

## LLAMA Mentoring Program

### An Evolving Model

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Mentoring is an important part of many professions as it actively encourages career development and helps to foster the next generation of professionals. Librarianship is no way an exception. ALA and its divisions have renewed their interest in cultivating new librarians through enhancement of its various mentoring programs. Each program offers something to professionals to help them navigate and develop the foundations and skills needed throughout one's career.

LLAMA began its mentoring program in 2007 with Janine Golden, currently LLAMA president, as chair. The LLAMA Mentoring Program is a distance mentoring, or e-mentoring, program that focuses on leadership development. It was originally designed to pair 25 mentees and 25 mentors in a formal mentoring relationship for a ten-month period. The requirements for participation were that participants physically attend an orientation at the annual conference, read the selected resources provided by the committee, and communicate with their mentor or mentee on a regular basis.

At its inception, the mentoring program was very successful; however, the program began to see changes in participation during the 2010-2011 program year. The number of applicants dwindled and some of the chosen participants had to decline the invitation to participate because they were no longer able to attend the annual conference, indicating financial reasons. The economic downturn, it seemed, had finally caught up with library budgets and this was adversely affecting participation in the program. Not only were library budgets an issue, but online content, such as webinars and virtual conference material, that focused on continuing education were increasing which provided cheaper and more accessible alternatives to attending the annual conference.

As the 2011-2012 program cycle approached, the LLAMA Mentoring Program hit its lowest numbers yet. During the orientation in New Orleans, the committee members hosting the orientation actually outnumbered the program participants. This was a huge wakeup call for the committee.

Through discussions, there was the realization that something needed to change and change quickly if the program was to survive. In the committee, there was renewed excitement to face the challenge of transforming this program to fit the evolving needs of the potential participants and find a way to get others excited about the program as well. The focus for the 2012-2013

program would introduce a revised mentoring model that would address the previous year's issues and respond to the changes affecting the library world.

As the committee examined the program structure, it was decided that the basic structure of the committee itself was sound; the problem was the way in which the program was implemented. So, at the basis of this transformation was the big question: what do we do to increase participation in this program? As the committee discussed the hurdles of participation there was one requirement that seemed to be continually brought up: attendance at the annual conference.

While the committee had always stood behind the fact that the orientation was an essential role in creating a relationship between the mentors and mentees, it was concluded that the face-to-face interaction essentially made up a small percentage of the program experience and was, in fact, limiting participation in the program to those individuals who could afford to go to conference, a number which was declining. The reality was that, with library budget cuts, the number of people able to fulfill the requirements was getting smaller and smaller and the practicality of maintaining such an exclusionary requirement weighed heavily on the committee. The decision was ultimately made that the attendance requirement would be dropped in favor of an online orientation.

With the attendance requirement gone and the decision to make the program entirely virtual, the committee made other decisions that ultimately affected the way the program was to be implemented. The 25 mentor and 25 mentee limitation was dropped in order to expand the program to accommodate more people. The expectation was that the program had a large audience because of focus and quality of the program and that once the attendance requirement was dropped, the committee would be able to commit itself to working with a larger number of participants. This would not only allow more people to participate in a unique and worthwhile experience, but it also allowed LLAMA to take a greater role in fulfilling its mission to develop library leaders.

The invitation to participate went out in November 2011 and there was immediate interest in the program, encouraging hope among the committee members that the changes made would revive the program. During the midwinter conference in Dallas, the committee was anxious to see a change in the number of applicants, specifically how many people applied to participate in the 2012-2013 program cycle. The number was record breaking: 120 mentees and 101 mentors (including 11 mentors from the previous year) applied.

All this preparation, discussion, and work by the committee have all led up to this upcoming year. Understanding, analyzing, and adapting to the changes in the profession is one of the most important elements to survival. The committee understood the challenges and refocused its thinking in order to make the program work for the potential participants. The 2012-2013 program cycle will be another challenge to adapt and learn from throughout the year, but the expectations are high and the committee is ready.

The LLAMA Mentoring Program provides an excellent experience for new and seasoned library professionals and there is renewed hope that the changes made for this year will set up the program for even bigger things in the near future.

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**Submitted:** 11 April 2012

**Accepted for Publication:** 8 April 2012

**Published:** 1 May 2012