Regina Romano Reynolds
Kathryn Wesley

Regina Romano Reynolds is a well-known figure in the library/serials/scholarly communication world. She’s been a leader at the US ISSN Center (formerly the National Serials Data Program) since 1982, and has been at its helm since 1992. She has published and presented widely, and the petite, vibrant woman with the mass of dark curly hair is a familiar sight at annual NASIG conferences. Regina has received numerous awards and honors in her career, including the Bowker/Ulrich’s Serials Librarianship Award and NASIG’s Marcia Tuttle International Award. But, truth be told, I was moved to do her profile because of the beautiful photographs she regularly posts and comments about on Facebook.

Regina majored in English and French as an undergraduate, and became interested in serials and librarianship while working as a paraprofessional serials cataloger at Penn State. She says, “The puzzle-like nature of serials appealed to me and the sense of bringing order to the chaos that serials can sometimes provide was very satisfying.” And she had a great mentor at Penn State, Suzanne Pitman (formerly Striedieck), who, Regina says, “… inspired me to think
about the bigger picture questions related to organizing information.” She’d previously worked in a small technical library and as an assistant archivist for the Insurance Company of North America. The latter position also gave Regina a taste of museum work in the company museum dedicated to its historical fire and marine insurance business. With experience in a variety of information management environments, Regina headed to the University of Michigan for her MLS, and then on to work for the Library of Congress.

Perhaps because of that early encouragement to think in big picture terms, Regina has long been involved in helping to develop, revise, and test various standards and best practices. A few examples are ISSN-L, the CONSER standard record, RDA, and PIE-J. I asked her what some of the challenges and rewards of this kind of work are. She responded at some length:

One of the biggest challenges is the slow pace of this work. Standards work is almost no one’s “day job,” so the work can drag on and focus can be lost. PIE-J, which is almost ready for publication, has taken over three years and it’s a best practice, not even a standard. Cindy Hepfer, the library co-chair, has done an incredible job of pushing the group forward but group members, including myself, have so many things on our plates that everything takes longer than we’d like. However, input from a diverse group is crucial for the acceptance of standards and best practices, so arriving at consensus is essential. I think the most speedy project I ever worked on—and a very satisfying one—was the development of the CONSER standard record. Diane Boehr from NLM and I co-chaired the CONSER group. We were put on a fast track and that really helped us keep focused. We developed and tested the record—a test that became a model for the RDA test—in a little over 6 months then it took another year before it was implemented. Even so, that was a short time in library years!

The other work that proceeded quickly for an extensive undertaking was the work of the U.S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee. Beacher Wiggins did a superb job of keeping the committee on track and my colleagues on the committee were fantastic to work with. It was enormously satisfying to play a part in helping to lead our community into a transformed bibliographic future.

Another big challenge is the meeting of minds that’s needed. Revision of the ISSN standard (ISO 3297), a revision that resulted in the linking ISSN, involved a very diverse group and a lot of creative compromise. There were times during that long process (2004 – 2007) when it seemed as if there could be no way to reconcile the needs of communities that wanted a single ISSN to represent all medium versions and those that wanted separate ISSN for each medium version. But, out of that foment the Linking ISSN (ISSN-L) was born.

The rewards of standards work are huge. It is a thrill for me to see the results of the work I’ve been involved in: to enjoy seeing how the CONSER standard record formed the basis for the BIBCO standard record and its whole family of standard records; to see how the evidenced-based decision making we developed for the CONSER standard record, that included testing of actual records by a group of libraries, became a model for the RDA test, to see how ISSN-L is being used in the UK’s Keepers Registry and by NLM and others, and will likely have an even bigger role in the linked data environment.
And PIE-J—wow! It’s been a dream of mine since online e-journals first appeared and we started assigning ISSN to them—this was in the late 1980’s!—to provide publishers with some library guidance. If PIE-J can help researchers, students, and librarians avoid banging their heads against the brick wall they now run into when all content published under earlier titles is placed online under the current title, I will be very happy. I’m a great believer in standards and best practices. Standards are essential for interoperability, and in today’s interconnected world—where everything seems to affect everything else—having standards and best practices saves a lot of frustration and work. If the standards and practices are followed, it will take much less preparatory work, and many fewer work-arounds to make things interoperate, and they will ultimately interoperate more effectively. Time and effort are saved, better outcomes are achieved, a win-win for everyone!

