PaLA | College & Research
Division (CRD)

Pennsylvania Libraries: *Research & Practice*

Interview

In the PaLRaP Spotlight:
Courtney Young

American Library Association (ALA) President, 2014-2015

*Courtney Young is Head Librarian and Professor of Women's Studies
at Pennsylvania State University, Greater Allegheny campus, cly11@psu.edu*

Interview by Stephanie Campbell

You are one of only a handful of Pennsylvanians to serve as ALA President. Why did you decide to run for this position?

I was honored to be nominated by ALA's Nominating Committee to run for ALA President. As I noted in a previous interview, I am passionate about ALA's strategic efforts to make its mission a reality. As a member-focused organization of 55,000 librarians, library staff, LIS students, trustees, and advocates, ALA has some of the smartest and most dedicated people. As president, I wanted to highlight how ALA is relevant to libraries, library staff, and the public. The ALA President develops an organizational vision for implementation, and I knew that with the strategic plan ending June 30, 2015, this would be a considerable part of the job.

In your platform, you said that you would focus on diversity, career development, and engagement & outreach. How would you assess your success at achieving these goals?

The Association has been successful in moving forward in these areas. The Career Development Facilitators program is one example. Twenty state chapter representatives, including one from Pennsylvania, participated in the inaugural Career Development Facilitators (CDF) program. This program provided "comprehensive training designed to address several facets of career planning and the job search." The training was tailored with special emphasis on the role of the librarian in helping library users and job seekers.

You have said that you traveled 100,000+ miles in the past year. Which countries have you visited? Did you have any travel nightmares that you would like to share?

I attended and presented at library conferences in the Dominican Republic, France, South Korea, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates. Many of these trips were long, but they went smoothly, and it was a pleasure to represent ALA and librarians from the United States globally.

How did being ALA President affect your everyday job?

It provided me with an opportunity to see how libraries of all types are serving their communities, which in turn, has allowed me to bring back some new ideas and take different approaches to the way I do my work. It has raised my profile among the campus faculty and staff, who are getting a better sense of the type of impact a library and librarians can have on a national level.

You are also a member of the Pennsylvania Library Association. Is there anything that you learned while serving as ALA President that you think would benefit PaLA?

I would encourage PaLA members to increase their understanding of how ALA benefits PA libraries, librarians, and the people of the Commonwealth. The Association has eight key action areas "as guiding principles for investment of energies and resources." They are 1) advocacy for libraries and the profession, 2) diversity, 3) education and lifelong learning, 4) equitable access to information and library services, 5) intellectual freedom, 6) literacy, 7) organizational excellence, and 8) transforming libraries.

Do you have any further comments that might benefit early career professionals thinking about or seeking significant leadership positions?

There are leadership opportunities everywhere. Be it chairing a committee, coordinating an event, or running for an office, these all take leadership and will lead to more opportunities. I encourage early career librarians to start by volunteering for a committee. Pick something you find interesting that will challenge you in some positive way or is a really great fit for your skills. Getting involved in a professional association is about making connections and growing as a professional. Remember, follow-through and good communication are key to having a great experience in any association or organization.