

As the recipient of the 2014 Student Travel Award from the Association of Architecture School Librarians, I am pleased to write this summary report on the recent 2014 AASL conference in Miami. This was my first time attending the conference, as well as my first exposure to the AASL in general. As a trained architect who has recently made the shift to librarianship, I applied for the AASL travel award with great interest in becoming involved with the professional niche group that is uniquely relevant to my career path and interests. Through attending the AASL conference and speaking with members, I wanted to gain a better sense of the range and diversity of roles in architecture librarianship and begin to understand where to fill in the gaps in my knowledge. To quote my own application for the travel award, I wanted to learn more about current trends in architecture librarianship, to expand my professional network, and build the knowledge and resources necessary to propel my career forward. What I found at the AASL conference is a dedicated group of dynamic, innovative, and collaborative librarians who enthusiastically spoke about their work, shared their professional experiences, and warmly welcomed me to the fold of architecture librarianship. The conference sessions, as well as the informal conversations I had with other members, provided me with insight, inspiration, and encouragement about the career that I am building in architecture librarianship.

While I am a newcomer to professional conferences in general, I was struck immediately by what seemed to be a unique sense of camaraderie and collegiality pervading the AASL conference. Walking onto the bus to attend the first event of the conference – a tour and lunch at Fairchild Tropical Botanical Gardens – was a bit like walking into a college reunion, with every person on the bus engaged in friendly chatter and catching-up. It quickly became clear that a defining characteristic of the AASL is the openness, warmth, and engagement of its members and the extent to which members seem mutually invested in each other's careers and projects. This environment facilitated easeful conversations with other members, and I had the distinct sense that as an emerging professional, any member I spoke to would answer my questions about the field of architecture librarianship with generosity and thoughtfulness.

The structure of the conference was an excellent mix of site tours, meetings, and presentation sessions. The opening day of the conference took us first to the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Gardens, with its numerous Dale Chihuly sculptures and gorgeous tropical blooms and butterflies. For those of us escaping the unusually long and cold northern winter, this was a wonderful respite and pleasant transition into the balmy south. Following this, we visited the Otto G. Richter Library at the University of Miami, where we toured the digitization and image processing unit, the preservation lab, special collections, archives, and the Cuban Heritage Collection. Cristina Favretto, head of special collections, Koichi Tasa, university archivist, and Natalie Baur, archivist of the Cuban Heritage Collection, had all selected beautifully illustrative materials from their respective collections for us to view during the tour. In the business meeting following in the Korach Gallery in the School of Architecture at

University of Miami, President David Eifler (a familiar face from my M.Arch days at UC Berkeley) and Vice-President Gilda Santana of University of Miami, guided the group through a recap of recent and projected activities of the AASL. The presentation by Awards Committee Chair Elizabeth Schaub of the Distinguished Service Award to Janine Henri and the Frances Chen Travel Award to Mark Pompelia narrated the impressive career biographies of these two long-time AASL members. When the bus returned to the Eden Roc Hotel that evening, some of us made our way into the lively ACSA reception, where we had the pleasant opportunity to mingle with academic colleagues from architectural history and design instruction, who had just emerged from a stunning keynote presentation by Zaha Hadid.

The second day of the conference brought us to downtown Miami for tours of art deco architecture and a visit to the newly opened AIA Miami Center for Architecture and Design. MCAD Executive Director Cheryl Jacobs described the history of the former post office building that now houses the center and guided us into the center's current exhibition of line drawings of facades of historic downtown buildings. The afternoon lightning round sessions brought us back to the meat of architectural librarianship. John Schlinke discussed the process and outcomes of a project that partnered the library as client with students in a design and fabrication studio to create flexible display space in the architecture library. Amy Auscherman examined the benefits of using the simple blogging platform of Tumblr to display and promote an architectural collection. Martha Walker surveyed the unexpected complexities of acquiring a 3D map for a thesis student, including the thought-provoking possibility that resourcefulness and good research on the part of a student could be perceived as unfair intellectual advantage. Jesse Vestermark presented a set of brilliantly simple diagrams that he had created with straightforward tools to illustrate the tools and processes of research for architecture and design students. The final lightning round session on the integration of GIS tools in architectural history websites was co-presented by John Nemmers, Jamie Rogers, and Mark Sullivan, who are working on two separate but conceptually similar projects related to the history of the cities of St. Augustine and Coral Gables.

