

In Step with Library Leaders

Welcome to the inaugural article for a new column, to be focused on library leadership. Leadership may provide vision, direction, encouragement, or a model, and it may come from those in positions of authority or from coworkers alongside you. If you are interested in library leadership, I would encourage you to network with your local library leaders and consider contacting someone from the NCLA's [Leadership, Administration, and Management Section](#).



Janice S. Lewis

For this first column, I have 3 questions for 3 library leaders. The first person to respond was Janice S. Lewis, Director of Academic Library Services at East Carolina University. On July 1, 2024, she will celebrate the completion of her 25th year at J.Y. Joyner Library. Her leadership

roles include past chair of the UNC University Libraries Advisory Council, past president of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, and President of the Friends of Sheppard Memorial Library.

Melanie Morgan, Director of Libraries for the Neuse Regional Libraries, was the second library leader polled. Selected Public Library Director of the Year for 2021, Morgan is an educator who believes in the power of libraries to transform lives. With more than 15 years of public library experience, she is dedicated to re-envisioning the library to advance its role as a community hub committed to inspiring creativity, fostering learning, and engaging the community. Melanie Morgan is a resident of Kinston and enjoys reading, going on hikes, and traveling with her family and friends.



Melanie Morgan



Kathy Parker

The third library leader to participate is Kathy Parker. Kathy is a Raleigh native who answered the calling to be a lifelong educator. She graduated with English and history degrees from North Carolina State University and earned ESL certification and a master's degree in library science from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She began her career in education as a high school English teacher before transitioning to school library media. In 2008, she earned National Board Certification in library media. Joining the NC Department of Public Instruction in 2012, she is currently the state's School Library and Sandhills Regional Consultant in the Office of Digital Teaching and Learning. Kathy is available via email or phone at kathy.parker@dpi.nc.gov or 252-220-0917.

My first question for all three is, "What motivates you as a library leader?"

As a library leader, Lewis writes that she is deeply motivated by the opportunity to innovate, improve, and proactively collaborate to advance our university's teaching, learning, and research mission. Her goal is to ensure that every person who interacts with our library services and resources – whether onsite or online – has a positive experience, and she strives to make their journey as frictionless as possible. Several factors drive her commitment. One is our collective responsibility to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Another is our collections, which should reflect the diversity of our communities, ensuring that everyone feels represented and valued. By curating materials that resonate with various backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives, we contribute to a richer learning experience for all library users. Third, Lewis is also deeply appreciative of the dedicated and tal-

ented team of faculty, staff, and student employees who are the backbone of our library. She is passionate about supporting them by providing resources, training, and technology that enable them to perform at their best.

Their professional growth and job satisfaction are essential to our collective success. She wants them to recognize the importance and value of their work and the impact it has on library users. As a leader, Lewis strives to communicate this impact to other stakeholders, whether it is faculty, administration, or the broader community. Our work matters, and she wants others to understand and appreciate it. The leadership mantra “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” resonates with her. “I try to prioritize empathy and understanding,” she writes in closing. “Despite managerial pressures and financial constraints, I am committed to fostering a compassionate environment where our team feels supported and valued.”

Public libraries are the heart of the community, Morgan firmly believes, the cornerstone of democracy, and inclusive environments “where community members’ needs are fulfilled in an impactful manner.” It has been her passion to build libraries that not only elevate the communities they serve but transform the lives they impact. She goes on, “As a leader, my focus is building a resilient team environment

dents, and their families better. Knowing how much libraries enrich our school communities and improve well-being, motivates me as a library leader. I want to enable that purposeful work!”

The second question is, “How do you help create a shared vision?”

Melanie Morgan provides a focus on a shared role, and attempts to gather consensus around what they can do together to meet that role. “The Neuse Regional Libraries (NRL) are dedicated to re-envisioning the library to advance its role as a community center where residents can gather, learn, create, and find inspiration; as well as increase partnerships with local organizations to provide programming and resources outside the library’s walls. For the NRL, it is really about being part of the community and adapting services and programming to meet community members where they are.” Neuse Regional must be attuned to differences across the service area, as it serves more than one homogenous community: “As one of twelve regional library systems overseeing three counties in North Carolina, it can be challenging because each county is unique. Therefore, we have to build collections, programming, and services that are adaptable, sustainable, and core to our mission of promoting intergenerational literacy to meet our goal of being a community center.”

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and creating a work culture where all staff members feel valued and heard. It takes relationship building to develop a connected library, and the success of a library comes down to a healthy work environment where staff members are encouraged to dream big while upholding professional best practices.” Leading that interconnected team of coworkers to make an impact on the community is the prime motivation for Melanie Morgan.

