Don's Conference Notes

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The 2019 ACRL Conference: Recasting the Narrative

Column Editor's Note: Because of space limitations, this is an abridged version of our report on this conference. You can read the full article which includes descriptions of additional sessions at https://www.against-the-grain.com/2019/09/v31-4-dons-conference-notes/. — DTH & LH

More than 3,000 attendees from 23 countries met in Cleveland, OH on April 10-13 for the biannual conference of the **Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL)**. The conference featured traditional plenary and concurrent presentations, poster sessions, an exhibit hall with 223 exhibitors, round-table discussions, and a reception at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Audience at the Opening Keynote

Opening Keynote

Michelle Norris, the opening keynote speaker, is an award-winning journalist, founder of the Race Card Project,[1] and Executive Director of The Bridge,[2] a program of the **Aspen Institute** on race, identity,

Michelle Norris

connectivity, and inclusion. She began her address by noting that not only do the stories we tell define us, but they can also confine us and keep us from seeing things. Race is a big topic and is often difficult to discuss. So she founded the Race Card Project, which challenges participants to reduce their thoughts to six words and send it to her. The response to the project was huge; thousands of cards were sent. Many of them used humor; many were about people's identities; and others were aspirational. (**Norris's** six words are "still more work to be done.") Sometimes the stories are difficult, but in this project, people find ways they can celebrate their differences and realize what they have in common and what they do not, which helps us to understand diversity.

The most work we can do is to create spaces where people can listen to each other. Libraries are places where that can happen. It is always good to listen first and figure out what you can agree on, stay together with people that you do not agree with and who may have pilloried you, and then work on recapturing lost relationships.

How Faculty Members Demonstrate Impact

This standing-room-only session featured six reports describing a multi-dimensional study of faculty members' understandings, perceptions, and strategies regarding impact metrics. **Dan DeSanto** and **Aaron Nichols** from the **University of Vermont** created a survey and presented a report on it at **ACRL** 2017.

- How familiar are faculty members with scholarly metrics and altmetrics?
- How accurate do faculty members perceive scholarly impact metrics to be?
- How important are scholarly metrics to faculty members?
- How much weight do faculty members believe should be given to scholarly impact metrics?
- How are scholarly impact metrics used in the promotion and tenure (P&T) process?

There were 1,222 responses to the survey; here are some results:

- In general, faculty members were less familiar with altmetrics than traditional ones; the majority of Arts & Humanities (A&H) faculty members said they were "not at all familiar" with altmetrics.
- A&H faculty members perceived scholarly metrics to be less accurate than faculty members in the sciences, social sciences and health sciences, and faculty members in those disciplines reported higher perceived importance.
- A&H faculty members perceive, value, and use metrics differently than faculty members in other disciplines.
- The role of scholarly metrics in the P&T process remains unclear to most faculty members.

These results suggest that we need a better understanding of what A&H disciplines value in metrics, how metrics are being used in general, and why they struggle for visibility.

Understanding Graduate Students' Knowledge of Research Data Management (RDM)

Two librarians from the **University of Pittsburgh** and one from nearby **Duquesne University** noticed a significant interest in RDM by graduate students and suspected that there was a more widespread need on their campuses. Not only was there a need for RDM training, but graduate students were doing most of the work on RDM, and in many cases faculty members did not know what they were doing.

Students learn from courses, hands-on experiences from labs and projects, and individually. Differences in student workflows depended on the discipline in which they were working: science students' work was influenced by instruments and experiments; those in the humanities and social sciences had more ad hoc and individual practices. Many students are concerned about losing data and do regular backups (one even mailed a hard drive to parents for safekeeping!). Some students do not know the source of the data they are working with because they are not integrated into the overall workflow but are just assigned tasks.

Libraries can play a role in the RDM process. Students want certifications, courses, workshops, and practical training to help them streamline what they do. Libraries can provide help with citation management, such as conducting workshops on EndNote and even the intricacies of Excel. Most students are focused on data creation and are not aware of what happens to it throughout its life cycle, which suggests that libraries can teach RDM as a system and should consider embedding RDM education into research practices.

