

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Commentary

Membership & Service Along the Career Path

Pre- and Post-Tenure Musings

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Two academic librarians, at different stages of professional life, share the importance of service in their daily duties and overall career path. The advantages of membership in the Pennsylvania Library Association are emphasized, as is networking with others in the profession. Leadership opportunities and mentorship of junior colleagues is also explored.

Introduction

Membership can be bought. In fact, for our state, national, and international library associations there is a fee to belong. Putting pen to check or entering a credit card number can officially make you a “card carrying member,” even though very few organizations will mail you an actual card anymore. This monetary exchange alone gives librarians the justification needed to list membership of a professional organization on a dossier or a curriculum vita. For this reason, tenure policies often require service to the profession, not just membership to the organization. Membership can easily be passive, while service requires action. Here are the reflections on service, and other benefits of membership, by two Penn State librarians at different points in their professional journeys, one on the tenure-track, and the other post-tenured. Public librarians, school media specialists, and librarians at other academic institutions may have different experiences.

The Early Career, Tenure-Track Academic Librarian

Kristin E. C. Green is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at Penn State Scranton. She is an early career librarian finishing her fourth year in the profession and is currently on the tenure-track.

The development needs of an early career academic librarian on the tenure-track are tremendous but membership in the Pennsylvania Library Association (PaLA) and the College and Research Division (CRD) of the association can be instrumental in meeting them. When you focus on aspects of academic librarianship you enjoy, and

immerse yourself within them, the quality of your dossier and records of accomplishments will naturally follow. Membership to the PaLA and the CRD presents the immersive opportunities needed by the tenure-track librarian that are necessary for growth as a librarian practitioner, a librarian scholar, and a librarian advocate.

Librarian Practitioner

The most important role librarians play on their campuses is in meeting the scholarly and intellectual needs of their academic communities, whether it be through information literacy instruction, collection development, or programming. Membership provides the occasions for sharing and growth regarding many facets of academic librarianship that are practiced on a daily basis. Learning from one another, face-to-face, is possible at annual events such as the PaLA Conference & Expo, the CRD Workshop, and chapter workshops held within different geographic regions throughout the Commonwealth. From these venues in the last three years, I have learned how other academic librarians build board game collections, map their information literacy curriculum, use systematic reviews as teaching tools, create escape rooms, mentor students through internships, develop open access policies, and more.

However, not all interactions need to be experienced in-person to foster professional growth. Undoubtedly early career librarians need more professional development than can fit into even the most generous of travel budgets. Therefore, membership to the CRD is critical for engagement with virtual and asynchronous professional development opportunities. The CRD sponsors the popular *Connect & Communicate* series, which this year alone has addressed a diverse range of topics including social media outreach, critical approach to assessment, digital badging, and librarianship residencies. A virtual journal club, open only to CRD members, was recently established and held two series of conversations in its first year, each one focusing on a different aspect of academic librarianship that members are interested in exploring together through a review of scholarly literature. Additionally, the CRD sponsors *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research and Practice*, an open-access journal fondly referred to as PaLRaP. Reading the articles published in PaLRaP and written by colleagues in varying types of libraries is an asynchronous avenue for professional growth by learning from others' research and day-to-day librarianship practices.

Librarian Scholar

Membership to a community dedicated to learning and professional growth necessitates that your own research and practice is shared. All the platforms and venues previously mentioned as offering quality professional development opportunities can also serve as growth opportunities for early career, tenure-track librarians to present their own work. As an active member of PaLA and CRD over the last few years, I have been honored with the offer to present three times at the PaLA Conference & Expo. One presentation session shared a solo pedagogical project, another was a collaborative poster session related to qualitative research conducted, and the third was a collaboration with a faculty instructor regarding the improvement of student learning. Similarly, I was offered the opportunity to present once at my chapter's workshop about an annual event I established. While these four presentations were on an assortment of distinct topics, they all provided the same benefit for me. I was able to share my work with colleagues who in turn provided me with insightful and constructive feedback, feedback that allowed for a reflection on my work and a strengthening of ideas for further development of these projects. Once these evolving ideas presented in conference and workshop sessions mature, PaLRaP proves an enticing venue to submit for publication as the editors, "consider all submissions that report original research (research articles), highlight innovative initiatives (practice articles), or discuss current trends/challenges (editorial/commentary)" (Pennsylvania Libraries: Research and Practice, n.d.). Publishing is a crucial component of work for tenure-track librarians and PaLRaP thoughtfully offers an open access space within our scholarly communication for a collection of works exhibiting the extensive medley of interests existing within librarianship.

