

AASL 2014 Annual Conference Report

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Recipient of the 2014 Frances Chen AASL Travel Award

The 2014 annual conference of the Association of Architecture School Librarians was a tremendous opportunity for me in terms of learning, presenting, and networking in an environment of allied interest and pervasive collegiality.

I was excited to see the call for papers issued for this conference and quickly responded to the programmers with the proposal of a session or panel related to materials collections pertaining to art, architecture, and design. Since a large percentage of these types of collections are situated in schools of architecture, I was hopeful that this proposal would be approved as a topic that the group had already identified as important to them or as one on the near horizon for many or some of its members. The proposal was quickly approved as a discussant panel, a presentation format that would allow for more speakers to cover their own collections—their founding, mission, maturation, etc., granting time for discussion among the panelists as well as questions from the audience. Since this is still a relatively new area of collection-building for librarians, materials collections tend to have their own unique profile where differences are just as common as similarities. Because of those factors, this format of more speakers and more discussion would be ideal. I issued a call for speakers and within a very short period heard from four speakers with myself as the fifth. At the time, this process felt completely effortless and, in hindsight, can attest that it was the easiest conference session I have ever organized, which I attribute to the uniquely supportive nature of AASL, an assessment that was only confirmed by the conference experience itself.

The cities of Miami and Miami Beach are among my favorite destinations—yes, who would not love palm trees and the ocean breeze—but much more because of the multicultural diversity of the people and the emphasis the area places upon design. That said, the conference commenced with a tour to Fairchild Tropical Botanic Gardens, specifically to its Butterfly Conservatory. I had visited before, several times, in fact, and chose to walk the expansive grounds and enjoy the landscape, complete with vines, palms, spiky trees, rainforest, cork trees, orchids, etc., including tropical birds and no small number of lizards sunning themselves. It was the perfect re-orientation to being in Miami.

The afternoon was spent touring the University of Miami Libraries, a paradise of a different sort with its state-of-the-art digital and preservation labs. I had never seen so many scanners and high-resolution cameras in one place as the UofM Digital Lab. The Preservation Lab was equally impressive, feeling almost like a chemistry laboratory with the variety and sophistication of equipment and dedicated space required for book material preservation. I left with the impression that the Preservation Lab really was setting a standard with its operations. Special Collections and University Archives presented unique materials from the school, showcasing

interests and pursuits of the institution as well as the immediate area of Coral Gables, which has an interesting history.

I did not attend the ASCA reception on Thursday evening but instead went to dinner with regional colleagues both long-held and new, including the recipient of the AASL travel award last year.

I had not registered for the boat tour on Friday morning but instead chose to make my way to downtown Miami from Miami Beach using public transport. I am glad that I did, as I spent more time exploring downtown Miami that included getting a sense of some of the districts in that area, which also included a fantastic Cuban-style lunch. This may sound like a trivial matter but part of my enjoyment of Miami is its strong and unique ethnic diversity.

The group then convened at The Miami Center for Architecture & Design (MCAD), the targeted location for exhibits and events relating to design and the built environment in Miami. In an historic former post office now renovated, MCAD features community meeting space and educational programs to enhance public appreciation for architecture and design. MCAD will be home to AIA Miami as well as the Visitor's Center for Downtown Miami. While we were there, MCAD featured the exhibit, *Facade: Historic Downtown Miami in Line Drawings*. With Miami's skyline so dominated with modern and contemporary towers, the exhibit showed that Miami has a rich history of buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The group returned to the conference hotel for the Lightning Round Session and Products & Resources Update. The topics included: the library as a client for a site-specific object/system to be used for display of student work; the use of Tumblr to promote architectural special collections to a global audience; the shocking difficulty in acquiring a digital map from an international source; visual aids for research by visual thinkers; and the utilization of geographic information systems (GIS) information and tools to create interfaces to the built environment in two different Florida cities across time, and doing so through unique partnerships between libraries, IT, and civic groups. The Lightning Round felt like poster sessions but more formal and less jumbled as when there are many posters competing for the attention of the visitor. This format, on the other hand, felt perfectly suited for its content, so much so that I felt perfectly engaged even when the topic was not fully something on my horizon but could at least be relatable in parts if not completely. Any one of these presentations could easily be expanded to a more formal presentation at a larger venue.