One of Regina’s upcoming standards-related projects is the revision of ISO 8, Documentation—Presentation of Periodicals, which dates from 1977. Because the serials world has changed enormously since then, I asked if that fact will present any special challenges. She responded:

The interesting thing about ISO standards is that, although they come up for review votes on a regular schedule, the outcome of many votes is to maintain the status quo. If a member country votes to revise, they are expected to give their reasons as well as give serious consideration to nominating someone to participate in the working group to do the revision. Unfortunately, my observation is that not every standard that comes up for review really gets a serious look by all those who vote to maintain them. Also, some standards are not widely known or used, which seems to be the case with ISO 8. NISO had a comparable standard, Z39.1 Format and Arrangement of Periodicals that dates from 1943 and is likely the earliest Z39 standard. Z39.1 was voted to be withdrawn in the 1980s rather than revised when there was no interest in revising it. If we think about it, the “format and arrangement” of print serials has been pretty static for a very long time. When we look at a print issue of Le Journal des Scavans, which began in 1665 and is considered the earliest “modern” academic journal, its format and arrangement make it quite recognizable as a journal and seem very much a piece with contemporary print academic journals.

ISO 8 is mainly concerned with the very basic elements of a journal’s make up. It covers such topics as: titles, issues, numbering, layout, pagination, tables of contents and serialists’ favorite topics: merges, splits, and announcing changes. There is only a brief mention of ISSN. The development in journals publishing that has made revision of ISO 8 essential—at least in my opinion—is the development of e-journals and the ever-growing importance of the ISSN. E-journals can be presented in a bewildering variety of ways and those presentations can change at the whim of the publisher or designer. Guidance for publishers and platform providers is essential if researchers, reference librarians, and particularly serials catalogers are to retain their sanity. Of course I’m joking about sanity, but PIE-J has been heartily embraced by reference librarians and serials catalogers. I think that a lot of the basic information in ISO 8 can remain or just be updated —right now it’s a very short standard. PIE-J contains a lot of the missing pieces: guidance about e-journals and ISSN, so I’d hope to start by merging the two documents and then assessing what needs updating and what needs to be added. ISO 8 has a broader scope and is a formal standard so doubtless there will still be a lot of drafting, editing, and negotiation. As an international standard, there will also be worldwide practices and concerns—which can vary considerably—to take into account.

Unfortunately, ISO 8 has run into the same kind of difficulties that plagued Z39.1: the need to gather a working group—this time an international group—that contains representatives from the affected communities, i.e., not just librarians, who are eager to participate, but representatives from publishers, platform providers, journal aggregators, digitizers and the like. I hope the working group does get formed and that we can build on PIE-J so that the key concepts in PIE-J can have the force of a standard and become international.

Meanwhile, things remain interesting back at Regina’s day job. The demand for new ISSN (which she says is both plural and singular) is exploding. Regina says, “Up until a year or two ago, ISSN requests were received
singly or in pairs: one ISSN for a print version and one ISSN for the online version. More recently, ISSN requests are being received in batches that can contain as many as one hundred or even two hundred titles, and ISSN might be needed for both print and online versions." What’s contributing to this trend? One factor is the rapid growth of “open access journals by start-up publishers, some of whom are planning large numbers of journals at once and some of whom may be using the less-than-ethical practices that Jeffrey Beall has described as characteristic of what he calls ‘predatory open access publishers.’ This new phenomenon has challenged the staff of the US ISSN Center and provided a new window on the world of publishing.” Another factor Regina cites is a change in ISSN rules regarding digitized reproductions, e.g., JSTOR titles. These titles are now treated the same as other separate formats and require separate ISSN. Regina says they are currently working to assign ISSN to JSTOR titles without a separate e-ISSN. And there are large-scale repository projects in the works:

