources to assist smaller libraries engage in strategies that are feasible for their existing staffing and budgets; and providing skill-building resources in such key areas as strategic planning and marketing to better articulate and promote library initiatives and resources. Finally, I plan to build upon the *Academic Library Impact: Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research* published in 2017 to provide an updated assessment and evidence of VAL as this has been an essential document in my own work advocating for library resources at my university.

AI Literacy

AI literacy is digital literacy focused on AI, its uses, and its ethical ramifications. Safety and Security of AI ranks number six on the 2024–2025 ACRL Legislative Agenda, marking AI as an area of focus for the association. Current ACRL President Leo S. Lo has been active in AI literacy and academic librarianship. In his June 2024 article, "Evaluating AI Literacy in Academic Libraries: A Survey Study with a Focus on U.S. Employees," Lo proposed a framework to define AI literacy in academic libraries formed around seven key competencies. While the Association of Research Libraries published the *Research Libraries Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence* in April 2024, ACRL has not yet created a comparable set of guidelines. However, work is moving forward on this issue with the ACRL AI Competencies for Library Workers Task Force. The ability to understand AI, teach how to use AI effectively and ethically, and serve as a model of using AI in a range of academic tasks will be vital for academic librarians who seek to remain at the forefront of innovative technology on their campuses. I endeavor to continue the important work done by Dr. Lo and others to develop a unified approach to AI literacy that will enable academic librarians to lead the way in best practices, to understand AI, and promote its ethical use in scholarship and beyond for faculty and students. I aspire to provide ACRL's members with the confidence and tools to embrace the benefits of AI while remaining mindful of potential risks through such initiatives as piloting principles for the use of AI in academic librarianship, transitioning the AI Competencies for Library Workers Task Force into a standing committee,

integrating AI literacy into the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, and creating AI toolkits to provide practical resources for academic librarians.

Mental Wellness

With more than 1 in 5 adults experiencing a mental illness and an estimated 15 to 20 percent of the population identifying as neurodiverse, academic librarians are likely to experience concerns with mental wellness and/or struggling to function in spaces that are not designed to be neuroinclusive. While much has been done in the field to understand better and serve library users with a mental illness or who are neurodiverse, less has been done to support library professionals faced with such concerns. A survey published in 2019, "Academic Librarians' Experiences and Perceptions on Mental Illness Stigma and the Workplace," identified academic librarians are often hesitant to disclose a mental illness in the workplace due to stigma. Stigma and the failure to disclose can lead to not receiving treatment services or accommodations that could lead to professionals leaving the field who would otherwise might be retained. Given my background in the mental health field, I have been active in promoting awareness of mental illness and neurodiversity to decrease stigma, improve services for library users, and advocate for the needs of library professionals.

Today, more than ever, academic librarians are faced with burnout, vicarious trauma, and low morale. Currently, there are no resources provided by ACRL that are dedicated to the mental wellness of its members. I plan to promote a culture of care within ACRL by providing a platform to discuss mental illness and neurodiversity, provide guidance and resources to recruit, retain, and provide opportunities for the advancement of librarians identifying as neurodiverse and/or experiencing a mental illness, and advance mental wellness initiatives to support ACRL members. Such work may be achieved through the addition of a task force or committee focused on mental wellness, making mental wellness and neuroinclusivity a strategic initiative of ACRL, and providing toolkits on such topics as self-care, supporting the needs of neurodiverse colleagues, self-advocacy, and finding treatment services. I am eager to utilize my expertise and skills in the mental health field to inform the path forward for building awareness, fostering inclusivity, and providing strategies to promote mental wellness to support and retain academic librarians.