Reshaping the Library Literature

Heather Getsay and **Aiping Chen-Gaffey**, Professors in the **Bailey Library** at **Slippery Rock University (SRU)**, PA, reported on research they conducted on publishing activities of technical services librarians at smaller institutions like **SRU** and the challenges such librarians have faced. They collected a sample of library literature published from 2013 to 2018 and also a sample of 15 job descriptions from institutions of different sizes and found the following:
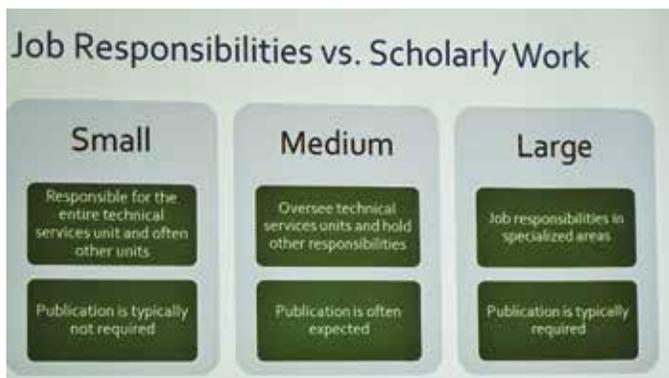
Opportunities for librarians at smaller institutions are:

* Maintain awareness of trends in the field,
* Develop research from their technical services work,
* Co-author with colleagues from larger institutions, and
* Partner with larger institutions.

Open Textbook Toolkit: Developing a New Narrative for OER Support

Presented by **Will Cross** and **Mira Walker** from **NC State University**, this standing-room-only session focused on IMLS-funded research that was completed to help faculty in the psychology department at **NC State** implement open education resources (OERs). They discussed perceived barriers for faculty to implement OERs on campus, and provided actionable recommendations to support adoption of OERs at other institutions and in other fields. A faculty guide to OERs is available on the **NC State** website.[3]

Thursday Keynote

Viet Than Nguyen, Professor of English and American Studies and Ethnicity at the **University of Southern California**, a writer, and winner of the Pulitzer and Macarthur prizes, came to the U.S. as a refugee from the Vietnam War in 1975. He was unable to find a sponsor for all four members of his family; separating from his parents still affects him as a traumatic experience. Now that he is a father, he can see what the experience was like for them. Being a refugee gave him the necessary experience to become a writer.

Today, we are living in the worst refugee crisis since World War II. There is something stigmatizing a refugee because nobody knows what to say to you after you disclose that. In 1975, most of the American public did not want to accept refugees from Southeast Asia, but immigrants and refugees have the right to be as ordinary as every other American.

Viet Than Nguyen

We need more diverse representation — the publishing industry is 87% white, which tells us that there is a persistence of colonization in the U.S. Successful colonization occurs when the settlers never leave; it is called the American dream. We need to recognize that Vietnam is a country, not a war!

We have made some bad choices in the past: when we have had the choice of being the colonizer or being colonized, we have chosen to be the colonizer. The problem is not that we are voiceless; it is that we are not heard. The desire of a voice for the voiceless is a symptom of colonization, but we need de-colonization. Some of the ways to do that include abolishing the present industrial complex, de-militarization, etc., which are difficult but not impossible.

ACRL Roadshow Showcase: Move Your Library Forward with Local, Affordable, In-Person Training

The **ACRL** Roadshow[4] is a series of one-day traveling workshops that bring the learning to you. There are six different choices of topics, from assessment to data management to standards, and each is led by expert presenters in the field.

We Don't Need That Any More: Impact of Digitization on Print Usage

In a standing-room-only session, **Thomas Teper** and **Vera Vasileva** from the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** discussed their research on differences in demand for print titles before and after digitization and the difference in demand for those published before and after 1923. Results of their study indicated that:

* There are measurable differences in demand based on the subject classifications of the items and their circulation.
* Average annual use for print resources decreases after digitization.
* The results appear to contradict speculation that the free access to pre-1923 items decreases demand. In fact, after digitization, pre-1923 items circulated more frequently than post-1923 items.

Scientists Don't Use Books — Or Do They?