Parker emphasizes her desire to work with those who enrich communities: “School librarians and the services they offer make the lives of our teachers, stu-

Kathy Parker writes “Listening, relationship building, engagement, and communication are key to creating a shared vision. Libraries are productive when stakeholders are collaborating and connecting around a common purpose.” Interpersonal communication and relationships are foregrounded in how leaders help create a shared vision.

For Jan Lewis, a shared vision “starts with communication, respect, and active participation.” She goes on to describe how East Carolina University has a strong commitment to shared governance that carries over into the library: “At our library, this is evidenced

through our EHRA and SHRA Assemblies, committees, regular department, division, and library-wide meetings, and participatory planning processes.” She attends all Assembly meetings to provide updates and answer questions, convenes regular leadership meetings documented with minutes shared library-wide, hosts regular library-wide events, and uses email, the library’s Intranet, and Teams sites to ensure that everyone stays informed. “As library director, I have learned,” she writes, “that it is practically impossible to over-communicate.”

Strategic planning is also done with library-wide input, ranging from the overarching five-year strategic plan which frames annual department, committee and individual goals. “Achieving the goals in the strategic plan and thereby our mission and vision requires buy-in and participation from everyone,” Lewis confirms, and she makes visible the products of that shared vision. “Our website prominently features our goals, metrics, annual reports, and initiatives that support our shared vision. Sustainable publishing, open and affordable educational resources, and student success are central themes. By showcasing these efforts, we inspire our community and reinforce our commitment to excellence.” Lewis summarizes her position this way: “In short, creating and achieving our shared vision hinges on effective communication, shared ownership, and a collective commitment.”

**The last question is,
“What is the most exciting thing you see
on the horizon for your libraries?”**

Perhaps not surprisingly, the possibilities offered by current and developing technologies figure into leaders’ responses to this question. Parker sets this in a school library context: “I am excited by the instructional leadership opportunities that generative AI provides for school librarians. Teachers, students, and their families need a school librarian’s skillset now more than ever to help them optimize generative AI effectively, ethically, and responsibly.”

Jan Lewis addresses this question from an academic library perspective. She writes that she is “excited about the opportunities generative artificial intelligence, customized large language models and other AI tools offer. Our university’s exploration of

a Microsoft CoPilot license,” she goes on, “can be game changer. Imagine training our chatbot using our institutional data and tailoring it to ECU’s unique resources, data, and needs. Leveraging AI features in Outlook, Teams and Microsoft tools will enhance productivity and user experiences. Patrons can receive personalized assistance whether they are seeking primary source materials, navigating databases, or reserving a laptop or a study room.” And thinking beyond immediate office tools, she goes on, “Likewise, the integration of AI in Adobe products and advancements in tools like DALL-E and Midjourney opens the creation of images and videos to a much wider audience. Specific tools for functions like coding, data analysis, metadata creation, literature reviews, and more will streamline many tasks and inform decision-making.” While she expressed concerns about the financial implications, Lewis writes that she is “excited by the incorporation of AI features in subscription databases and the potential for helping researchers uncover insights faster and contribute new knowledge.”

ECU is one of the institutions participating in the Ithaka S+R “Making Artificial Intelligence Generative for Higher Education” research study. As part of the research team, Lewis interviewed instructors and researchers about their uses of generative AI and the types of support they need. “This has been invaluable in helping plan for the library’s role in the area of AI literacy, which,” she affirms, “is a natural evolution of

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our role with information literacy and critical evaluation of information. Helping users understand AI’s capabilities, biases, and ethical considerations will help ensure informed engagement with these powerful tools.”

Beyond AI, community engagement remains paramount. The growth of StoryWalks® across North Carolina exemplifies this, and at this time, a Joyner Library team is planning the first StoryWalk® in

Greenville. Jan confesses that she is “super excited to be part of this project and can’t wait for the ribbon-cutting ceremony! It will be a celebration of literacy, nature, and shared experiences.”

Melanie Morgan sees innovation and resiliency in the face of challenges. She writes, “Although our libraries are located in rural and tier-one counties, Neuse Regional Libraries have become centers of innovation and resiliency. We hope to continue to build upon the innovative programs and services that have elevated our community including the Digital Media Lab, Digital Resource Rover, Let’s Connect, Literacy without Barriers, and the WiFi for All programs to ensure accessibility for all community members.” Further, she hopes to increase her library’s sustainability by attracting new people into

the profession. Specifically, NRL plans to grow their Teen Volunteer program by offering paid internships through the LSTA Teen Leadership Internship grant, “introducing librarianship as a career path for the next generation.”

Even though they work in disparate environments, including an academic library, a regional public library and as a regional consultant for teachers and school librarians, these three library leaders share their commitments to their colleagues within libraries, seeking to bring library employees together to build a shared vision of service to their communities. Future articles in this column may offer advice, encouragement, and inspiration for each of us to build leadership capacity within ourselves.



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