Conclusions

Being nominated to serve as vice-president/president-elect of ACRL is one of the highest honors I have achieved in my career as an academic librarian. ACRL has been a guiding presence in my work as a librarian since my time as a library science student. The opportunities for involvement, service, and professional connection have been invaluable in my professional development. It is my intention to work diligently to further the strategic initiatives of ACRL for the benefit of the association's membership and to create new initiatives to lead us into the coming years. I plan to focus on developing scalable resources to help members articulate the value their libraries provide, providing a unified understanding and guidelines to support members in using AI to its full-potential, and fostering a culture of care that supports mental wellness for professionals in the field. My experience in leadership in my university's library, state library association, and ACRL provides me with the ability and skills to ensure that ACRL continues to provide outstanding value to its members in the important work they do in supporting academic libraries.

Alexia Hudson-Ward

I am honored to stand as a candidate for the role of vice-president/president-elect of ACRL. Over my more than 20 years of membership in the association, I've been privileged to serve in several elected and appointed positions. I possess deep knowledge and passion for ACRL. I understand how to successfully partner with member volunteers and the ACRL staff to execute important initiatives and formulate high-impact strategies.

My transition into academic libraries came after success in several for-profit and non-profit managerial roles. I've served as an award-nominated corporate marketing manager for The Coca-Cola Company, was an award-winning journalist and editor, and was an award-winning promotions manager for a university-owned 12-radio station network. My entry into academic libraries began with a strong foundation in leadership development, which I gained from an internship in graduate school. I later transitioned into a diversity fellowship position as a represented staff member. After that position, I was recruited into a tenure-stream role in which I was successfully promoted and tenured.

For nearly a decade, my career has been as a senior administrator with successes in innovative service execution, pipeline leadership development, and organizational design. My professional trajectory would not have been possible without the support of academic libraries and ACRL. As a first-generation college graduate, I know from personal experience how academic libraries democratize knowledge and create pathways to achievement. As a professional and volunteer-leader, I've experienced the transformative ways ACRL membership has benefited me and many others.

During this campaign cycle, I gathered input from leaders within and outside ACRL and academic library personnel at every level on what they deem as important emphasis areas for our association. We universally agree that we are in a pivotal moment for higher education, the nation, and our world. Therefore, it is essential for us to formulate tangible strategies and action plans. If successfully elected, I will build our capacity within five focus areas: amplifying our excellence, deepening strategic partnerships, strengthening our advocacy efforts, expanding professional development opportunities for all library workers, and fostering inclusive workplace cultures.

Amplifying Our Excellence

Academic libraries are centers of innovation and transformation. We provide essential forethought on critical issues such as climate education, AI, and inclusive excellence. While we are often described as the "heart" of our institutions, I've heard from many of you that you feel our achievements are under-acknowledged by your institution's senior administration. Some of our libraries and their employees have been described more as costly expenditures to their institutions than mission-aligned critical entities.

Under my leadership, ACRL will implement a programmatic and research-centered approach to data-driven storytelling that will elevate rich stories of impact—from first-year students finding their footing in research to faculty making groundbreaking discoveries with our support. The association will lead efforts to equip members with the tools to measure and communicate our libraries' contributions more effectively.

We will extend our metrics to capture success outcomes with our contributions to institutional research, campus community engagement initiatives, and academic library student employment. We will highlight our capacity for innovation by further promoting how our evolutions in services and spaces promote achievement and belonging on campus. ACRL will also expand its support for library innovation, offering opportunities to highlight academic libraries that are exemplars in leveraging humanistic approaches to implementing artificial intelligence tools that enhance teaching, research, and access.

Deepen Strategic Partnerships

Fostering strategic partnerships within higher education is one of many strengths I will bring to our association as vice-president/president-elect. I have successfully engaged with divisions of research, student life, presidents' and provosts' offices, institutional presidents, provosts, and finance vice presidents to elevate academic libraries as critical to advancing the institution's curricular, co-curricular, and research objectives. Several academic libraries share similar successes. As the association's leader, I will ensure that ACRL prioritizes sharing models and best practices for fostering such collaborations, ensuring our libraries are recognized as indispensable academic partners.