Michelle Wilde, Coordinator, College Liaisons, **Colorado State University (CSU)**, investigated how eBook statistics can challenge conventional wisdom and inform collection decisions. Today, attitudes toward eBooks are changing rapidly. Usage and adoption seems to vary by institution. At **CSU**, after a flood in 2012 destroyed many of the print books in storage, eBooks have been the preferred format for monograph purchasing, and now they have over 500,000 of them. eBooks are purchased from publishers in three packages:

* Ownership (from **Springer** and **Elsevier**): The content is DRM free, and users have access to a wide variety of holdings. Usage of these works is increasing.
* Lease: Some high-impact titles are only available in a lease arrangement, which has the disadvantage that monographs become treated like serials.
* An evidence-based model is emerging.

CSU has experienced a dramatic increase in demand-driven acquisitions of eBooks.

The Eyes Have It: Using Eye Tracking to Evaluate a Library Website

Tracey Kry from **Western New England University** and **Emily Porter-Fyke** from **Fairfield University** wanted to evaluate how a library website was used (reading vs. scanning), the use of buttons, navigation, and terminology. They developed a list of tasks that students could do, recruited testers (mainly engineering students), and used Tobii-2 glasses[5] to observe and record which parts of the site were being looked at.

Tobii-2 Glasses

Nine first-year students used a talk-aloud protocol to describe how they used the website in performing the assigned tasks. The resulting data told the investigators which ones were the most difficult to complete and the optimal path that the students used. The most frequently viewed section of the web pages was the left side. Participants rarely scrolled down to look at the lower ("below the fold") sections of the page, but they were willing to use a search box if one was provided. They usually scanned pages rather than reading them. Jargon was a problem for the participants.

Start Something New: How Libraries Support Cross-Campus Entrepreneurship Education

This session featured four librarians showing how they support entrepreneurship through the library in a variety of ways on diverse campuses. **Ash Faulkner** (**The Ohio State University**), **Genifer Snipes** (**University of Oregon**), and **Marlinda Karo** (**Houston Community College**) discussed topics such as outreach, instruction, campus and community engagement, and collection issues. Some examples of library support were helping to coach students for "pitch" style contests, providing space and support for entrepreneurial club events and workshops, and more. Another discussion was on collections issues, and the unique challenges faced in providing entrepreneurship resources. Most databases still focus on brick-and-mortar/traditional industries and keeping up with the landscape of available resources is challenging.

Talking About Research: Applying Textual Analysis Software to Student Interviews

What does the term "research" mean to students and how do they form narratives to make sense of the research process? **Sarah Wagner** and **Ann Marshall** from **Purdue University Fort Wayne** used Voyant Tools[6] to analyze the conversations of 20 undergraduate students who were involved with a research project. Common words associated with "research" included "paper," "project," "class," and "presentation." Many students thought of research as work. It is important to note that libraries need a deep appreciation of students' perspectives on their work.

Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Libraries

A panel of librarians and publisher representatives noted that there is no common definition of artificial intelligence (AI), but the Projects in Artificial Intelligence Registry (PAIR)[7] maintained at the **University of Oklahoma Library** can give us a view of its scope.

M.J. Tooey, Associate VP, Academic Affairs, **University of Maryland Baltimore**, started a Journal Club to discuss topics such as:

- What do Google and Facebook know about us and how do they know?
- AI in healthcare,
- Data accuracy (or inaccuracy) and its effect on AI,
- Intelligent agents and how they work,
- Ethical and privacy considerations, and
- Where do we go from here?

Bohyun Kim, Associate Professor, **University of Rhode Island (URI)** Libraries, described an AI lab at **URI**[8] that offers workshops on basic programming, robotics, etc. She said that we will soon be interacting with machine intelligence; should we delegate high-level tasks to the machine? AI may appear magical but it is based on the data given to the system, so we must pay close attention to the algorithms used to generate the data.

Adam Griff, Managing Director, **Brightspot Consulting**, presented new roles for the library in the age of AI:

- The library as a convenor: bringing people together to discuss AI, particularly around ethical issues such as privacy and equity.
- The library as creator: supporting AI and machine learning projects in the library and finding relationships across disciplines. Librarians have functional expertise around tools; AI will enhance this trend.
- The library as service adaptor: using AI to provide library services such as **Strayer University's** student service chatbot and the **University of Oklahoma's** SoonerBot.
- The library as discovery adaptor: using AI to enable and assist with discovery and research, creating metadata.

