Community College Librarian Focus Group Report
April 30, 2019
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Background

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) commissioned this focus group to be held during the ACRL 2019 conference in Cleveland. The objective of this focus groups was to discover what ACRL can do to support the professional engagement and development of community college librarians. This was intended to inform the work of a new engagement task force formed by the Community & Junior College Library Section.

This report summarizes the information gained from eight participants. The session followed a script approved by the ACRL Executive Director and Associate Director. The script is included in this document as an Appendix.

Audio of the session was recorded digitally to ensure the accuracy of this report. Direct quotes from participants are enclosed by quotation marks when they appear in paragraphs and are italicized when they appear in bulleted lists under the header, "Quotes."

Key Findings

Community College librarians are highly engaged with and interested in issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). They work closely with students from under-represented and under-served communities and feel deeply connected to those communities. They serve both non-traditional students and non-traditional faculty, helping meet informational, educational, and sometimes basic needs. Their familiarity with serving diverse needs of diverse populations is an untapped resource for other librarians who eventually end up serving the same students as they make their way through the higher educational system.

They don't see themselves represented in ACRL leadership, publications, or programming, which brings the value of their membership into question—if the association does not sufficiently value their perspectives or contributions, they cannot derive the greatest benefit from membership in the association.

Community college librarians want greater recognition of the role they play in educating college students and greater representation in ACRL.

ACRL Engagement (Question 1)

Participants don't feel strongly connected to ACRL; they view it as a "passive resource," not a point of engagement. They don't see themselves represented within ACRL leadership, on the conference program or in publications, or on the groups addressing major initiatives that directly affect their work (Information Literacy, OER, EDI). They view other groups and individuals as over-represented and noted their frustration at knowing how many of their colleagues' Conference proposals were rejected, especially when "there's one person presenting five times." Information and resources such as the Framework are useful, but typically written from/developed for a four-year context; this requires community college librarians to scale them for a two-year context. Since community colleges are "the backbone of higher ed in some states," the "dearth of programming" for community college librarians seems like a missed opportunity for ACRL to engage with librarians who are serving a large, diverse student population.

Quotes

I told all my colleagues where I work I was coming, and they said, tell them we're really concerned that we're tired of having to translate the Framework so it works at the community college level.
We have a lot to offer to ACRL in terms of what we know from our very direct teaching relationship with students; I find it ironic that this conference is focused on EDI, but we're not embracing in a very overt way the group of librarians who deal most directly with that.
I'm here [at the Conference] for EDI.
The social justice keynote speakers were a big draw for me [to come to Conference].

Relevance of ACRL Offerings (Question 2)

For these participants, the most relevant ACRL offerings fall into two categories:

- information that helps them have credibility and speak with authority with peers/administrators at the larger institution (Standards, research, publications)
- e-Learning related to the tools many libraries/librarians use in common, such as databases, online course management

ACRL has not addressed issues of critical importance to participants, such as

- how libraries can serve non-traditional faculty who teach professional/workforce-focused programs
- how libraries can serve non-traditional students (high school-aged/dual enrollment, adults released from prison or other institutions) and students from low-SES backgrounds
- how to improve the experience of students transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution

Quotes

My library just engaged in strategic planning, and I looked to the ACRL strategic plan as a guide to help us through that process.
It's important to assert ourselves as a profession in our institutions, so I think ACRL has that backbone of support for us.

The students that we work with are so complex in their differences.
Our students have basic needs, and they can't be successful academically if their stomachs aren't full and they don't have a place to sleep.

Resonance of Value Proposition (Questions 3 & 4)

All participants indicated that the statement "With up-to-date trend news, customized education and a community of like-minded peers, ACRL gives you the tools you need so you can help students achieve their goals" was "somewhat true."