Following the lightning round sessions, we heard updates on the current activities and resources of Material ConneXion, ARTstor, and Le Corbusier Plans, as well as several initiatives underway at Columbia's Avery Library. Jeffrey Ross brought us up to date on the complexities of journal indexing and the current state of the Avery Index. Chris Sala described the challenges of web archiving and the success of creating global research guides in conjunction with design faculty. Margaret Smithglass detailed the massive and exciting undertaking that is the Built Works Registry.

The final morning of the conference presented two themed sessions. The first centered on material collections, and the second focused on libraries in the post-digital age. Mark Pompelia chaired the material collection discussant panel, whose presenters highlighted a range of material collections challenges, from simply getting materials out of boxes and into the hands of students, to gathering informative usage statistics and properly including material information in catalogs and databases. Kasia Leousis described the success of integrating

student research on materials into descriptive classification information available in the Auburn materials library. Barbara Opar outlined the development of the materials collection at Syracuse and a means for mapping materials to traditional cataloging structures in Voyager. Rebecca Price detailed the range of users who access the University of Michigan materials library, and illustrated the display tools she utilizes to highlight the collection to users. Fiona Anastas of Material ConneXion discussed the benefits of technology transfer and the importance of having the appropriate vocabulary to describe your needs in relation to materials. Mark Pompelia outlined the development of the Materials Resource Center at RISD and noted memorably that “at RISD we teach students to fail creatively.” Creative failure and the learning that results from it are key elements of design education, and these presentations illustrated beautifully the necessity of access to a good materials collection in this critical learning process.

In the final session, moderated by Hannah Bennett, on future-proofing and the post-digital age, Kim Soss described the potentially productive upheaval of reformulating a school’s curriculum. Patrick Tomlin explained the benefits for architecture faculty of alternative tools for bibliometrics, such as Altmetric, Plum Analytics, and Impact Story, while cautioning that “altmetrics measure attention, not quality.” Rebecca Price outlined a mindset for anticipating change in the library, noting that new knowledge comes from clashing ideas and the neutral space of the library can be productively exploited toward such new knowledge. Daniel Gunnarsson skyped in from Denmark to discuss the highly successful, minimally funded crowdsourcing project that has created arkitekturbilleder.dk, a comprehensive database of Danish architecture. The concepts of intellectual flexibility (in Rebecca Price’s words “being present and nimble”), capitalizing on uniqueness, and taking intelligent risks pervaded these presentations and provided inspiring watchwords to move forward.

After the close of the conference, there were a few more delights of Miami yet to explore before my return to icy New York: the excellent murals of the Wynwood district, the bustling gallery scene of Second Saturday, the new Perez Art Museum Miami, the restored deco glory of South Beach, the early works of Arquitectonica, and the glorious turquoise water at the beach. I was delighted and stimulated by all that I saw and heard at the AASL, and I would have been thrilled to stay for days of more presentations from members. While I have my professional feet wet now through working in a paraprofessional role at Avery Library, my eagerness to really dive into the field is strong and I was thrilled to take in all the information possible at the conference. (My binder of notes, resources, and ideas has expanded greatly.)

I departed the conference with a list of new colleagues and friends, inspiration and knowledge about library initiatives and projects, and an informed sense of optimism about the field. Through my exposure to the experiences of working architecture librarians, I am working toward my goals in a more intelligent, networked manner. I am grateful for the opportunity the AASL Travel Award afforded me in attending this year’s conference, and I know that I will continue to feel grateful in the years to come for the supportive, dynamic, and inspiring community of architecture librarians who comprise the AASL.