Ann Gabriel, Senior VP, Global Strategic Markets, **Elsevier** described how knowledge is created and used. No sector of knowledge is focused on ethics.

Elsevier's AI resource center[9] provides free access to research and expert commentary on AI as well as a link to a newly issued report entitled "Artificial Intelligence: How knowledge is created, transferred, and used."

In response to a set of three questions, panel members' responses included:

- Librarians bring a special perspective to the issues of ethics and privacy.
- How can we track truth in research and understand what is embedded in articles?
- Claims for AI are not reproducible if the data is not published.
- How do we prepare students for an environment where they need higher level thinking skills?
- AI is not just one thing; it is an infrastructure and integrated already into many things we already use (Google, robotics, etc.).

Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey 2018

Christine Wolff-Eisenberg and **Roger Schonfeld** of **Ithaka S+R** unveiled key findings from the 2018 Faculty Survey that has been tracking the attitudes and behaviors of U.S. faculty members since 2000 to provide longitudinal data on key issues and trend analysis of changes across survey cycles. Key takeaways from the survey results include:

- Discovery starting points are shifting towards Google Scholar and other general search engines.
- Faculty members increasingly prefer to manage and preserve their data using cloud-based storage services.
- While faculty are increasingly interested in an open access publication model, traditional scholarly incentives continue to motivate their decision-making.
- There is substantial interest in use of open educational resources for instructional practices, particularly from younger faculty members.
- Faculty are skeptical about the value of using learning analytics tools.
- The role of the library in archiving materials is increasingly important.

The full report can be found online.[10] *Against the Grain* will also be publishing a special report from librarians in the field on their response and experiences with faculty on the key findings presented here.

Creating Ideas Into Reality: Spaces and Programs that Open Up the Imagination

Kari Kozak, Head, Engineering Library, **University of Iowa** developed an innovative tool library after receiving an email from a frustrated professor who had 38 hand tools to donate. Now the library has more than 225 tools that can be checked out; in the fall semester of 2018, 1,703 were borrowed. The most popular tools are calculators, tape measures, ruler sets, and calipers.

The tool library has given rise to the creation of a creative space to teach prototyping, virtual reality, computer programming and circuit building in a welcoming and fun environment. Topics include how to solder, create a poster, and program a computer.

Using funding provided by the Engineering Technology Center, five kick-start awards of $500 each were given to individual students or teams to help them bring their projects into reality. The response to this program was very positive.

Reconceptualizing the Conference Experience

This panel presented tips and best practices on how and why to start your own grassroots conference, especially focused on inclusivity and accessibility for small conferences. Each person on the panel had been involved with starting or organizing a small-scale conference event. The panel was composed of **Rebecca Halpern** (**The Claremont Colleges Library**), **Elizabeth Galoozis** (**University of Southern California**), **Nataly Blas** (**Loyola Marymount University**), **Kayleen Jones** (**University of Minnesota Duluth**), **Stephanie Pierce** (**University of Arkansas**), and a video presentation from **Ali Versluis** (**University of Guelph**). They posited that although conferences are seen as a central

component to spread knowledge, gather new ideas, and network within the library profession, they often remain inaccessible to many library staff, thus reinforcing inequalities in the profession. Some tips and takeaways included setting clear goals, a meaningful mission, and a theme that supports conference goals; designing an engaging space; looking for funding through local grants. Always remember to have fun and embrace the setbacks to learn for next time.

Publish Not Perish: Real Talk About Content Management Systems

Courtney McDonald, Learner Experience & Engagement Librarian, **University of Colorado Boulder**, and **Heidi Burkhardt**, Web Project Manager & Content Strategist, **University of Michigan**, noted that libraries are publishers, and their Content Management Systems (CMSs) are powerful because staff at all levels can create and publish content using them. But creating content takes time, and producing more noise than signal can become the norm. Challenges that can arise include:

- So many authors producing content that it becomes difficult to track them,
- Lack of a consistent voice for the organization,
- Content bloat with repetition and duplication,
- Lingering content without regular updates so that it becomes "crusty,"
- Sites based on the organization chart, and
- Poor accessibility, quality, etc.

