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## Membership has its Benefits: Continuing Educations E-Learning Workshops in Hard Times

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# Membership has its Benefits:

## Continuing Education E-learning Workshops in Hard Times

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### Introduction

The Oregon chapter of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has a long history of providing its members with a range of continuing education (CE) and professional development (PD) opportunities since its inception as a state chapter in 1975 (and as the Academic Division of OLA since 1989). Indeed, they are core elements of its mission statement:

“... ACRL-Oregon seeks to support academic libraries and librarians; to foster communication among academic librarians; to promote the development of Oregon academic libraries; to sponsor educational programs of interest to academic librarians; and to serve as liaison between academic librarians and various other academic and library constituencies.” (ACRL Oregon, 2010)

In 2008, a new CE program was started to address the changing needs of the membership, who were hard pressed to keep up with the explosive growth of ideas and new practices in academic librarianship while funding for their CE and PD dwindled due to the current economic turmoil.

### A [Brief] History of the Program

When the ACRL Oregon Board realized that it had a small nest egg of funds available in 2006–2007 a lengthy debate ensued as to how to best utilize them; ultimately an e-learning scholarship program was born that would support individual librarians’ CE needs via online workshops or courses. During 2008–2009 there were four recipients of e-learning scholarships:

- Claire Rivers, Portland Community College, for *Metadata for Digital Collections*;
- Jacquelyn Ray, Lane Community College, for *Instructional Design for Online Teaching & Learning*;
- John Reppinger, Willamette University, for *Thinking Like a Designer: Web Design & Construction*;
- and lastly Michelle DeSilva, Central Oregon Community College, for *Information in the Social Context*.

The face of the existing ACRL Oregon E-Scholarship program changed when group subscriptions to the popular ACRL National E-learning Live Webcasts (see for example, <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/events/elearning/index.cfm>) became available. Rather than serving the continuing education needs of one person at a time, it was possible to offer continuing education workshops to many people at once. The group subscriptions enabled ACRL Oregon to provide CE opportunities across the entire membership. Also, it was an opportunity to bring together groups of librarians at sites across the state to participate in



the online workshops and network with other librarians. Members and non-members were welcome to attend the live sessions, increasing CE opportunities for both academic and non-academic library staff. To publicize the events, ACRL Oregon sent “save the date” messages directly to its membership e-mail list, to the *LIBS-OR* and *ACRL-NW* discussions lists, entered them in the *Northwest Central* events list, and published them on the *ACRL Oregon Continuing Education Web page* (<http://www.olaweb.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=68063>), *ACRL Oregon Blog* (<http://acrloreion.org/>), and in the *OLA Hotline* (<http://olahotline.wordpress.com/>). The ACRL Oregon Board has even received e-mails from colleagues in Washington State inquiring whether they too are eligible to attend (yes, they can)!

The 2010 inaugural series of workshops included:

- *Marketing Ideas That Work in Academic Libraries: Pecha Kucha Presentations*
- *Check In with Location Based Mobile Services: Foursquare and Libraries*
- *The Not-So-Distant Librarian: Online Library Instruction to Engage Students and Faculty*
- and *So You Want to Create an Interactive Information Literacy Tutorial?*

The in-person, “live” sessions were held at academic libraries along the I-5 corridor in western Oregon to allow easy access by the majority of our membership (many thanks to our host sites: Chemeketa Community College, Oregon State University, Portland Community College, and Southern Oregon University libraries). Equitable access was a major concern for the ACRL Oregon Board who wanted to make any CE activities it sponsors available to all members. Luckily, ACRL National also provides an archived version of each workshop soon after the live event, and allows (nay encourages) the URL to be sent out to all ACRL Oregon members. This has been an ideal situation for a membership organization like ACRL Oregon whose members are spread out across a rather large state, and with members’ time and travel funds at a premium.

In-person attendance to the inaugural series has varied, from a low of three to a high of ten. The audience has drawn members and non-members alike, though the Board does not currently have an accurate method to determine how many members have attended the workshops in person or viewed the archived workshops. Feedback regarding the series has been positive, though limited. In the future the Board will seek more advance input about which workshops to offer by polling the membership and soliciting additional feedback on how to improve member services. The ACRL Oregon Board has heard of positive results from attendance at the workshops. For example, Elaine Hirsch, Lewis & Clark College Library Advancement Coordinator, was inspired to propose a program on marketing for the OLA 2011 Annual Conference after attending the *Marketing Ideas That Work in Academic Libraries* session (personal communication, 2010). In addition, after a stimulating discussion at OSU Libraries, academic and public librarians set up a meeting to continue their conversation over some adult beverages.