ACRL is providing participants with a community of like-minded peers and tools they can use, most notably through

- research studies & Standards to apply to work
- tools that help indirectly, such as a list serv, to find what others doing and connect
- Conference—"where we go to connect"; place to meet other community college librarians from around the country

ACRL is not providing participants with up-to-date trend news and customized education:

- the Framework answered some concerns, but isn't explicitly designed for or customizable to a two-year educational context; ACRL hasn't offered any supporting documentation or training related to adapting the Framework for this context
- programming that emphasizes the first-year experience assumes a traditional student in a four-year context
- information about trends most important to community colleges is "always behind"
- public libraries and colleagues at community colleges provide more relevant information faster than ACRL

For this statement to resonate more strongly, participants would need ACRL to

- pay attention to "all the articles out there" about the role and value of community colleges and make a concerted effort to bring that conversation into the forefront (in ACRL publications, Conference programming, etc.)
- encourage increased collaboration between librarians at four-year institutions and community colleges
- offer accessible (low-cost/free), scalable learning opportunities presented by and for community college librarians on "specific topics we are facing"

<u>Quotes</u>

There's often good, solid research that I can use to support my work.
Every time we looked at trying to apply [the Framework], we thought, these are great ideals, but how they're gonna work here, we could never figure it out.
I don't feel that ACRL is the place where I go to keep up to date with new trends, and it doesn't feel like a customized education . . . I feel like I get more from my colleagues at my institution and that's where the innovation comes from.
I'm constantly turned off by the cost of an individual subscribing to see a webinar.

Needs and Desires (Question 5)

ACRL can enhance community college member engagement by

- increasing community college librarian representation at "higher levels of ACRL" and "in all major ACRL initiatives"
- giving community college librarians "a representative voice in the scholarly output of the association"
- providing opportunities for community college librarians to lead initiatives such as OER or EDI; "this is something we deal with regularly"
- offering more programming that is focused on community colleges, or scalable to that context

These concrete actions would demonstrate to community college librarians that "there's value in their membership dollars."

The Community and Junior College Libraries Section could also be strengthened. Participants repeatedly expressed that its membership/leadership is not representative of all community college members: "CJCLS could be valuable to us, but we need to make it more inclusive and more embracing of all community college librarians." Participants were not aware of the existence/work of the Community College Engagement Task Force.

APPENDIX

ACRL Focus Group: Community College Librarians
2019

Background

Thank you for your time and your willingness to share your thoughts and experiences. Today we're here to find out what ACRL can do to support your professional engagement and development. What we learn will inform the work of a new engagement task force formed by the Community & Junior College Library Section. Your responses will be used to generate a report to ACRL; individual comments will not be identified. I will be recording the session to assist me in creating an accurate report, but I will not share that recording with anyone. I will sometimes ask you to write down responses on paper or cards; I will collect those at the end and destroy them after I have completed my report.

Introductions: To get us started, I'd like to ask each of you to briefly introduce yourself. Would you please tell us
- Your name
- Your institution

Question 1: I'm going to ask you to think about your experience so far with ACRL as an organization, specifically in your role as a community college librarian. What's it like to engage with ACRL as a community college librarian?

Question 2:

- Have any recent ACRL offerings or experiences stood out as being particularly relevant or useful to you as a community college librarian?

- Based on trends and developments important in community college librarianship, has ACRL missed any recent opportunities to offer you relevant/useful information, programs, or resources?

Question 3: Based on your experience so far with ACRL, how true is the following statement for you (post on flip chart, with three segments marked on a continuum: Mostly True, Somewhat True, Not at All True)?

With up-to-date trend news, customized education and a community of like-minded peers, ACRL gives you the tools you need so you can help students achieve their goals.

How many of you are in segment 1, closer to "Mostly True"?

How many are in the segment 2, one one side or the other of "Somewhat True"? How many are in segment 3, closer to "Not at All True?"

- For those in Segment 1 or Segment 2, can you tell us what ACRL has done that makes this statement more true for you?

- For those in Segment 2 or Segment 3, can you tell us what ACRL has done/not done that makes this statement less true for you?

Question 4: Let's imagine that it's 2021, and we're back together in Seattle, at the next ACRL conference. I've just asked you the same question about this statement. You've all answered by placing yourselves in Segment 1—this statement is Mostly True for all of you. What's happened over the last two years to get us from where you were in 2019 to where you are now, in 2021?

- Are any of these ideas that you think the new engagement task force could take on?

Question 5: If you could speak directly to the leadership of ACRL, what would you like them to know about your needs and desires as an ACRL member? I'm going to hand out these index cards, and on one side, ask you to write down your top 1 or 2 needs. On the other side, write down your top 1 or 2 desires.

- What were the main differences between your needs and desires?
- What were the similarities?
- How well are your needs currently being met?
- How well are your desires currently being met?