Organizations need a content strategy to manage content and ensure that it is useful, usable, well structured, and easily found and understood. This requires the following five steps:

Why — Why is the content being produced and why would someone be interested in it? Why would they choose your content and not someone else's? If you cannot say why someone would use your content, you need to think about your site.

Who — Who is authoring, editing, approving, and publishing the content? Who are the internal decision makers? Who is the primary target audience? Who are the frequent users and who does not visit the website at all?

What and Where — What do you have? Where does it live? Who owns and maintains it? What is the audience and purpose of the platforms? What kinds of actions make sense in the culture of the organization? Where are you putting your content? Is it running wild? What do you control and have influence on?

When — When was the content born? When will you get around to fixing errors? When do you plan to revisit this content and this platform? Figure out your priorities. No page should be alone for its entire life; have an editorial calendar.

How — Write well and write well for the web. Be thinking about things to make your content more accessible and play to your strengths. Produce high quality standards-compliant content.

Decide which is the most critical of these questions to address and use your CMS for good!
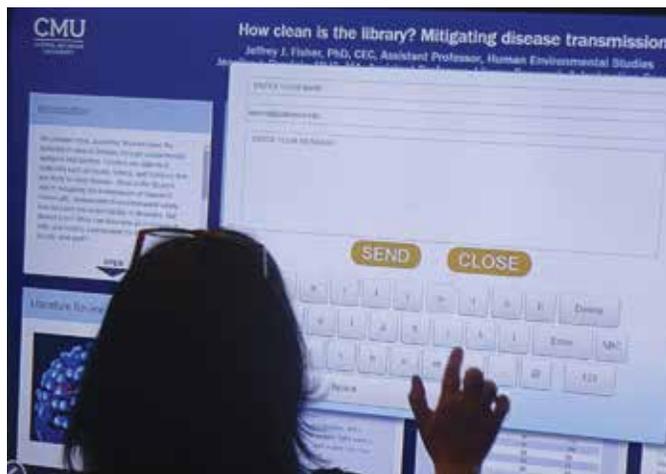
Poster Sessions

ACRL hosted a series of digital-only poster sessions across several days of the conference. The platform used touch-screen laptops that enabled presenters and attendees to swipe and zoom on the poster images, as well as enter their name and email address to receive a PDF copy of the poster or more information. Each poster session timeslot had 24 posters organized in innovative groups of six in a hexagonal arrangement. The full

list of poster sessions, descriptions, and presenters, and some PDF image files are listed in the conference program.[11]

Typical poster

A user sending a message to the author of the poster

Options for communicating with the author

Closing Session

Alison Bechdel, author of the graphic novel *Fun Home* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006)[12] and the long-running comic series "Dykes to Watch Out For" closed the conference with stories connecting her work with what she called an "intense library cathexis," with libraries and books as central themes in all of them, and of the often messy relationship between narrative and truth. "Libraries are crucial as one of the last spaces that exist not to sell you something, but to give you something for free."

Alison Bechdel

The next ACRL conference will be on April 14-17, 2021 in Seattle, WA, with the theme "**Ascending in to an Open Future**." 🐉

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 Today, 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.

Leah H. Hinds was appointed Executive Director of the **Charleston Conference** in 2017, and has served in various roles with the **Charleston Information Group, LLC**, since 2004. Prior to working for the conference, she was Assistant Director of Graduate Admissions for the **College of Charleston** for four years. She lives in a small town near Columbia, SC, with her husband and two kids where they raise a menagerie of farm animals.

Endnotes for Don's Conference Notes — *from page 82*

1. *https://theracecardproject.com/*. Participants in the project can send their cards using a form at *http://theracecardproject.com/send-your-race-card/*.
2. *https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/the-bridge/*
3. *https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/alttextbook/guide*
4. *www.ala.org/acrl/roadshows*
5. *https://www.tobiipro.com/product-listing/tobii-pro-glasses-2/*
6. *https://voyant-tools.org/*
7. *https://pair.libraries.ou.edu/*
8. *https://web.uri.edu/ai/*
9. *https://www.elsevier.com/connect/resource-center/artificial-intelligence*
10. h*ttps://sr.ithaka.org/publications/2018-us-faculty-survey/*
11. *https://s4.goeshow.com/acrl/national/2019/conference_schedule.cfm*
12. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fun_Home*