

# Empowering People through Libraries: The Role of the Profession

by Marilyn L. Miller

**Editor's note:** Marilyn L. Miller, Professor and Chair of the Department of Library and Information Studies at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Vice President and President-Elect of the American Library Association, presented the Ogilvie Lecture at the Second General Session of the NCLA Biennial Conference. The Ogilvie Lecture was created in 1977 in memory of Philip S. Ogilvie, State Librarian of North Carolina from 1965 to 1976.



some other local vintage of noteworthy power to persuade the tongue. Spur of the moment speeches tended to get easier to deliver as the day progressed.

I also had the opportunity to speak with library staffs on a couple of occasions. I took those occasions to discuss the importance of the professional association in developing high quality library services to communities.

It was easy to talk to Romanians about the potential of empowering people through libraries. You and I believe this. Many of us were recruited by the attractiveness of joining our love of books with the potential for being of service to our fellow men, women, and children. Once we were recruited, prepared, and on the job we have seen ourselves over and over in an empowerment role. Because of what we do, we enable people to be something other than they were before they used the resources, information, and services we help provide. The little child who reads for the first time all by herself a book checked out from the library; the adult who completes a literacy program in a public library; the high school student who writes successfully a paper with the help of the reference librarian; the businessman who can make a decision because of the information received in the library. And so it goes: researchers, parents, students, recreational readers, the discouraged — all are somehow enabled because of us.

Empowerment of people through libraries is the theme I have selected for my presidential year. While I intend to keep us thinking next year about our role as agents of empowerment for residents and citizens of our nation, I hope to encourage the profession to continue to examine new paradigms of delivering information services to the nation. I am also urging us, beginning now, to empower ourselves as members of a professional association.

Today, in my presentation, I am going to concentrate on two areas of professional

**M**y first official function for ALA as President-Elect was to lead a delegation of seventeen very competent American librarians to Romania to deliver a seminar to about one hundred Romanian librarians. The purpose of the seminar was to describe how we deliver library service in the United States. Library service in Romania is at ground level after the Ceceascu regime and, as efforts are made to build a new library system, it was deemed an opportunity to provide an alternative to the European model. So we talked about organization, service, library education, automation, and intellectual freedom. The week there provided heart and mind-wrenching experiences with people, history, and social conditions. Each trip across Bucharest, a shabby, tired, and discouraged city, took us by the bullet-spattered, burned-out hulk of the university library. The secret service had taken refuge on the roof with guns, but the people were not to be denied on those December days of fury, and the library lost in that furious tug of war.

Ceceascu did not close the tiny nation's libraries. Throughout his reign, staff still received small salaries, but few materials were purchased. He closed library education programs, so librarians today are holders of college degrees with-

out professional preparation for their positions. Indeed, they are well-educated, cultured people with earned degrees in the liberal arts. They have taught themselves English. They run the libraries as they were run by the professionals fifty years before them. Libraries are operated as warehouses, but the Romanian warehouses of today little represent the information needed by a nation trying to understand what it will take to move into the late twentieth century. Indeed, Romanians must leapfrog the last forty-six years and move directly into the twenty-first century.

When we talked in the seminar, and individually to the librarians and to the many city and national officials we met, we talked about the way libraries can and should empower people. We talked about our belief in the library as intrinsic to a democratic way of life. As the leader of the delegation, I was the one who had to prepare those little speeches for our city, provincial, and national hosts at city hall and the provincial and national ministries — and deliver them — usually on the spur of the moment.

Our library hosts were not always careful about giving us a detailed glimpse of their plans, and before we knew it we were in a town hall, a mountain village, or at the State Ministry of Culture toasting and being toasted with brandy, wine, or

empowerment. First is the critical need for the profession to embark on a serious discussion and debate on library education. Second is our need to take a thoughtful look at the way we organize ourselves into a national profession.

It is absolutely time for the American Library Association to shift from reactive to proactive in its discussion and actions relative to library education. A profession that looks neither to its history nor to the education/continuation of its future is in a sad way. I would propose to you that we fail somewhat on both fronts, and the failure in the library education arena could do us in.

I'd like to identify some of the issues that must be addressed by state and regional associations, as well as ALA, if we are going to sustain and maintain viable library education programs and improved relationships between the field and the library education community.

