

President's Message

More on Library Education

by Michael Gorman

I chose to make the education of librarians one of the major topics of my term as American Library Association president because of my concern that some ALA-accredited LIS programs do not provide the kind of library-centered education that enables graduates to use the training they receive to become effective and productive librarians. I do acknowledge the need for libraries to provide training to round out the education that should be the responsibility of the LIS programs.

I was asked recently about what, if anything, I had achieved in furthering the cause of library education during my term as president. The powers of the ALA presidency are fleeting and limited. Often, the best one can do is to draw attention to a problem or issue, convene meetings on and write about it, and, with luck, set events in train that will lead to improvement or resolution.

If you believe, as I do, that there is a crisis in library education that threatens the very existence of libraries and librarianship, you are likely to draw a negative reaction from a variety of people. First, there are the millennialist librarians and pseudo-librarians who, intoxicated with self-indulgence and technology, will dismiss you as a “Luddite” or worse. They and their yips and yawps can safely be left to their acronymic backwaters and the dubious delights of clicking and surfing. Then there are the increasing numbers of faculty in LIS schools who are, at best, indifferent to libraries and, at worst, hostile to libraries and their continuing mission. Their concerns are with “information science” and other topics that are marginal or irrelevant to the work of libraries. I emphasize that this categorization does not include the many library-oriented faculty who strive, against the odds and the winds of fashion, to teach the next generation of librarians and to pass on the core subjects, ethics, and values of our profession. Their valiant efforts are often stymied by the arrogant and dismissive “I” battalions.

Here are the central issues: I believe there is a discipline called librarianship; that the core concerns of that discipline can be defined and codified into a core curriculum; that ALA's accreditation of LIS programs should depend on the faculty of those programs teaching and doing research into those central concerns; and that library educators and practitioners should work together through ALA to ensure that graduates of ALA-accredited programs receive the



training that will enable them to build on their library education to become productive librarians. Moreover, I believe that those educated and trained librarians should be involved in both the practice of librarianship and in continuing education—another area in which the Association can work fruitfully with practitioners and library educators.

Some of those who have challenged my statements about the crisis in library education have said that all ALA-accredited library programs do, in fact, teach the core subjects of librarianship. Examination of their catalogs and the teaching and research interests

of their full-time faculty do not support these assertions. Such examinations are made very difficult by the fact that the names of courses and/or research interests are cloaked in the obscurity of academic jargon (heaven forefend that we should have courses called “cataloging,” “reference,” “library technology,” etc.) and it is very difficult to discover what a recent graduate of an LIS program has learned. If it is true that all ALA-accredited LIS programs are teaching an agreed core of subjects, where is the problem in having ALA enforce its accreditation standards and insist that the programs they accredit both teach and do research in a prescribed set of subjects?

To go back to the initial question: What, if anything, has been accomplished? I have written extensively on the topic and spoken at a variety of state and other library meetings—most recently at ALA's Public Library Association conference in Boston. The ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio saw a forum on library education that was, among other things, the largest gathering of library educators and practitioners in many decades (*AL*, Mar., p. 47–49). Papers and discussions from that forum are available at www.michaelgorman.org. On June 9 there will be a national interactive teleconference (open to all) on library education (see details at www.michaelgorman.org). There will also be a forum on international library education June 23, during the ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans. Most of all, I hope to have created an interest in this central topic, rattled some cages, and, generally, made people think about education for and the future of our profession. 📧

ALA President MICHAEL GORMAN is dean of library services at California State University at Fresno's Henry Madden Library; michaelg@csufresno.edu.