The Products & Resources Update was extensively presented to the attendees but unfortunately illustrated my tangential relationship with architecture librarianship until this time, as I have firsthand experience with just two of the six vendors. Still, it is always interesting to hear of developments with these types of products and resources and the attentive conversations that occur as a result.

The program on Saturday began with the Material Collections Discussant Panel that I organized and moderated/led. In this format, each presenter spoke between ten and fifteen minutes as a

means for all to discuss their respective collections: mission, origin, acquisitions, organization, automation, etc. All of the librarians on the panel had attended the materials collection symposium held at Rhode Island School of Design in June 2013 and had their collections informed by it in one way or many, including coming into being as a direct outcome. I presented a history of the collection at RISD that now numbers 26,000 items, its mission at a top art school with twenty-two departments, the physical space renovation in summer 2012, and the material taxonomy collaboration and database project with Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. Kasia Leousis at Auburn University is example of one such collection that was created in the months following her attendance at RISD, framing the AU materials collection as being central to satisfying the literacy standards for design accreditation, made accessible through its materials being cataloged into the library OPAC using the MasterFormat taxonomy from the Construction Specification Institute (CSI) and the development of online auxiliary resources. Barbara Ann Opar at Syracuse University presented a comprehensive experience of creating a materials collection from a gift donation and the related challenges and successes, such as using CSI categories for catalog records, authoring a Libguide and Wordpress site, and creating a survey to guide future development. Rebecca Price at University of Michigan discussed the experience of creating a 200-item materials library as a client of Material ConneXion and its physical staging. Last in the lineup, Fiona Anastas as a material specialist at Material ConneXion provided many details and insights from how MC operates as a global materials consultancy, including the jury process of considering materials for addition to its library and subscribers, as well as being a resource for working with universities and colleges to maximize benefit to current students and to be a necessary resource to graduates as they develop their careers. Remaining time was then used for discussion among the speakers in additions to questions from the attendees. Based on feedback from the speakers (including myself) and the audience, I feel this panel was highly informative and achieved its mission. In addition to contributing to the AASL conference as a whole, this panel was the first programming to occur in direct relation to the RISD symposium that had occurred nine months earlier and went very far in illustrating the different instances of materials collections and how a materials community could be created from such a varied group.

The morning continued with the Special Focus Topic session, this year dealing with post-digital matters such as born-digital resources, MOOCs, the cloud, etc. Kim Soss from Illinois Institute of Technology cast an overarching net with her presentation on radical curriculum shifts and how design librarians can best support those processes and the aftermath through the traditional means of engagement and instruction. Patrick Tomlin of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University continued with the post-digital topic of alternative bibliometrics, or "altmetrics," and how these are playing an increasingly important role in measuring the impact of online architecture-related research. Daniel Gunnarsson Skyped in from Denmark to deliver his presentation on expert crowdsourcing of architectural photographic works. Lastly, Rebecca Price provided bookend considerations on future-proofing our libraries to avoid obsolescence and maintain relevancy through the two strategies of being present to sense shifts of organizational demand and need and of possessing the ability to respond to change. Being at an art school and learning the terrain, I found the content of each of these papers as being

inherently relevant and possibly even central to the forces that are at play at RISD and my role as librarian for media-based collections.

That session concluded my experiences at AASL 2014 in Miami as I did not opt in for the architectural walking tour.

I would like to conclude this report by underscoring the level of connectedness and collegiality that were on abundant display (my clumsy use of superlatives cannot be clumsy enough). I will have to think further why this is present at AASL and to lesser degree at larger events. This meeting felt like a retreat for thinking and thoughtful professionals at the fore of their fields to come together to consider the most timely and relevant of topics. I will definitely be paying continued attention to AASL.

On a personal note, I was completely gratified to attend the meeting this year when Janine Henri was awarded the AASL Distinguished Service Award. I met Janine through ARLIS/NA Texas-Mexico upon moving to Houston in 2000 and, while many were friendly and have indeed become close colleagues and friends, Janine was the most forward, the most vocal, and the most irrepensible in her kindness to a stranger. I hated to see her leave Texas for California, but I knew that our career trajectories would always allow room for a continued and supportive connection. I thank the AASL Nominating Committee for conferring this award to Janine.