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On Crafting a Policy: Reflections on Membership and Community

Every August, ACRL-level committees—including editorial boards like *RBM*—submit a “Work Plan,” which is a review of work from the past “service year”—July 1 through June 30 in ALA parlance—and a series of “activities,” that the Board self-devises and plans to execute in the service year already in progress. The Work Plan is then reviewed by the ACRL Board Liaison—who is the immediate ACRL Past President—along with *RBM*’s ACRL Staff Liaison, and officially submitted to ALA through the ACRL Program Officer who “manages the ACRL division-level committee process, annual ACRL Board elections, ACRL’s IFLA section standing committee appointments, and ACRL meeting scheduling for ALA conferences and ACRL’s virtual meetings scheduling,” and “supports the work of the ACRL Board of Directors, ACRL Budget & Finance Committee, and division-level committees.” Unlike RBMS committees, the work of *RBM* is, theoretically at least, thus highly visible to our parent organization, and directly supported by the second-highest-ranking individual in the ACRL elected hierarchy. —That’s meaningful, right? This service year, *RBM*’s editorial board committed to creating and publishing a policy on generative AI by July 2026. Over the course of five months, a subgroup from the Board researched and drafted a policy, which was reviewed and approved by the full Board in January of this year. But, in the meantime, the members of the subgroup got to experience the growth, connection, and change that can often be discovered within ACRL service work.

We always intended to publish this policy in the Spring 2026 issue of *RBM*, but later it seemed necessary to also share our reflections on the work of drafting a generative AI policy and the shared values about peer mentorship, professional growth, authenticity, and more that we surfaced in the process. There was also a brief, but meaningful, appearance by Keanu Reeves that made us wonder: Cannot we all learn from Keanu, at this moment in time?

This subgroup ended up being very important to all of the members. We are all struggling to adapt to the quickness of AI adoption everywhere—we think about it a lot, like everyone else is also being forced to think about it a lot. We are each struggling to find where we are on the spectrum of approaches to AI—some of us work with people who are enthusiastic adopters and also with others who refuse to use it. We are

struggling to know what role it plays in our own lives and in our work, where it may be assertively engaged with by our institutions. As information professionals, we have to put AI tools through their paces, we must understand what students are using, and how and why. But most of us can't say that we are particularly thrilled about all this, especially with the rapidness of AI adoption. This subgroup, and our conversations, allowed us all to explore further, to hear others' experiences and approaches, and to grow further in our own thoughts and practices than any of the webinars and lectures on AI we have attended so far. Our discussions were far-ranging, full of thoughts about circumstances and consequences, and just really interesting; we learned a lot.

Less than a month into the subcommittee's work, the ALA Forward strategic plan—<https://www.ala.org/Strategic-Plan-2025>—kicked into gear, and 8% of its staff were laid off. (See Editor's Note, this issue.) Among those directly affected were beloved ACRL team members—individuals who had helped shape the identity of RBMS as an organization, and who had enabled important professional experiences for so many special collections professionals in our field. This cut ran deep, particularly with Board members, which prompted sincere reflection in this subgroup and beyond, both about what an organization such as RBMS means to individual members, and how we as members of this organization serve it and each other.

We all struggled this fall because of ALA's actions. We wondered why they would do that to ACRL, the largest and most lucrative division; why they would not value these folks the way we did. We were outraged, frankly, at the news, and having this subgroup helped us each think through that outrage. Everyone on the subgroup is roughly at the same place in our careers, of the same cohort in the profession. ACRL/ALA and RBMS have always been the professional home for each of us. But these actions led us back to conversations we've all had throughout our long memberships in RBMS, about membership in ACRL, and what benefit is derived from it for a group who is made up of far more than academic librarians. This subgroup helped us all think through some of that, and most of all our work led us to appreciate each other deeply, and to value the peership, friendship, and support that RBMS stands for. Reflecting on these struggles while working on a subcommittee is the unseen personal and professional growth that comes with membership in our association. We felt that providing a view into what took place in our subcommittee meetings could help members see the benefits and importance of RBMS.

