

Against the Grain

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Don's Conference Notes- Transforming the Information Community: The 33rd Annual NASIG Conference

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Transforming the Information Community: The 33rd Annual NASIG Conference

Guest Columnist: **Steve Oberg** (Group Leader for Resource Description and Digital Initiatives, Wheaton College, and NASIG Past President) <steve.oberg@wheaton.edu>

Echoing its official tagline, “*Transforming the Information Community*” was the theme of the **33rd Annual NASIG Conference**, held 7-11 June 2018 at the Grand Hyatt Buckhead in Atlanta, Georgia. That is a rather grand theme to tackle, but the conference delivered on it with a well thought-out program that drew hundreds of attendees from North America and many other areas of the world including Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and the Middle East.

Program elements included Vision Sessions (one held each morning of the event), concurrent sessions, a well-attended Vendor Expo, a Great Ideas Showcase, Snapshot Sessions, and Vendor Lightning Talks. This year was the second time the program included Student Snapshot Sessions, which were added to the program to provide an opportunity for student attendees to get their feet wet by presenting at a professional conference in a welcoming atmosphere. This year’s sessions were perhaps even better than the inaugural version last year.

There also were several well-attended pre-conferences on topics such as linked data for serials, introductory serials cataloging with RDA, MarcEdit, and managing EZproxy. During the conference opening event, we took time to recognize winners of an amazing number of awards that are given out by the organization annually. The award winners represented highly diverse backgrounds which was particularly encouraging. Another traditional element of the opening event is a speech from an invited guest speaker. The idea behind this tradition is to provide attendees with a sense of place and local history of the conference city. The speech given by this year’s guest speaker on the history of Atlanta contained unforeseen problematic elements, for which an official apology to attendees was issued the next morning before the first Vision Session. (NASIG is working on ways to improve this section of the program for future events.)

Sören Auer (Director, **Technische Informationsbibliothek (TIB)** in Germany) kicked off the main portion of the conference program with a fascinating Vision Session talk entitled “*Towards an Open Research Knowledge Graph*.” **Auer** stated that although he is not a librarian by training, he is a librarian by state of mind, and he went on to review some of his findings on traditional serials publishing. Many serials are no longer published (he referenced, for example, the Sears catalog), and he pointed out how much the methods and approaches for finding information being used today have changed. There is so much information to wade through that researchers are looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. In addition, reproducibility of research is frequently doubtful, casting doubt on the validity of research results, and because there is so much more being published, it is hard for researchers to even stay on top of who is doing what and where. Here, **Auer** said, is where the need for a knowledge graph comes into play, so that researchers are able to impose some structure and order for sources of information they need. Scholarly communication is ripe for improvement, and developing an open knowledge graph is a viable solution, built on linked data. **Auer** argued that such a structure would increase transparency, reduce ambiguity, increase interdisciplinarity, and consolidate terminology, among other benefits. He highlighted a website he has developed, *orkg.org*, that is built to demonstrate the feasibility of this concept. Several audience members asked questions in the following Q&A period, including whether this open knowledge graph concept could work for social sciences and humanities, and how

this might practically be achieved with a mix of automated and manual effort.

The second Vision Session was given by **Dr. Lauren Smith** (Information Specialist, **Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services** in Glasgow, Scotland) on the topic of “*Communities of Praxis: Transforming Access to Information for Equity*.”² This inspiring speech talked about the importance of power, agency, and activism. For example, **Smith** noted that “Democratizing access to information is a precondition for exercising rights.” She went on to highlight her experiences working within social services in Scotland where she identified barriers to information for users of those services including a difficult-to-use online catalog and even something we might think as relatively simple: downloading an article PDF on a site that is overloaded with traffic or when Internet bandwidth might not be optimal. She focused her efforts on advocacy (open access, make it more understandable and accessible!), learning from and engaging with others across the information community spectrum, and negotiation. She called out our own professional weaknesses in terms of making our own data open, and strongly encouraged attendees to wield collective power to protect important values such as patron privacy and security. Those in attendance felt energized and empowered to create needed change. An audience member representing a major publisher commented afterward on how much **Smith’s** call for community dialogue resonated, and **Smith** responded by asking for input and advice on how to do that better, especially with the publishing community. Another vendor representative noted how much collective advocacy impacts their work, especially with regard to building in and paying attention to accessibility within their products.

The third and final Vision Session was by **Lisa Macklin** (Director, Research, Engagement, and Scholarly Communications, **Emory University**). She spoke with passion and clarity on “*Open Access: How Accessible Is It?*”³ **Macklin**, well known for her work in promoting open access (OA) and for her copyright expertise as a lawyer and a librarian, opened her talk by stating that open access and scholarly communication are for all of us, not just those with those words such as “scholarly communications” in their job title. She went on to describe several important OA projects such as TOME,⁴ an initiative of the **Association of Research Libraries (ARL)**, and outlined her vision of an ecosystem in which publishers, authors, and institutions work together in mutually beneficial ways. **Macklin** also provided some guidelines for evaluating OA projects. She reminded us not to lose sight of our broad objectives to preserve and make our collections available for everyone without barriers if at all possible. She felt that we sometimes are limited, also, in how we think of what exists within OA. For example, we should include digital humanities, broader digitization efforts such as those available through the **Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)**,⁵ and also we should remember and learn from collection development policies that explicitly support OA such as one recently published by the **University of North Texas** which has received a lot of attention.⁶ We also need to think more broadly still, **Macklin** believes, by paying attention to accessibility and findability of our collections, and also by expanding access within our profession to more people with more diverse perspectives. **Macklin** was particularly articulate about the need to open doors for others within our profession, and encouraged those who are early in their careers to seek out mentors as well as opportunities to grow and learn. There were several good exchanges afterward about advice for mentoring, language as a potential accessibility barrier, and reference to the important Scholarly Commons work coming out of the FORCE11 group.⁷

This article does not have the room to fully cover all of the many other worthwhile and interesting program elements. A new develop-

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Little Red Herrings — Giving Thanks: Libraries

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

I am probably alone in this, but every time I see one of those ALA READ posters, I bristle. Oh, I'm sure there is abundant market research to prove that these posters are effective in some way. But when I see them, I'm prone to wonder about several things. First, what money went into these posters — surely most were public service shots — and where did that money come from? Second, those eminentos appearing in the posters: have they been to a library, ever? Or, have they been to one recently? Sure, they doubtless live in a town where there is a library, but honestly, do we need to be reminded to read by some athlete who may have his own “issues,” or some actress whose last movie may not be one any of us can see without blushing or boredom?