The present role of ALA in library education is a topic on which we need common knowledge. The most dedicated, sustained, and well-financed library education effort by ALA is in the area of program accreditation. In this process, association members develop standards for accreditation that are approved by the ALA Council. The process for applying those standards to individual programs is developed by the Committee on Accreditation. That process is not approved by any ALA body, but it is approved by COPA, the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, the regulatory body that monitors the accreditation processes of all professional societies and organizations involved in accreditation.

An ad hoc committee of ALA members is now finalizing a draft of new standards to be brought to the council for approval at the San Francisco meeting. At its regular fall meeting at the end of October, the ALA Executive Board asked the Committee on Accreditation to address the issues of concern surrounding the accreditation process being raised by university administrators and deans and directors of library education programs.

For several years ALA had a unit called the Library Education Division. When ALA implemented a new financing structure that required all divisions to be self-supporting, under the direction of its esteemed president at the time, Ed Holley, LED was one of the small divisions quickly in trouble. It was abolished — or as someone said, "just let go." The substitute was a council committee, SCOLE. SCOLE was born of necessity, and in hindsight — and remember that hindsight is always 20/20 — this move has been a disastrous mistake

if one looks now at the range of problems we face in deciding what we should do about library education and how we should do it.

I don't remember the options discussed at the time of the abolition of LED. It was sincerely felt at the time that SCOLE with its Library Assembly composed of representatives from each division would be a viable substitute. SCOLE, a council committee, would have the attention of the Council and thus the membership. A Committee could direct attention to various library education concerns through a subcommittee and task force structure, besides addressing major concerns themselves. As is true of all committees, SCOLE has a staff liaison, one of the very finest of the ALA staff members in my opinion, in Margaret Myers, who directs the Office of Library Personnel Resources. The library assembly would and does meet at each conference and reports on unit library education activities, responds to various association-wide library education concerns, and exchanges information among units.

Having just finished two terms on SCOLE myself, including a year as chair, I can say with some confidence that our present system does not work to our advantage in dealing with the concentration of library education issues. Regular committee turnover and members with uneven backgrounds in library education and experience make continuity and attention to major issues difficult. Library assembly members represent units that have disparate library education interests and goals and objectives. Some divisions have devoted time and energy to the development of competency statements and to discussions and development of output measures in terms of position descriptions, while others have lesser interest in library education concerns. I should note for those of you who may not know that there is an organization for library educators outside of ALA called the Association of Library and Information Science Educators (ALISE). ALISE meets once a year prior to the ALA Midwinter meeting. I believe strongly that the problems we must deal with cannot be solved by the faculty of library schools alone. The profession must live up to its responsibility to be concerned about these issues in a productive way.

Now let me indicate a few of the library education-related issues this association must address. I am not listing my concerns in priority or any kind of sequen-

tial order although I am going to leave the closing of library schools to the last, although it is first on many of our minds. I am not sure we can work to stem the flow of closings until we address some of the other issues.

### **1. What will libraries be like and what will librarians do in the twenty-first century?**

I was in a middle school the other evening in Randolph County, not one of North Carolina's wealthiest school districts. However, that district has given the state of North Carolina a school with a state of the art library media center program. Just as the silicon chip is promoting political upheavals all over the world, the silicon chip is fomenting upheavals in our educational system. This new school out in a rural area of North Carolina is proof of this. All teachers in this school have telephones in their classrooms (fewer than fifty percent of the school librarians in the country have telephones in their media centers, much less a dedicated line for communications technology). With these phones, teachers easily control their instructional use of the school's large and growing video collection. Students can access the library media center catalog from any computer in the school; electronic mail keeps students, faculty, and administrators in communication; CD-ROM is used by sixth graders with ease and

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sophistication. Teachers in the school are overhauling curriculum and teaching strategies in directions only a few would have guessed at when the new school started. The library media center, the technological switching station for much of what is going on in the school, is delivering information. The development of the smart school will continue to define the role of the school library media specialist into that of information access manager.

A recent Lou Harris poll reported the upswing in the use of the public library and reported impressive gains in the numbers of books being circulated. Even more impressive was the number of people who said they would use home computers, if



they had them, to access the library. Thus the public library becomes even more caught up in the delivery of information.

