Back in November, I contacted the ALA chapter president at FSU in hopes that they would join the USF ALA chapter in sponsoring a joint event. Our collaboration manifested as the FSU-USF Intercollegiate Symposium on Library and Information Science which took place yesterday at the University of Florida's Marston Science Library. It was a small, day-long event consisting of five presentations from USF, four presentations from FSU, and one presentation from UF. We were able to get approximately thirty-five people to attend in person and online which included our presenters. The vast majority of our attendees consisted of library and LIS faculty members from the three institutions. We had a wide variety of topics presented ranging from new innovations on linked data to disaster preparedness and emergency contingency plans for academic libraries. Despite the low turnout of attendees, the faculty and I all agree that the event was a huge success as it sets a precedent for another event like this next year. However, I will be unable to ensure that this happens as I will be graduating in August. I was hoping that due to the nature of this event that we might be able to ask for some assistance from FACRL to ensure that a second symposium happens next year. Since the three universities have already established a partnership and all parties agree that we should hold another symposium for the faculty and LIS students, I thought it would be an excellent opportunity for FACRL to get involved and use this as a gateway event for faculty and students to involve themselves in future FACRL events and activities.

This would also lead to an open dialogue between the ALA student chapter board members and FACRL board members. It’s for this very reason - the fact that there is very little FACRL presence/representation on campus - that such an event would be mutually beneficial to the ALA student chapters and FACRL.

We did host our symposium online and had two individuals present via Google Hangouts. So, that’s something I think should be pursued; however, I also believe that an in-person event would be essential to the success of the symposium. One of the ideas that attendees and presenters seemed to gravitate towards was rotating the location from year to year. This year was at UF and was chosen as the venue because it’s halfway between USF and FSU. Next year could be at USF, and the following year could be at FSU and so on. This event should be targeted at USF and FSU students as that’s the demographic who aren’t current FACRL members and will be entering the profession soon. Because of this, we believe that keeping an in-person symposium would most benefit our students.

What I think is really important by including FACRL in our plans from our point of view is that we need a way to establish a permanent and annual event. The FSU-USF symposium was planned entirely by myself and Adriana Williams, the FSU ALA student chapter president. Because she and I will be graduating before we can ensure that a second symposium will take place, I felt that it would be important to involve a larger organization to give the symposium a greater degree of validity as well as longevity. Exactly what FACRL can do, I am unsure. What I am hoping is that FACRL can help us establish permanence even after Adriana and I have graduated. I see the prospects of such an annual event as mutually beneficial to both the LIS students at FSU and USF, and to FACRL.

I suppose that if we wanted to really blow this thing up, then marketing, planning, and funding support would be needed in order to augment what the ALA chapters can already do alone. We planned for fifty attendees from three different institutions, and were able to finance the event through our own organizational funds without outside assistance. I believe that we could have afforded an event slightly larger than what we planned for, but we decided not to push our luck in case any surprise expenditures came our way. UF really helped us out by providing a venue space free of charge in their Marston Science Library, and they recommended caterers to us that fit our budget. If we were to try to attract attendees from other institutions or include other institutions in the rotation, then we would need assistance from FACRL so we could establish meaningful connections with information specialists from those institutions. Also, developing marketing materials that would be eye-catching and communicate the value of the symposium to those institutions would also be helpful.

Finally, and this is probably the most important aspect, I believe that if FACRL involved itself in planning the event, then the ALA chapters at USF and FSU would feel more empowered to follow through. I don’t know about FSU, but USF is holding elections within the next several weeks to name new presidents to our ALA and SLA chapters. Ultimately, I will be looking to one or both of them to take on the responsibilities for preparing for another symposium. I am prepared to donate as much of my time as necessary towards planning; however, the onus of responsibility will fall on one or both of them. I will be bringing this up at our next board meeting in May. The problem is that not everyone in my ALA chapter is as outgoing and views ideas like this with a great deal of skepticism. They often wonder if such large events with so many components will be successful and worthwhile. Furthermore, they tend to view my ideas as way too big and ambitious, and the thought of planning such a large scale event overwhelms many of my colleagues. As such, I’m often left to plan such events by myself. Believe me, planning this symposium was an enormous undertaking, but I proved to them that it can be done. I believe that FACRL’s involvement in planning will make it less overwhelming for them. However, I think it’s important that this symposium remain a joint effort made by the ALA chapters at USF and FSU, but with the support of FACRL. I don’t believe that this should be an event that FACRL takes over and plans for our students, but rather an event planned by our student organizations with the assistance of FACRL.

I think it’s important that we have a way to show the benefits of joining FACRL and attending conferences to our students who are not members yet in a way that makes them feel as if they are attending a real FACRL conference. Our symposium will be able to do just that thereby encouraging our students to join FACRL as well as other professional associations like FLA, SFA, and others.