Midway through our subcommittee work, we had what came to be called the Keanu Reeves Interlude. A member attended a Broadway performance of *Waiting for Godot* with Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves, about which we all delighted in hearing. From the excellent adventure with Ted, to "Vaya con Dios," a high-speed bus, choosing between the red pill and the blue pill, and avenging the death of one's dog, Keanu

(as we are on a first-name basis), has been nearly a mystical figure for our generation. Professional committee work can be boring, difficult, and even intimidating. But what makes it fun and rewarding are the connections and experience one gets to share along the way. Perhaps this is cliché, but the Keanu Reeves Interlude proved it true. The subcommittee reflected on the awesomeness that is Keanu: a genuinely kind, authentic, and generous human being, whose presence could be felt all the way from the stage, to the balcony of a Broadway theater, and through the internet across a Zoom meeting.

In thinking through our intellectual values in regards to AI, the subgroup kept returning to concepts of authenticity, to the important work of doing one's own thinking and making a unique and personal contribution to our scholarly discourse. Subgroup member Juli McLoone penned the inspired bolded paragraph, below, and we all enthusiastically supported this inclusion as a unique—and sincere—element of our policy. As Keanu said, "I have always used writing to learn what it is that I think. And I find myself disinclined to leave these mysteries unexamined. I would like to know what I think about this."¹ And we would like to know what you think, authentically, from your own mind, as we make our way through this brave new information landscape, together.

Here's the policy, approved by the *RBM* Editorial Board in January 2026:

RBM: a Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage publishes articles of interest to the special collections and archives professions on a wide variety of topics. In this field where we seek to collect, preserve, and provide access to the documentary record of human history, it is of particular importance to think carefully about how machine learning, and in particular, Generative AI, is implemented in the process of researching and writing about those practices. Given the rapidly shifting landscape of Large Language Models and Generative AI, this is a conversation that will be ongoing for some time to come, as the field develops a shared set of scholarly norms around these new technologies.

The *RBM* editorial board encourages authors to embrace the hard work of thinking, analyzing, and writing. You have something valuable to contribute to the professional conversation, and it is through the struggle to bring it forth that you will figure out what your contribution is, and how best to communicate it.

1. Keanu Reeves and China Miéville. *The Book of Elsewhere*. Del Rey, 2024: 9.

Beginning with the Fall 2026 issue, the *RBM* Board is implementing the following norms and guidelines surrounding the use of Generative AI.

- The *RBM* editorial board recognizes a distinction between assistive AI, which makes suggestions and improvements to content generated by human authors, and generative AI, which produces text and image content.²
- Articles that consist entirely or primarily of AI-generated prose will not be accepted.
- Authors take full responsibility for all claims, citations, and analyses in their article.
- Authors must disclose any use of AI to the Editor as part of the submission process in an author statement that includes the tool used, the time period during which it was used, and the purpose of that use. Authors should explain how they verified the accuracy of AI-supplied content and how errors were corrected.

Example Statements for Editorial Review:

- I used built-in AI assistant on [platform] to assist in literature review; I used [tool] to create the images in this article; I used [tool] to create a table/graph
- I used GPT-5 to generate the prose in my introduction before revising for accuracy and my authorial voice.
- The Editor may request additional information about where and how Generative AI has been used in an article, as well as AI transcripts.
- Tools used as a substantive part of the research project and article writing—including Generative AI tools—should be specified in an article’s Methodology.
- Use of Generative AI will appear as a note in the first page of the article, when published.

Example Statements for Publication:

- Portions of this article were created with generative AI, as reported by the author(s).
- The author(s) applied generative AI tools in drafting this article.

2. “Assistive and Generative AI Guidelines for Authors: Policies & Guidelines.” Sage Corporate Policies & Guidelines, Sage, www.sagepub.com/about/sage-policies/corporate-policies/ai-author-guidelines.