

Editor's Column: Where We Are Headed

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As I write this, I currently serve as the Chair of the Executive Board of the LOUIS consortium. It's not my first time to serve, and I doubt it will be my last time. My term as Chair is up at the end of June 2025, at which time I will transition to the role of Past Chair. One of the responsibilities of the Executive Board is to help LOUIS with the awards for the LOUIS Users Conference. Several years ago, we implemented an award known as the Timely Librarianship – this award changes every year to reflect a prevailing trend, concern, or topic within academic librarianship generally and in Louisiana specifically. Past themes have included Promoting Wellness (2022), Anti-Censorship Hero (2023), and Artificial Intelligence Trailblazer (2024).

This year, when Laurie Blandino reached out to the Executive Board to brainstorm themes, I found myself momentarily baffled. After all, we are all still very much contending with the AI conundrum; we are still very much contending with censorship concerns related to the Executive Orders of the current presidential administration; and wellness, for both personnel and the communities we serve, remain relevant and critical, especially given the current political climate. All of these topics and concepts seem still very much clear and present within librarianship. I popped over to good ol' Google to investigate trends in academic librarianship at the national level, and I found that these topics ARE still very much front and center in academic librarianship.

Consequently, I had to sit with Laurie's question for a while before coming up with some themes I thought might reflect what's going on in the state and/or in academic librarianship at large. I will not be sharing them here, as we have not settled on a theme yet. But some of the ideas and topics that came to me were related to topics from the past, like academic integrity (always a topic of discussion in the context of genAI in education), collaboration (which seems critical in an era of dwindling budgets and staff), analytics and reporting (especially after all the demos for the LSP and thinking about how each product addressed these aspects), and open ecosystem topics. The migration itself looms on the horizon, and that will occupy many of us in the coming year. One could argue that wellness is even MORE critical now, given how anxious and stressed many of us are as the current presidential administration attempts to chip away at important topics in education (such as access, equity, inclusion, and diversity). And it's not just us: our students and communities are anxious and stressed as well. Given how jobs, grants, and funding are just disappearing, our collective angst and fear are understandable.

It made me wonder: where are we headed, where 'we' is 'academic library people,' both generally speaking and in Louisiana? Now, I'm not one to prognosticate, and I am not inclined to make predictions. There are too many variables to really try to nail down definitive answers to that question, especially in our current political climate. When I consider the question, it feels tinged with anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and frankly a little exhaustion (flavors of 'what fresh hell' that permeated the first months of 2025 following the flurry of Executive Orders). Despite those less-than-comfy feelings, I don't find the question to be tinged with despair, hopelessness, or pessimism.

Nevertheless, the question remains. From a practical perspective, we know the consortium is initiating the LSP migration from Sirsi Dynix to Ex Libris's Alma. Some of our librarian and library professional colleagues are retiring, while others are standing for tenure and promotion or starting work on other degrees to enhance their skills sets (I'm particularly looking at you folx pursuing doctorates – you have my sympathies). LUC 2025 has already been scheduled for October 15-16, and the request for proposals has gone out already. Closer to the moment in time when I am writing this (late June), the nolalLC Forum is coming at the end of July. I spent this morning working on operating hours schedules for the various branches of my library ecosystem for Fall 2025 and responding to vendors who want me to spend money on their products – money I don't have (but what's new?).

I won't bore you, dear reader, with a list of tasks I completed this morning or plan to tackle this afternoon, many of which relate to focusing on future events and obligations. But the point of highlighting what's coming from a practical perspective is to reinforce the idea that where we are going is where we are always striving to go: forward. The current presidential administration notwithstanding, libraries must always strive to move forward – to see and meet the needs of our communities, to reach and teach those communities and the individuals contained therein, and to make connections and foster collaborations. Sure, that work may be more difficult moving forward in our current circumstances, fiscally and politically, but the work remains, and it should remain our focus. It should remain our motivation. It should, even when we feel like Artax in the Swamp of Sadness, be our North Star, the horizon for which we strive.

Feeling like Artax is totally valid and understandable; no one is immune to the

frustrations and fears that can sometimes attend working in higher education. Like I said: there's so much uncertainty. Managing that uncertainty and the anxiety and emotional exhaustion that come with it is no easy feat.

So, where are we headed? Forward. We will continue to move forward. That doesn't have to change; it shouldn't change. It's important to focus on moving forward, however slow and/or difficult one's progress may be. And the greatest part of moving forward? We don't have to go alone. We can choose to move forward together, not just as a consortium toward a (hopefully better) LSP, but as a profession, as an industry, and – perhaps most importantly – as a community.

If you find yourself mired in the muck, reach out to someone. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed – by politics, by the migration, by the prospect of applying for tenure, by the prospect of presenting at LUC, by just getting out of bed in the morning because things can get so heavy at times – reach out. Academic libraries are locations for people to come together, and that's not just for our users, not just for the communities we serve. They are also places for us as the animating spirits of those libraries to come together as communities, to bond together as support networks and helping hands for hopeful hearts.

Where are we headed? Flip it: ***We are headed where we can make a difference.***