## 2. What is the world of work going to be like for Americans?

Thoughtful United States businessmen, university presidents, and other intellectual leaders are trying to alert the American public to the fact that the era of the smokestack is over in the United States and that the smokestack syndrome prevalent in American education must be replaced and schools restructured and reformed. The worker of the twenty-first century will not be a blue collar worker. So illiteracy must be abolished.

Not only will the workers of the twenty-first century work differently, the work force of the twenty-first century will be drastically changed. Almost ninety percent of the new entrants into our work force during this decade will be people of color, non-minority women, or immigrants. The twenty-first century will be the first post-European century in American history in the sense that an absolute majority of young people born in this century will be born of parents of other than European background—Asian, African, and Hispanic. Workers will work in an “age of knowledge.”

## 3. What should library school curriculum be like?

Are library schools caught up also in the smokestack syndrome? Should we be experimenting with new models of library education based on problem solving, team work, specialization, and increased use of technology and a new curriculum?

I must add that I frankly do not think that library educators alone should be making the curriculum decisions. The profession has a right and a responsibility to enter this dialogue beyond the development of new accreditation standards.

## 4. How many librarians do we need?

We have not the foggiest idea of how many professionally educated librarians we need. We do not have the foggiest idea of how many we have if all those who have left the field would return. A month ago I asked state librarians to communicate with me the results of any needs assessments they have conducted. So far I have heard from two. A corollary question is: Is it only the M.L.S. graduate we need in libraries?

## 5. What about distance education and quality control?

We have had distance education for a long time in library education programs. We have called it extension or off-campus programs. Instructors have driven across the state; adjuncts have been hired in off-campus locations; instructors have flown to other cities. Now we are using technology. There are several interesting models in operation. The University of South Carolina has been delivering televised courses for several years. Emporia State University (Kansas) is offering off-campus programs in states without established library education programs or in states with established library education programs but no interest in off-campus programs. Emporia faculty and on-site liaisons and adjunct faculty are delivering courses, and those students participating are extremely grateful for the opportunity to prepare themselves for new careers or to continue to hold the jobs they have. My own Department of Library and Information Studies at UNC-G has been given permission to offer our entire degree program via the state's microwave concert transmission system (MCNC). To my knowledge we are the first program in the entire university system to be granted the opportunity to use this very

versatile, totally interactive series of electronic classrooms to deliver a degree. We are now transmitting a program to Charlotte, and we hope to add the Asheville campus before long.

With increasing sophistication of technology and the development of LISDEC, a consortium of library schools and other agencies interested in the delivery of library education and devoted to the delivery of courses via satellite, we come to the next question. How many library schools will we need in the twenty-first century?

I should note that distance education programs are not without problems. Resources off-campus do not typically match resources on campus in libraries, learning centers, and oftentimes in available libraries for demonstration and field trips. Socialization is still a challenge as is guaranteed equity of instruction unless the university exercise of quality control extends forcefully to adjunct faculty appointments. Which leads to the next question.

Should we implement the only still unimplemented recommendation of the Williamson report of the 1920s? Should we move to the certification of librarians? Should we develop licensing examinations?

—Next question: How are we going to re-educate the present work force to work with a changing multicultural society and the relentless development of technology and its applications? How are we going to

recruit? Whose responsibility is it to recruit? How much effort should we be making now to recruit in a period of economic uncertainty? Who role models the excitement of the profession? So far we are not being totally successful in recruiting the kinds of people we say we want. We still are recruiting some people in their early twenties, many in their late twenties, many more in their thirties, quite a few in their forties, and even some in their fifties. Over the past several years we have gradually seen undergraduate declarations for library science move upwards, until we now find that the concentration of those declaring for careers as librarians or information specialists are in the senior year of their college career.

—We are not recruiting minorities. We are getting people who are not committed to the profession as an early first choice; we are getting people who cannot use the degree or major of their first choice and are finding us as a second choice. We are getting women re-entering the work force after childrearing or making lateral moves out of the classroom or a variety of other occupations and professions. Many, many of our graduates do not look forward to long, sustained years of contribution to a profession. Where will we get our library faculty?

