

Chapter 111

Contrasting Professional Development and Continuing Education Opportunities for Library Professionals: Offerings both Within and Outside the Profession

Agnes K. Bradshaw

University of North Carolina – Greensboro, USA

ABSTRACT

By design or not, most librarians restrict their professional organization involvement to professional librarian organizations. Limiting professional involvement to only library related organizations will not provide the depth of professional knowledge that today's librarian needs to have in order to keep up with the requirements of the profession. Library budgets and funding have been slashed due to economic downturns, and patrons are turning to libraries for assistance with a variety of concerns that libraries did not have to address in previous times. Reaching beyond the scope of the profession, librarians can broaden their knowledge base and use that broader knowledge base to benefit their patrons and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Librarians in all segments of the profession are being requested to assume a wider variety of tasks and roles within their jobs. As with other

professions, technology has impacted the work librarians do, but so have economic and other external forces. Libraries of all types have faced a variety of budgetary challenges; in spite of budget cuts, libraries are still facing demands from their constituencies that have forced them to adapt to meet those demands. A variety of new

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skillsets are necessary to provide the services that patrons now demand. Most professionals rely on their respective professional organizations to provide professional development and continuing education opportunities. Librarian-focused professional organizations offer a large variety of continuing education and professional development opportunities; however as librarians, we must ask ourselves several questions about professional development and continuing education. Should professional library/librarian-focused organizations be the sole source of all our needs for professional development? My answer to this question is “No” and say that librarians should look beyond librarianship for professional growth and development. There are several other questions that library professionals should ask concerning continuing education and professional development: How will our employers and constituencies benefit from our professional involvement outside the profession? Are the continuing education and professional development opportunities provided by library professional organizations sufficient to allow us to advance the profession? This chapter will look at continuing education and professional development opportunities provided by major professional library organizations. The chapter will then outline some of the roles and responsibilities that librarians are being asked to assume and compare those roles to the offerings by professional librarian organizations. Finally, this chapter will review the advantages of professional involvement outside of librarianship in fulfilling those roles and responsibilities.

BACKGROUND

Professional development and continuing education are crucial components to any profession. In academic libraries, librarians may have faculty status; and in fact may be tenured or tenure track faculty. Those librarians that are tenure track know that scholarship relating to the profession is

a requirement for tenure attainment. In addition, there is the expectation that tenured and tenure track librarians will make meaningful contributions to the profession by professional writing, but also by presenting at conferences, and serving on professional association committees. Professional development is not limited to academic librarians. In order to meet the service needs of an ever changing patron base, professional development and continuing education are also important for all librarians, no matter the constituent base they serve. Many professionals, librarians included, obtain their continuing education and professional development through their respective professional organizations. Professional organizations frequently offer or sponsor specialized professional development and/or continuing education opportunities that are unavailable elsewhere. Like other forms of education, technology has had a large impact, so professional development and/or continuing education is now available virtually, using a variety of forms, such as webinars, online course offerings and teleconferences.

Bugher (1983) states the purpose of an association is to “serve its members. Associations are organized by people who voluntarily join together to achieve common goals and solve common problems.” For purposes of this chapter, I will use the definition of “professional association” as provided by the Reference for Business *Encyclopedia for Business* (2013):

Professional and trade associations are membership organizations, usually nonprofit, which serve the interests of members who share a common field of activity. Professional organizations—also called professional societies—consist of individuals of a common profession, whereas trade associations consist of companies in a particular industry. Professional associations have the additional objectives of expanding the knowledge or skills of its members and providing professional standards. The definition of a profession is an occupation that requires considerable education

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