New archiving and digitizing projects are another potential source that might require huge numbers of ISSN. The US ISSN Center has been in discussions with the Center for Research Libraries about the possibility of their developing a grant-funded project to have ISSN assigned to titles arising from two CRL repository projects. One project of particular interest for ISSN purposes is their IMLS-funded project to build a newspaper preservation registry since it includes as many as 200,000 newspapers, many of which are part of the Library of Congress’s Chronicling America project. The other potential project concerns titles in CRL’s Print Archive Preservation Registry. These registry projects demonstrated to CRL the crucial need for ISSN. Discussions have also taken place with Peter Burnhill, director of The Keepers Registry, a UK-based registry of “who’s looking after what” e-journals that will include HathiTrust titles, another enormous group of serials that would involve assigning ISSN to both print and online versions. Looking ahead to the ongoing digitization of print serials, the US ISSN Center, and ISSN centers around the world, can anticipate a deluge of titles needing ISSN. How can ISSN centers meet this need?

Regina acknowledges meeting these new demands will be a challenge. Are there plans to automate all or part of the ISSN assignment process? Regina says efforts in this area are afoot:

One strategy that has been used already by some ISSN centers, such as the French and Italian ISSN Centers, is termed “semi-automated ISSN assignment.” It is interesting that you should ask about these large-scale projects because, together with our ProQuest employee, Erik Bergstrom, I’ve been working on a plan to test this semi-automated process at the US ISSN Center. We are fortunate to be part of CONSER because the semi-automated ISSN assignment process relies on the existence of solid metadata records that can be enhanced in a batch mode with ISSN elements, such as a key title derived from the uniform title or cataloging title. We hope to do a pilot project that will add ISSN to 200 CONSER records in the next few months. I think I should first notify the lucky CONSER library of their “guinea pig” status before revealing their name here. I believe that some form of batch processing using existing metadata records and enhanced use of automation is the only way to meet future ISSN needs for large numbers of ISSN. This kind of batch process might co-exist with traditional manual processing—perhaps with partner institutions creating the basic catalog record—for brand new titles and titles for which no good catalog record exists.

In addition to the growing need for large numbers of new ISSN, other big changes are coming down the pipeline. What will the role of ISSN be in the evolving bibliographic environment of linked data and Bibframe? Regina responds:

I’m very excited about the potential of the ISSN in the linked data environment! Linked data relies on identifiers for making links and the ISSN Register (the data base that underlies the ISSN Portal product) will soon contain over 1.7 million ISSN and metadata records. I certainly recognize that number of ISSN is not all that will be needed in the new environment but I’m encouraged by the increasing number of ISSN centers that are undertaking retrospective ISSN assignment projects. I can envision a future time when a single ISSN can be the key to opening up a
world of data. As Tim Berners-Lee has stated, “With linked data, when you have some of it, you can find other, related data.”

So, one ISSN could lead to the entire title history of a journal, including its earlier and later titles, related titles, and so much more. One set of links could lead to other titles by the same publisher; another to other journals on the same subject; yet another to articles within a particular issue of the journal, and from there you could find other articles by authors represented in that issue, other information about the authors, and so on practically infinitely. One ISSN could conceivably lead you to purchase a painting by the author of an article! That might happen if the ISSN led to the journal home page, which was linked to the author’s article which was in turn linked to the personal web page of that author—who is also an artist.

I also see a huge potential for the ISSN in a future environment where we’ve been able to “free the bound elements,” which is the title of a video that I made while I was part of the US RDA Test Coordinating Committee to illustrate visually the power of freeing the metadata elements we now provide bound into our catalog records to combine and re-combine in new ways. The ISSN can help connect these elements when they are in new combinations and track the elements back to the serial to which they belong.

I’ve recently been asked to work with the Bibframe group that is modeling serials. What an exciting challenge because as serialists know, the only thing that’s predictable about serials is that they are unpredictable! Even before my first meeting with the group, one member joked that he was afraid that I would bring up an example that would “break the model.” Although that has not happened so far, the first example I mentioned did take the better part of three hours, including multiple diagrams and revisions of diagrams, to even begin to represent its behavior. I’m also part of the ISSN Review Group, a group that’s looking at ISSN in relation to an object-oriented version of FRBR, FRBR-OO. Did I already say it’s an exciting time to be working with serials and ISSN?