I recommend that you read the Futas/Lipowitz article in the September 1, *Library Journal* for an up-to-date report on faculty projections for library schools. We are aging, and if we can, many of us will opt out of higher education early for a variety of reasons some of which are not discussed in the Futas report. Our preponderant faculty expertise is not in the areas that should be in most demand to help libraries change: the areas of technology or telecommunications. Several of the library education programs that have closed had doctoral programs. Thereby opportunities are lessened for students who do wish to go into teaching.

I must note that pressure applied by ALA and the field have secured five million dollars in federally funded fellowship money for the preparation of master's and doctoral students. This is more federal money than we have ever had for scholarships from the federal government. Eighty-five proposals have been received for

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funding under this program.

Can we stem the tide of library school closings? We will have to try — and I mean we. This is a profession-wide job.

ALA and the profession should have become concerned when the first university, the University of Oregon, announced that its program would be phased out. Remember hindsight? Most of you are familiar with the work of Marian Paris who tackled the subject of library school closings in her dissertation. Paris concluded that schools were closing because they had become a financial burden to the university; they were isolated within the university; they had unresponsive and complacent library school leadership who could not provide credible justification for the school's existence; and they were not a part of the redefinition of the university's mission. Turf battles with other departments and divisions such as computer science and business, poor program quality as determined by evaluations (including, I might infer, those from our COA), too little and poor quality of research of faculty, and lack of a pressuring alumni group were also cited.

A second article I highly recommend for your reading is one that appeared in the July *Library Quarterly* by Margaret Steig. This article: "The Closing of the Library Schools: Darwinism at the University" is an extremely well written explanation of what is happening in universities. This includes the shift to an emphasis on research and grantsmanship — the concern with the bottom line. Small programs, and many library education programs are small by comparison, are disappearing from the curriculum in universities. Library education programs are not the only ones fighting for their lives in some universities. Most of those programs that have closed have been in private institutions, have had relatively small enrollments that did not recoup their program costs with tuition and fee income, and did not, perhaps, fit the changed mission of the university.

The bottom line syndrome brought on by decreasing state support in the case of state universities is prevalent. Universities are in hot pursuit of grant money. There is little grant money out there for many library education programs; and I might add that one reason is our isolation in the university. We have been told on our campus that the university is demanding that each campus show evidence of organized contribution to the public good through service to communities, especially the public schools. More emphasis on providing for the public good can only help us defend and describe the value of library education.

Lest you think that I will be sitting back during my year in the ALA Presidency and dealing only with issues of implementation of the White House Conference and heightening the dialog on library education, I should tell you, I am working on a charge to a special committee that will involve itself in a multi-year self study of the association. In my opinion, we need to look at the way the Association is managed. We are managing this Association of fifty-three thousand members the same way we did when we had ten thousand members with a remarkably arcane governance system — some would say archaic as well as arcane, but that is for the self-study to clarify. We need to ask ourselves some tough questions.

First, what should be the business of a national association in the twenty-first century? Is it primarily to deliver continuing education through conferences? Is it to affect legislation? Is it to develop partnerships or alliances with other organizations? Is it to communicate to the nation the needs and successes of the

nation's libraries? Is it to be the intellectual freedom watchdog? Should we look at ways to strengthen state and regional associations and identify a different role for the national organization? I have no answers (I have some opinions), but I want to prod us to identify the questions that should be asked, do some background reading and research, analyze ourselves, look at the future, and come up with some recommendations. If we recommend the very same goals, objectives, and priorities, and structure and management process, it is o.k. At least we will be coming from an intelligent self-

examination.

I am not seeking restructuring of ALA in my proposal for a self-study. I am seeking for us to examine the way we do business just as we are asking librarians to examine the way they will do business in the twenty-first century. If we need new paradigms of information delivery in the twenty-first century, maybe we need new paradigms for empowering our profession to be more than it is now.

I have been elected to serve as president of the largest and oldest library profession in the world. And I thank you for the opportunity to speak "at home" and I thank you for your continued interest and support as I move through the next year and a half in what is proving to be for me a very interesting adventure and opportunity to be of service to you and to what we believe in: empowering people through libraries.

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how many professionally  
educated librarians we need.*

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