

Bree Drapa
Director, Westford Public Library
westfordpubliclibrary@gmail.com

I would be happy to speak on behalf of this important issue.

I received my VT Certificate of Librarianship in 2015. This was a time when classes were still held in person in Berlin and you really got to know the cohort you were learning alongside. The connections I made in those core classes still exist for me today. At a recent mentoring meeting (thank you, Joy, for starting up this program), several of the mentors were people I had taken classes with or been taught by. It felt like a reunion. I really miss in person meetings and classes, but also see the value in digital instruction.

The fact that my VT Library Certification was earned at no cost to me or my library was amazing. I do not think people would take the time to earn this accreditation, nor would some libraries prioritize paying for it. I would recommend doing everything you can to keep VTLIB's classes free for those who take them.

I have continued to take classes through VTLIB – there always seems to be something I am interested in. As a solo librarian, I wear all the hats, so I need all the classes! I find it odd, or worrisome, that we do not need to take further CE classes to keep up our certification. The value in updating skills, learning new information, and making those important connections with colleagues does not stop once you have your certificate.

Not only have I taken VTLIB classes, but I have taken classes with their partner organizations – like Narcan training or mental health classes with the Howard Center and Gary Diezel's HR courses through UVM Extension school.

I deeply miss the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative – a program that I was part of for many years. These classes and workshops grew my youth services practice and gave me materials and skills to better serve my community. Not only that, but we were also trained and certified to teach childcare providers through Northern Lights. Giving child care providers FREE credits was super helpful for them, since they must take many hours of CE, often at their own expense, to keep up their certification.

At this point in my library learning journey, I often look outside of Vermont for learning opportunities. I have participated in several ALA book groups and found them very informative. But that most relevant and transformational educational opportunities I have had have been through the Association of Rural and Small Libraries. ARSL just gets a small, rural librarian. Their classes are relevant, timely, and very professional. The ARSL Conference is more useful and applicable to me than even our VLA Conference. The national presence and the ability to draw on a larger pool of experts makes ARSL a valuable resource. I have met and learned from colleagues across the country and to see their struggles and strengths has given me inspiration and even more connections to the library world. In 2020, I was accepted into the ARSL Outstanding in Their Field Leadership Institute. This 20-month long program has given

me skills and opportunities that I never thought I would have. It has been my unofficial MLIS.

Speaking of MLIS, the fact that there is no ALA accredited MLIS program located in the state of Vermont is a blow for the profession. Online programs do not work for everyone. Also, the cost of the programs available, online or otherwise, are prohibitive. I am never going to recoup my investment in an MLIS working in Vermont. I am not going to suddenly start making \$40,000 more at my current job with an advanced degree. Even if I switch to a larger library (I love being a rural librarian), the ROI is not here in this state.

Because I value CE, I also like to give back in the form of presenting at conferences, webinars, workshops, etc. The VT library landscape is full of talent and using that talent to strengthen the profession should be a top priority of VTLIB going forward.

Before I conclude, I would like to compliment Joy Worland on her improvement of the VTLIB CE offerings and process. Since she came on, there have been a greater variety of classes/topics available, as well as various meet ups, round tables, and trainings for upper level library workers. Her efforts are very much appreciated. Keep up the good work, Joy!

Looking back on what I wrote here, I think that CE is partly what you learn and partly who you meet. The connections that are made through the learning process can be just as important as the information or skills learned.