

2013

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Recommended Citation

Hurdle, Lynndy (2013) "Join Now!: Professional Organizations as a Student," *SLIS Connecting*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 6.

DOI: 10.18785/slis.0202.06

Available at: <http://aquila.usm.edu/slisconnecting/vol2/iss2/6>

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Join Now!: Professional Organizations as a Student

By Lynndy Hurdle

Why should a person join a professional organization?

According to Lisa Russell, an eHow.com contributor, “professional organizations offer benefits to their members, making it easier to do their jobs and solving common problems for members. Most importantly, joining a professional organization instantly associates you with the most serious people in the industry and adds to your credibility as a professional” (2013). Taking in account this advice about professional organizations, school librarians need to join professional library organizations so that they can find practical advice and ideas about school libraries, so that they can learn from the most serious people in the industry, and so that they can gain credibility in their field. The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and the Mississippi Library Association are two professional library organizations that school librarians in Mississippi would benefit from joining.

The Young Adult Library Services Association is a division of the American Library Association. It is “a national association of librarians, library workers and advocates whose mission is to expand and strengthen library services for teens, aged 12-18” (About YALSA, 2013). The association seeks to build libraries and librarians in order to “engage, serve, and empower teens” (About YALSA, 2013).



My membership with YALSA began in a round-about way, but I have been extremely glad to be connected to the organization. Last fall, a fellow librarian asked if I would like to accompany her to YALSA’s Young Adult Literature Symposium in St. Louis (www.ala.org/yalitsymposium). She knew that I was a library student and that I could get discounted registration for the conference. Since her district was paying all the travel costs, I decided to buy an ALA

student membership, and I purchased a YALSA add-on for \$20. That small investment in ALA and YALSA has paid off tremendously. Through this organization, I have gained ideas to use in my library, I have learned from experts in the field, and I, myself, have gained credibility in the field.

I was glad that I went to the YALSA conference because I gained so many practical ideas there. At the conference, one of the presenters mentioned having a brown bag book club at her school. She explained that she chose a book for the group to read and that she ordered brown bag lunches from the cafeteria for the kids to eat in the library while they had their book club meetings. I liked this idea and decided to give it a try at my school. Amazingly, my students loved having these meetings. Within one meeting, I had formed a core group of students for the club, and every time we finished a book, they asked what the next book was going to be. If this idea had been the only new idea that I had gained from the YALSA membership, the cost of membership would have been worth it.

Also, with this membership, I am able to access the wisdom and knowledge of librarians who work with teens. As part of my YALSA membership, I receive the journal, *Young Adult Library Services*. This journal contains news about YA library services, it includes articles of current interest to YA librarians, and it provides information about YALSA events and professional literature (YALSA Products and Publications, 2013). I particularly enjoyed the spring issue with its emphasis on Teen Tech Week™. I have not done a Teen Tech Week™ at my school library, but with the advice of professionals who have done it; I think I can try to organize an event next year.

Finally, my YALSA membership has helped me gain my own credibility in the field. In the YALSA E-News email that I receive, I saw an ad for a Summer Reading Grant from YALSA and Dollar General. I decided to submit a grant proposal, and I won one of the twenty grants that were available. My school library received \$1000 from YALSA and Dollar General for a summer reading program. I was able to gain

some professional credibility by receiving this grant, but if I had not been a member in YALSA, I never would have been able to apply.

The second organization that is beneficial to school librarians is the Mississippi Library Association (MLA). "The mission of the Mississippi Library Association is to provide professional leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all" (Mission & History, 2013). This organization has also helped me gain ideas for my library, it has helped me learn from experts in the field, and I hope to gain credibility in the field by contributing to this organization.

From the MLA, I have gathered ideas and facts that were very practical and relevant to my work as a school library. The book reviews in the MLA journal, *Mississippi Libraries*, have been helpful. For example, as I was reading the journal, I read a review for Margaret McMullan's book *Sources of Light*. I learned that McMullan was a Mississippi author and that *Sources of Light* was one of several YA books that she had written. This information was very helpful because a teacher in my school has a Mississippi author assignment. I had been struggling to find books by Mississippi authors that my students could read and that they wanted to read. My school library had a lot of Grisham, Faulkner, and Welty books, but very few YA books by Mississippi authors. After reading this review in *Mississippi Libraries*, I researched McMullan and bought several of her books for our library.

While MLA does not focus primarily on school libraries, the information provided by library experts in Mississippi is relevant for school libraries. For instance, an article about library orientations for freshmen at Mississippi Valley State University was beneficial because as a school librarian, I need to know what library skills the upper classmen at my high school need to know when they leave high school.

Finally, I hope to gain some professional credibility by contributing research to MLA. My Master's project is about the Mississippi Library Partnership, and my

project analyzes the First Regional Library System's participation in the partnership. When my project is complete, I hope to submit it for publication in the MLA journal and, thereby, gain some professional credibility within the library field.

So, why are YALSA and MLA important library organizations for school librarians? I can speak from experience that both of these organizations provide their participants with benefits that exponentially outweigh the costs associated with membership. They provide practical ideas, professional knowledge, and venues for librarians to gain professional credibility. I am a better librarian because of my membership in these organizations, and I hope to gain more from and contribute more to these organizations.



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