Librarian Advocate

By contributing back to the profession through service, your voice and advocacy as a librarian can be heard and acted upon. Through service, you can help shape these growth opportunities for others and give back for the opportunities created for you. The organizational structure of PaLA creates ample options for any member to provide service in an area that aligns with professional interests. There are chapters that correlate to different geographic regions of the Commonwealth, divisions organized around different types of librarianship (i.e., CRD), and roundtables that focus on specific interests, all with service opportunities available. There are association-level committees embedded with member-at-large positions for additional opportunities to serve. I have personally just begun my journey giving back to the association this year through service with an appointment on the CRD board and I eagerly look forward to continuing my service as a member by seeking involvement in more committees that align with my professional interests.

The Established, Tenured Academic Librarian

Bonnie Imler is Head Librarian at Penn State Altoona and Acting Head Librarian at Penn State DuBois. She has been a tenured librarian for 7 years and holds the rank of Associate Librarian.

Librarian as Experienced Professional

Many of the opportunities availed by membership in PaLA that benefit tenure-track librarians, are also appreciated in the post-tenure years. The librarian love for life-long learning draws us to continue to seek occasions for professional development and collegial sharing. Service in a professional organization may have begun as a tenure requirement, but it can become a professional habit. Post-tenure life may even provide more time for service, or at the very least, time management skills learned during the tenure process may make the time commitment less stressful. Success in early career committees can give you some name recognition and increase the odds of receiving an invitation to serve on special projects, speak at programs, or run for higher office in the organization.

New friendships found through association membership can be a nice service perk, and attending meetings and conferences is a good way to stay in touch. I have known of several cases where strong friendships, forged on early career committees, have turned into standing appointments to room together at conferences. If your family members believe that you shelve books and say “sh-hh” for a living, it can be nice to have friends in the profession that understand where you are coming from. In your post-tenure life, there may also be times when you are called on to provide names of potential references or reviewers outside of your library. Some of these times may include when you have written a book, or when you are up for promotion. In cases like these, it is good to have long-standing professional relationships, with people familiar with your work, to provide ready names for such occasions.

Librarian Leader

If service is a priority for your academic institution, it will be at all levels of employment. Active service, and particularly exhibited leadership, are often valued elements of a successful annual evaluation, and may even be a requirement for future promotion in rank. In addition, significant service and leadership in state and national associations is almost always expected of all candidates for higher administrative positions. Networking and past, positive committee interactions can lead to the development of library consortia, and a web of respected reviewers and references for the tenure and hiring process.

Career advancement is likely to mean a change in your service orientation. Changing job responsibilities may lead you to service on a different committee, a different section, or even a new professional organization. It is important

to align your career goals and professional development needs with your association memberships. As your horizons expand and you abandon your previous committee positions, there will always be plenty of new librarians looking for their first service opportunity.

Librarian Mentor

As a tenure survivor, you may be a mentor, either formally or informally. Wisdom on navigating the association system is one of the areas most sought after by our new tenure-track colleagues. You may not consider it wisdom, but you do have knowledge on how, where, and when to volunteer. You likely know the committees that fill up the fastest and those that are always in need of new members. You know that some committee leadership is directly tied to simultaneous membership on section executive committees or a larger organizational committee with like interests. That's right, one leadership appointment can lead to one or two additional memberships in notable committees. For example, the membership representative of each local PaLA chapter is automatically part of the state-wide PaLA Membership Committee. Perhaps most helpful to a newly minted librarian, is the network of contacts you have obtained that allow you to inquire about open positions on committees, and lobby for opportunities on your mentee's behalf.

Conclusion

Wherever you may be within your own journey of academic librarianship, membership provides the resources, relationships, and opportunities needed for professional development. When you think beyond the check you wrote or the credit card you charged your membership dues on, you realize the value inherent in engagement with PaLA is not tangible. The value lies within the moments that foster improvement, reflection, and genuine growth as a librarian.

References

Pennsylvania Libraries: Research and Practice. (n.d.) Editorial policies: Focus and scope. Retrieved from <http://www.palrap.org/ojs/index.php/palrap/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>