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## What's in a Name Revisited

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**D**o you refer to yourself as reference librarian? If so, what does the word reference mean to you?<sup>1</sup> This was the lead on RUSA Past-President Anne Houston's column in the spring 2016 issue of *RUSQ*. Shortly thereafter she formed the RUSA Name Change Task Force to examine possibilities for changing the name of RUSA in the context of larger re-branding efforts within RUSA and "library public services generally." In the fall, the task force submitted their report which will be discussed by RUSA board to determine next steps. The report should be published to the RUSA website by the time this issue appears.

The task force undertook a survey of library professionals in June 2016 and 618 completed surveys were collected. The respondents included both RUSA members and non-RUSA members. The number of RUSA members who responded was 426, representing approximately 13 percent of the RUSA membership. From the results, the task force was not able to determine a definitive response to changing the name of RUSA. RUSA members' opinions are mixed. The task force ultimately recommended that either we change the name of the association and remove the term "reference," which would be more inclusive of RUSA's diverse membership, or to use a tag line after the acronym RUSA to transition to a new name eventually.

I found one of the more interesting survey questions to be the request to provide terms that respondents thought best represented RUSA's values such as users, ability to research, innovation, outreach, adult services (in our old name RASD), assistance, responsiveness, instruction, and authority. RUSA's core purpose as stated in our strategic plan is that we are a member community "engaged in the practices of connecting people to resources, information services, and collections." Instruction and authority, mentioned as key terms, are a means of connecting people to *reliable* resources. The recent presidential election brought to light the issue of fake news and media literacy. In November 2016, researchers Sam Wineburg and Sarah Drew from Stanford University published a commentary in *Education Week* titled "Why Students Can't Google Their Way to the Truth." They discussed results from a study they had done with students (middle school through college) to evaluate online information: "At every level, we were taken aback by students' lack of preparation: middle school students unable to tell the difference between an advertisement and a news story; high school students taking at face value a cooked-up chart from the Minnesota Gun Owners Political Action Committee; college students credulously accepting a .org top-level domain name as if it were a Good Housekeeping seal."<sup>2</sup>

As library practitioners who help people every day to locate reliable sources of information, I think this is something to discuss further with RUSA members to see if we can develop tools and resources to help us promote an informed and engaged citizenry. One way we do this is by supporting access to sources with a variety of points of view that are supported by credible information. This is yet another aspect of library practice that will need ongoing encouragement and support. ALA members are reflecting on our core professional values and these values can provide us with the strength and guidance to navigate a very different political climate. The ALA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Implementation Working Group made a statement on ALA's post-election communications that notes that "our utmost priorities during this current time of rampant misinformation and propaganda should be honoring diversity and ensuring the ethical use and critical evaluation of information."<sup>3</sup>

I read many of the post-election threads and posts about ALA's position and direction moving forward into 2017. A post by Rory Litwin talked about the role of the ALA Washington Office and the policy-setting role of the Committee on Legislation (under the direction of ALA Council).<sup>4</sup> The Committee on Legislation (COL) is a complicated structure because it has many subcommittees for different areas of policy. I formerly served as the RUSA representative to the Legislative Assembly, which provides a way for ALA constituent groups such as divisions to advise on the direction of policy set by the COL. Referring to the post above, I did find in my experience that we received information from the ALA Washington Office but we representatives didn't usually have much to offer in the way of feedback on policy ideas. Joe Thompson, another former RUSA president, wrote about "positioning RUSA to actively support advocacy"<sup>5</sup> in the *RUSQ* 2015 summer issue. I think we need to build on

Joe's leadership on this issue and include advocacy goals in our strategic plan. We revised the charge of RUSA's Access to Information Committee so it serves the role of "coordinating RUSA's efforts at promoting access to information in reference and user services and serve as a conduit to advocate for legislative concerns." I hope we can work together to determine and advocate for our legislative concerns as an association.

I welcome your comments and thoughts on this column. Please send an email message to [alemcmmanus@ucdavis.edu](mailto:alemcmmanus@ucdavis.edu).

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## References

1. Anne Houston, "What's in a Name? Toward a New Definition of Reference," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2016), <https://journals.ala.org/rusq/article/view/5927/7513>.
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4. "The ALA Washington Office press releases and Todaro's Monday morning misdirection (#NotMyALA)," *Library Juice* (blog), November 21, 2016, <http://libraryjuicepress.com/blog/?p=5429>.
5. Joseph Thompson, "Advocating for Reference and User Services," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (2015), <https://journals.ala.org/rusq/article/view/5701/7084>.