



President's Column

Virginia Steel

As I was cleaning my office recently, I came across the Council on Library and Information Resources report, *Reflecting on Leadership*, written by Karin Wittenborg, Chris Ferguson, and Michael A. Keller (www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub123/contents

.html). In it, Chris Ferguson defines leadership as being “about what should and should not be changed. It is about understanding the interplay of self and others, and perceiving the interconnectedness of personal and organizational values.” Having spent a lot of time in the past few months thinking about the future of LAMA, how best to develop the next generation of library leaders, and how to serve the needs of our current members and of our profession, his words resonated with me. If LAMA is to thrive and grow, it must continue to be a flexible, responsive organization that offers programs and services of value to all members. Participation in LAMA governance and leadership must also continue to be in activities that people enjoy and find rewarding.

As many of you know, ALA is in the process of developing its strategic plan to cover the next five years, *ALA Ahead to 2010*, and has made the draft available on the ALA Web site for comments (www.ala.org/ala/ourassociation/governingdocs/aheadto2010/aheadto2010.htm). It is now time for LAMA, too, to create a new strategic plan, one that will establish key directions and priorities for our organization for the next several years. In order to give us more background on the best way to accomplish this, Lorraine Olley, LAMA executive director, Catherine Murray-Rust, LAMA vice-president/president-elect, and I attended the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) Conference for Chief Executive Officers and Chief Elected Officers in Phoenix in February to learn more about what other professional societies are doing to sustain and build membership and programs and what kinds of planning have been most beneficial. I learned a great deal in the two days we spent, including these points:

- Because no organization has sufficient resources to do everything its members would like it to do, our strategic planning process must culminate with a handful of ambitious but clearly understood, shared goals that

represent our highest priorities for the near term. In my mind, for LAMA, this means that rather than trying to cover the entire leadership waterfront, we need to assess our environment to figure out what LAMA's niche is and then enhance that.

- One of the ways successful organizations are growing is by establishing partnerships and collaborations with other organizations that have similar interests. LAMA already has a history of doing this (for instance, our partnership with the American Institute of Architects on the Library Building Awards Program), and there are discussions actively underway about several other opportunities for productive collaborations. This is an area in which LAMA is likely to continue to do more.
- Different generations of members have different needs and expectations for the organization. There has been much talk about the way the Millennial Generation views the world, and we're all well aware of the impact changes in technology have had and will continue to have on the way we communicate. One of the suggestions in the ASAE conference was that each organization establish mechanisms to gather feedback from members so that we can routinely assess how well the organization is doing in delivering programs and services. Here, too, LAMA has some experience with program evaluations and surveys, but there is plenty more that could be done.
- As a way of focusing and ensuring quality, organizations need to regularly evaluate programs, services, and structure. If an activity or group appears no longer to be relevant to the organizational mission, it should be reviewed carefully and either modified or eliminated. The LAMA board, section executive committees, and the Committee on Organization all do these kinds of evaluations as the need arises, and we expect that we will do even more of this as we develop a new strategic plan.

Michele Russo has agreed to chair the Strategic Planning Task Force and will be leading the process to write LAMA's five-year plan. We would like this to be as inclusive a process as possible, so if you have ideas, comments, or suggestions, please send them to me or Michele so they can be taken into consideration.

continued on page 67

A: I do believe that there has been a decline in new library construction. I think there has been a lot of focus on renovation and refurbishment of library space. It is common now to offload some collections into offsite facilities. Many of us have built or co-constructed shelving facilities where we can store some of those low-use, but still important research collections and convert or transform our library space on campus into new purposes. Today, library space is more of an intellectual space, a social space, and a community space. That transformation of the nature and purpose of library space is not something that we have fully appreciated and embraced.

Another prediction that more than fifty percent of reference transactions would take place over campus networks is proving correct. I think the ATM philosophy that we experience in our broader lives applies to all of the service environments in which we work. The notion of electronic reserves, chat reference, renewal of books, everything where we have a service relationship with the user is increasingly an online, user-driven activity.

Finally, one of the predictions that I made in 1996 was that academic libraries would become much more involved in government information policies issues. That certainly is true, particularly in the case of copyright and a whole array of laws, legislation, and court decisions that we have been party to on the issues around privacy, around intellectual freedom. All of these affect access and the functionality of our evolving services. Libraries more than ever are seen as central players in many of these national and international information policy debates.

Q: *Here's your chance to dust off that crystal ball again. Bring this to, let's say, 2010: What are we looking at? What are we facing? What are we doing?*

A: The nature of our collections will continue to be transformed. The trends that we are experiencing today will continue to move us toward a much more electronic content and service environment. More and more stuff that we acquire will be made available electronically. More and more of our historical content will either be made available by publishers or search engine vendors or through our own digital library programs. We have to be cognizant of the relationship between quantitative change and qualitative change. At what point do we reach true transformation? I often allude to Marxist theory of knowledge where he talks about a pot of water over a flame. Intellectually we know the temperature is increasing, but at some point it reaches a transformational point where the water turns from liquid to gas. At what point do we reach a similar transformational point of quantitative shift from print-based to electronic information and Web-based services? Also, the competitive environment, where libraries will work in the future, is something that we have not come to understand. There are continuing efforts by the information distributors and others to bypass libraries and to provide our communities with access to information in a market relationship with users. There are organizations and companies that have the ability perhaps to serve our users more effectively than we can, and the economics of that competition pushes us to the side.

Reference

1. James G. Neal, "Academic Libraries: 2000 and Beyond," *Library Journal* 121, no. 12 (July 1996): 74-76.

President's Column *continued from page 62*

I invite you to think about LAMA's future and what kinds of programs your professional association needs to have in place to meet your needs. There are many things LAMA could do to increase leadership skills in the library profession, so we will undoubtedly have difficult choices to

make. If we are to succeed in articulating our course to the future, we will need your input, advice, and leadership. I look forward to lots of conversations and e-mail exchanges with many of you!

Editor's Keyboard *continued from page 63*

learning. Of the many staff development programs we offered during those years, it was the outdoor variety that best moved staff beyond personal and organizational limitations. With the library's top leader encouraging risk taking and experimentation—while expertly fending off those seek-

ing to keep the old ways—we were able to achieve major successes on behalf of the library's users."

I hope that you enjoy reading this issue of *LA&M* as much as Gregg and I enjoyed preparing it.