Beyond our campuses, academic libraries have untapped opportunities to collaborate more with museums, independent research libraries, and learned societies. Together, we can tackle issues like AI and digital equity, materials management in the era of climate change, and the best approaches to open scholarship and Open Educational Resources (OER) expansion. On a global scale, our international colleagues look to ACRL for leadership in building relationships with global library associations to share knowledge, resources, and solutions.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of our success, and we must form more partnerships — within our institutions, across communities, and globally—that will allow us to address complex challenges while elevating our profession. Through my vast network, ACRL will deepen strategic partnerships to strengthen our advocacy efforts, expand professional development for library employees, and advance inclusive workplace cultures within our organizations.

Strengthen Our Advocacy Efforts

Public policy impacts every aspect of academic library work, from federal research funding to open access and copyright issues. Advocacy is not just a responsibility—it is necessary to protect and advance our profession's interests and those of the communities we serve.

As vice-president/president-elect, I will strengthen ACRL's advocacy efforts by equipping members with the knowledge and confidence to engage with policymakers, offering targeted campaigns on key issues, and building coalitions with allied organizations. ACRL will serve as a hub for resources and training, empowering academic library staff to advocate effectively within their institutions, at the state level, and nationally.

Our trusted voice is needed in key policy areas, including sustainable funding, intellectual freedom, and equity in education. We must articulate our value to decision-makers in terms that resonate, emphasizing how our libraries drive student success, fuel faculty research, and foster community engagement. We must also advocate for fair copyright policies that support academic work while ensuring broad access to information.

Expanding Professional Development for All Academic Library Workers

The strength of academic libraries lies within all of our team members. To thrive in a rapidly evolving environment that AI is reshaping, all library staff—regardless of role or career stage—must have access to professional development that supports maintaining professional currency and essential skill-building.

Through my leadership, ACRL will expand its offerings to ensure that library workers in all roles have opportunities to grow their skills and explore new areas of interest. I will also emphasize leadership development for those in formal management roles and staff across our organizations. ACRL will foster leadership at all levels by creating unique mentorship programs, providing access to training on organizational change, and encouraging cross-functional collaboration within institutions.

Advancing Inclusive Workplace Culture

Now more than ever, we must maintain our commitment to advancing inclusive practices that will be embedded in every aspect of our work. An inclusive workplace culture is foundational to attracting and retaining the talent that drives academic library excellence. Over the past decade, some progress has been made with compositional diversity in our libraries (particularly in the leadership ranks). Yet, confronting some hard truths about the persistently negative behaviors that plague our workplace culture and discourage the richness that diversity, equity, and inclusion offer must be a top priority for ACRL leadership. As vice-president/president-elect and a leader committed to elevating measurable DEI efforts, I will emphasize creating environments where staff and patrons feel valued, respected, and supported. I will activate solutions-centered research and approaches to addressing our long-standing cultural issues that will empower staff and administration to make incremental and sweeping organizational change.

Together, we can amplify our excellence by celebrating and sharing academic libraries' transformative work. We can strengthen strategic partnerships that position us as indispensable collaborators in addressing higher education's greatest challenges. We can promote advocacy and public policy that ensures libraries have the resources and freedoms they need to thrive. We can also foster an inclusive workplace culture that empowers every staff member to succeed.

My vision for ACRL is one of bold leadership and collective action. I believe deeply in the power of academic libraries to change lives, and I am eager to work alongside you to shape our future. Within our association lies an extraordinary community of practitioners, educators, and researchers eager to collaborate on complex topics and share their knowledge for the betterment of our profession. We can and we must build upon ACRL's legacy of excellence by ensuring that academic libraries remain at the forefront of innovation, advocacy, and inclusion.

I am excited to be nominated for the position of ACRL vice-president/president-elect and stand ready to serve at this seminal time in history.

Thank you for considering my candidacy and I humbly ask for your vote. ✄