Margot Conahan, ACRL Professional Development Manager, has called ACRL Oregon trailblazers for our innovative program to provide ACRL National e-learning opportunities that enrich our membership’s professional development (though perhaps she was referring to our basketball team!) (personal communication, 2010). Indeed a quick review of other ACRL chapter Web sites reveals that ACRL Oregon is a leader in CE and PD among the chapters, offering a full range of conferences, workshops, and scholarships.

**ACRL Chapters’ Continuing Education Quick Facts:**

Of the 42 ACRL chapters:

23 have their own annual academic library conference

24 sponsor programs at their state library association's annual conference

12 provide in-person CE workshops

7 provide at least one type of online CE workshops, including: in-person attendance to online webinars, webinars available from providers other than ACRL

2 offer professional development/CE grants

**Program Pluses**

- This program ensures that more CE opportunities are available to the ACRL Oregon membership (and even non-members) throughout the year. Previously, only the ACRL-OR/WA annual conference and programs at the OLA Annual Conference offered those opportunities.
- More CE opportunities are closer to where our members actually live and work. The four in-person sites represent the areas where the lion’s share of our membership is located, and the archived online version of the workshop is available to all members 24/7 shortly after the in-person session, dramatically reducing the effect of the geographic divide present in our state.
- It is greener! Providing CE opportunities closer to members’ homes and online reduces the carbon footprint of the organization.
- Members can use their available CE and PD funding to attend additional conferences and workshops (the workshops are approximately a \$200 value for the current cost of membership which is approximately \$110).



- As a networking tool to meet other area academic librarians, the in-person events are wonderful venues with time before and after the workshop to meet and discuss.
- ACRL National offers a 'frequent learner' (ACRL 2009) program, which rewards those who register for three workshops with a fourth workshop at no additional cost. Thus, ACRL Oregon will be able to maximize its offerings to four workshops per year.
- Focus on topics of interest specifically to academic librarians. However, it should be noted that many of the online workshops available via the Oregon State Library's sponsored LYRASIS program are of interest to non-academic librarians as well. Readers are encouraged to visit Northwest Central events Web page (<http://www.nwcentral.org/events>) and limit the results by type (online/Web-based). The ACRL Oregon blog (<http://acrloregon.org/>) also features Northwest Central's academic RSS feed on its homepage, which is an easy way to keep up with what CE is being offered!
- ACRL National also makes some funds available to chapters to help underwrite operating costs. In 2010, ACRL Oregon applied some of those funds to partially offset the registration fees for the online workshops, further maximizing the limited budget.

### Program Issues

- Timing the sessions has been surprisingly challenging due to varying term schedules, conference conflicts (OLA Annual, ALA Annual & Midwinter, ACRL Oregon and Washington Joint Fall Conference, ACRL National Conferences, etc), 9 month vs. 12 month contract librarians' schedules, holidays, etc. Fortunately, the archived version of the workshop is available any time a member wants to view it!
- To launch the program the Board selected the online workshops, but as ACRL Oregon is a membership organization, the Board would like to involve the membership more closely in choosing sessions, receiving feedback, and developing the direction of the program.
- On the administrative side, we had to iron out some difficulties related to payment and logins for the series. Thankfully, all of these issues were resolved due to the hard work and careful attention of Shirley Roberts, OLA Association Manager, and Margot Conahan, Kathryn Deiss, and David Connolly in the ACRL National Office.
- ACRL National and other organizations also offer multi-week, in-depth courses; although to date no known courses allow groups to register. For instance, ACRL offered a multi-week class on research methods in summer/fall 2010, but it was not possible to register as a group. It would be beneficial to the profession as a whole if a structure were created for groups to register, as there is a need for more in-depth engagement with contemporary issues and concepts. And of course, it would be great




to be able to offer our membership both apples (one-shot online workshops that give an overview of a topic) and oranges (multi-week, in-depth courses that explore concepts and practices deeply).

### Conclusion

The recently published Oregon Library Association *Vision 2020* statement expresses the importance of a collaboration vision for librarians across the state.

“In 2020, Oregon librarians will rely on dynamic professional networks—local, state-wide and beyond—for resources, support and expertise. Together our libraries will:

- Create and share opportunities for professional development and training.
- Develop and share best practices, standards, technologies, templates and tools.”  
(OLA 2010, p.2)

Professional organizations such as ACRL Oregon play an important role in the future of Oregon libraries by providing important continuing education and professional development opportunities to their membership in an era when doing more with less is a daily reality. 

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