But let's set all that aside. This is a column about libraries and why we should give thanks for them. I know I don't need to preach this to the choir, so to say, but is there any other civic entity that provides so much for so many for so little? Stop for a minute and let that sink in. Where else can one go and get so much for so little? Libraries aren't exactly free, but they may as well be for all you get just by showing up.

I work in an academic library, but students aren't our only patrons, as I suspect this is the case with many other academic libraries, if not all. When I think of all those folks in and out of our building who are not degree-seeking, I marvel at the cornucopia of resources they have at their fingertips. Are they working on

a research project? We have what they need in spades. Are they creating the next great American novel? We have whatever they need to strike a match, light a fire, or create a conflagration of creativity. And it isn't just the subject matter for their topic. We also have the tools to craft them on, the consultants on hand to help them navigate the often rough waters of inspiration, not to mention the very suggestions needed to get that inspiration going.

Perhaps they are writing a screenplay or just trying to find some obscure fact they need to pull off that clever mystery play. The fact of the matter is that it's here, everywhere. Sure, they can Google around all day if they like, but they'll find, more often than not, that the time-savers we have here can set them more quickly on their stated task than a half day of running down that rabbit-hole that is too often the Google experience.

Suppose they're trying to start a business and they want to do some market research, not just for this city, but for any city? Then yes. Here. Again. In spades. Moreover, they may, with all the collaboration going on in the building at all hours of the day, even pick up some expert advice, free of charge.

But it doesn't even have to be something as far-flung as all these examples. It may be something far more mundane, like trying to chat

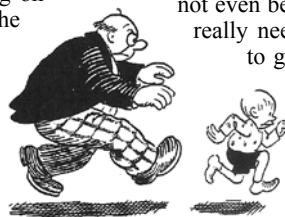
with your teenager, or trying to redesign your bonus room, or even move to a new house, to a new location, or to a new state. The fact of the matter is, we have it here. And it is here for the asking.

I don't want to go hyperbolic on readers, but honestly, is there a better or more public demonstration of what it means to live in a democratic republic than any one of the more than 116,000 libraries of all kinds in this country?

Libraries do all this with very little funding, often with even smaller staffs, and yet do it every day, every month, every year, and often amid the most tempestuous moments of change any business has ever had to endure in so short a time frame.

What I'd like to see rather than celebrities, athletes, or even politicians on READ posters would be everyday librarians and their everyday patrons reminding the world that this is what anyone can have, almost at any time, and just about anywhere you live in this country.

I know that by the time you read this column, Thanksgiving will be long past and may not even be a good memory. But you don't really need Thanksgiving to be reminded to give thanks for the many benefits we enjoy in this great country. I'm sure I'm biased, but librarians strike me as one of those things we aren't nearly thankful for, often or enough. 🍂



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ment this year, spearheaded by **Maria Aghazarian** of the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**, was collaborative note-taking. Check out a shared Google Doc containing notes from conference attendees on many other sessions to get a feel for what was covered.⁸ There was so much good material! In addition, all of the vision sessions are freely available on **NASIG's** YouTube channel, so feel free to check them out.⁹ Several other sessions were also recorded and will become freely available early next year, so I hope you will check them out as well.

Next year's conference will be held at the historic and beautiful Omni William Penn Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh on June 5-8. The conference theme will be **“Building Bridges: Connecting the Information Community”** and vision session speakers will be announced shortly. This is a wonderful event that is well worth attending. You are warmly welcomed to join the **NASIG** community! 🍂

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Donald T. Hawkins is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for **Against the Grain**, he blogs the **Computers in Libraries and Internet Librarian** conferences for **Information To-**

day, Inc. (ITI) and maintains the **Conference Calendar** on the **ITI Website** (<http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp>). He is the Editor of **Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage**, (*Information Today*, 2013) and Co-Editor of **Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits** (*Information Today*, 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the **University of California, Berkeley** and has worked in the online information industry for over 45 years.

Endnotes

1. Abstract available online at <https://nasig2018.sched.com/event/DEpH/vision-i-soren-auer-towards-an-open-research-knowledge-graph>.
2. Abstract available online at <https://nasig2018.sched.com/event/DEpK/vision-ii-lauren-smith-communities-of-praxis-transforming-access-to-information-for-equity>.
3. Abstract available online at <https://nasig2018.sched.com/event/DEpN/vision-iii-lisa-macklin-open-access-how-accessible-is-it>.
4. See more detail about this project at <http://www.arl.org/focus-areas/scholarly-communication/toward-an-open-monograph-ecosystem>.
5. <https://dp.la>
6. See more detail at <https://www.library.unt.edu/policies/collection-development/collection-development-policy>.
7. <https://www.force11.org>
8. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oBfThhE2-Gy3N10es8Hd3MS8Wn5awMRxyTqJZm7HJwg/edit>
9. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoaSD8TVbhg&list=PLfCwmKIU_VaS-NGG3A49nax0T5SNpAX4.