ACLALS Chair’s Report

As many of you are probably aware, my term as chair was somewhat unusual. No decision was taken at the last ACLALS meeting in Auckland in 2019 about where the association would be headquartered next or where the next conference would be held. I was approached after the conference by the past chair Chris Prentice. I want to thank Chris for all her work facilitating this transition. This has been a period of challenge for ACLALS, with the loss of funding by the Commonwealth Foundation several years ago, the passing and retirement of some very active long-term members, and of, course, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

One irony of the pandemic is that the activities of the Commonwealth largely shifted online, and I was able to be more involved in some discussions than I might have been otherwise. I took whatever opportunities I could to draw attention to the importance of academic freedom, the humanities, and the value of post-secondary education. I had a few objectives for my own term as chair, some that reflected my own sense of priorities, and others that emerged from the directions set at previous meetings in 2013 and 2016.

Firstly, it was important that we updated our communication strategy. ACLALS has a permanent home on the web! The domain [www.aclals.net](http://www.aclals.net) is registered internationally, with godaddy hosting the site. The advantage of this is that the address remains the same, regardless of where in the world the ACLALS leadership is located. This means that the website does not need to move every three years. It is simply a matter of transferring editorial control from one person to another. it’s a pretty simple wordpress site that I have since maintained myself and with the help of students.

The ACLALS website is also home to a lot more information about ACLALS than in the past. Going back to at least 2016, members of ACLALS and the ACLALS executive had been looking at ways to both preserve the ACLALS archive, and to record the history of the organization. In the last three years, we’ve tackled that in a few ways. The ACLALS archives now have a permanent electronic home. This is also a living resource that can be added to in the future. Sorthing through thousands of documents was a substantial task. Creating this digital archive would not have been possible without the support of the following organizations:

The Information and Communications Technology Council Work-Integrated learning Digital Program

The Ontario Work Study Program

The office of Indigenous Initiatives at Lakehead University

The Lakehead University Library

Specifically, I want to acknowledge the work of Connor D’Angelo, Ashley Little, and Mariah Toset, all of whom worked to scan documents into the archives over this three year period. Mariah also sorted and labelled them.

I also want to thank Sara Janes, the Lakehead University archivist, for arranging web storage, helping to set up the archives and providing training on the Omeka system, amongst other things.

This archive means an end to shipping boxes of papers around the world every three years, which is beneficial from an environmental and financial perspective.

In addition to the archive, the ACLALS website now has a narrative history, summary of past conferences, and a list of resources for further research. In addition to those supporters mentioned above, this project was funded by the Mitacs Globalink Research Internship program.

I also want to acknowledge Mariah Toset and Yi Wang who wrote the historical narrative you can now find on the ACLALS website, along with a complete list of past conferences, an overview of key figures, and an extensive bibliography of sources about ACLALS and its history.

This is a living project. The fact that this is web-based means that more documents can be added to the archive in the future, and the history can be expanded and developed as future executives see fit. The archives and bibliography mean that this is a resource for current and future scholars.

Another major concern I had was to regularize the organization’s finances, after several years with no bank account and no external funding or system of internal funding for the ACLALS office.

Back in 2016, ACLALS resolved that regional branches would send 10% of membership fees to the central ACLALS organization. There are a number of reasons why ACLALS needs to have some funding. First of all, we are required to pay an annual membership to the Commonwealth Consortium for education. Secondly, even a very modestly run ACLALS office needs to maintain the website and perform administrative tasks that may occasionally cost money. It has been difficult, I know, for many branches to collect membership fees in the context of the pandemic, but I hope we will continue to move forward.

I want to thank Canadian ACLALS and European ACLALS for providing that seed funding for ACLALS over the past few years.

As may have been evident from my previous list of thanks, part of maintaining robust finances for ACLALS and getting the resources needed to accomplish projects is applying for grants. This conference is being sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Toronto Metropolitan University, University of Toronto, University of British Columbia, Lakehead University, St. Jerome’s University, Saint Mary’s University, the University of New Brunswick and the journals *Canadian Literature* and *Studies in Canadian Literature*. Thank you so much to all of our sponsors, without whom we would not be here. I also want to thank *ARIEL* for their contribution of a subscription for the graduate student prize.

I also want to thank the ACLALS vice-chairs, Neil Kortenaar and Judith Leggatt, Site Coordinators Anne-Marie Lee-Loy and Hyacinth Simpson, and organizing committee members Laura Moss, Veronica Austen, Karina Vernon, Sarah Dowling, John Ball, Asma Syed and Henghameh Saroukhani. It really does take a village to put together an event like this, particularly under the challenging circumstances that we faced over the last three years. I also want to thank the folks at Lakehead University – particularly my colleagues in the department of English, and my dean, without whose support I could not have taken on this role.

I also want us all to take a minute to acknowledge the work of Mariah Toset. I’m sure many of you have interacted with Mariah over the last year, who, in addition to playing a pivotal role in putting together the ACLALS history project has played a really pivotal role in this conference. From finding us our wonderful conference hotel, to the conference program, to the virtual book fair, many of the elements of this conference would not have come together were it not for Mariah’s incredible work.

I also want to thank the regional chairs: Michael Bucknor, Mohd Asaddudin, Walter Perera, Marcel Okhakhu, Alex Wanjala, Iri Manase, Michael Griffiths, Radhika Mohanram and Asma Sayed.

Lastly, I want to thank all of you for coming. Though I have been to several ACLALS conferences over the last 20 years, I never envisioned myself as the chair. I’m happy to have been able to steer the association through this difficult time. There were some moments in the last two years where I wondered if we would really be able to come together in person in Toronto this year. It’s gratifying to see it happening.