
Welcome to the Table

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It is the beginning of April as I write this and I am in the middle of making committee appointments—matching people who want to serve with open committee slots—and trying to balance the needs of an active membership with the limited spaces I have to fill. By the time you read this all my appointments will be made and I will have had to say no to many people. The reality is that there are only so many spaces to fill and that there are more volunteers than open appointments slots.

RUSA is a dynamic organization, and we are lucky to have so many people willing to give their time and energy to the division. Yet, while I am sending out final calls for volunteers and making the last of my appointments, I wonder about all our members who cannot attend ALA conferences or elect not to serve on committees.

If noninvolvement is due to lack of institution support, then you have my sympathy. It is a heavy burden to attend conferences on your own dime. But if it is lack of opportunity or a feeling that you would not be welcome, then that worries me.

As RUSA president, I have many goals, but nothing can be as important as making sure that everyone in RUSA feels vested and welcome and can participate at the level at which they feel comfortable and fulfilled. I am not sure how to make that happen. I am working on plans for better integration of RUSA committees and more section involvement in RUSA-level decisions, there are long-term plans to try to bring conference programming to RUSA members who cannot attend conference and improve virtual committee experiences, and there are lots of people trying to make the blog, wiki, and electronic lists more useful to us all. Yet I am hyper-aware that we are preaching to the choir. When we have these discussions and make these plans, we make them in a room full of people who have been active in RUSA for years. It is very hard, if not impossible, to hear the voice of those members who do not serve on committees, who do not regularly attend conferences, or who have not yet reached a position within the organization where they get to sit at the table.

On the endless list of things no one tells you when you agree to run for RUSA president is the fact that you will end up serving on ALA taskforces and focus groups. I am part of a taskforce looking at ALA-wide issues related to data collection, communication, and how we work across the association. It has become clear that data is a big issue in ALA. It is a big issue in RUSA as well.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19