But even the most exciting work isn’t everything. As noted above, despite Regina’s role as a mover and shaker in the world of serials, etc., it was the beautiful photographs she posts on Facebook along with insightful, reflective comments that drew me to profile her. So how did she get into serious photography? And does she have her camera with her at all times? Because I often love the shots she captures on the way to work or just walking around Washington. And, as her Facebook friends learned recently, her first gallery showing is coming up! How exciting is that? Regina explains:

Yes, I’m still pinching myself to make sure I’m not dreaming about the gallery showing—it’s something I never even dreamed of. And, I have to say I owe it all to the Library of Congress joining Flickr in mid-2007. By early 2008 my curiosity had become piqued both about Flickr and about user tagging. I joined Flickr one weekend just to see what it was like and soon became hooked. One of the most appealing aspects of Flickr was that I found it a very supportive community, very welcoming to a newcomer and novice photographer. I have since become good friends with a number of Flickr members, including visiting a woman friend in Biarritz, France last April, a very rewarding experience.

Through Flickr, I was exposed (you could say) to a great variety of photographic styles and techniques. I tried to emulate those approaches, subjects, and styles that I liked and then adapt them to suit myself. I began taking photos almost every day, carrying my camera everywhere I went and even stopping on the way to work to capture a view, a flower, a person walking with an umbrella. Interestingly, I did not even realize my photography had improved after a year or two until I started getting requests to use my photos. For example, one of my photos of Washington’s cherry blossoms was used by the Japanese Embassy to advertise an embassy lecture about how the trees came to DC. Prints of a photo I took of St. Peter’s dome when I visited the Vatican in 2009 were given away—with my “blessing” —as part of a premium to new subscribers. Even so, when I received an invitation to submit photos to the exhibits committee of a local Bethesda, Maryland, gallery as part of their program of mini-shows for emerging artists, I was taken completely by surprise.
I’m not into the technical or equipment aspects of photography so I’m perfectly content with one glorified point and shoot Canon camera that allows me to use manual settings but does not have interchangeable lenses. I also use a low-end photo processing program. I think of my photography as “chasing beauty,” and “creating art without the mess” (I used to dabble in watercolors which can be messy) so I don’t really feel any need to have the latest and greatest cameras or software. In fact, I’ve managed to take some surprisingly satisfying photos with my smart phone.

And what else does Regina do for fun? Her answer involves family and travel, both near and far. She says:

I enjoy following the adventures of my daughter, Elizabeth Reynolds Losin, and her husband, Neil Losin, whether by telephone, visits, or on Facebook. They both received their PhDs in June from UCLA. Elizabeth is a postdoctoral researcher in neuroscience at UC Boulder working in the emerging specialty of cultural neuroscience. I spend many interesting hours serving as a sounding board for her experiments and articles, occasionally providing some input or editing. Neil is using his PhD in evolutionary biology to create science documentaries in exotic locations such as the Rwenzori Mountains of Uganda. Neil and his business partner from Days Edge Productions recently summited and filmed disappearing equatorial glaciers on five 16,000 foot peaks with funding from the first Dos Equis “Stay Thirsty Grant.”

I suppose that compared to those adventures, my love of walking seems pretty tame but it’s something I enjoy a lot, whether in Washington or on my travels around the world. I’m fortunate to be able to walk to work but even on weekends I take off in all directions to admire the Victorian architecture of my Capitol Hill neighborhood (with or without camera in hand), or walk to Washington landmarks and museums. When I travel for ISSN meetings, I take leave after the meeting to just wander around, looking at my surroundings and meeting people. I often don’t even bother to follow what’s in my guidebook but rather enjoy the excitement of discovering what might be around the next corner. I especially love to walk on beaches early in the morning so I’ll take side trips in order to place my feet in some sand that is new to me, for example on my April visit to Biarritz and on a future visit to Bournemouth. That reminds me, I also seem to collect places around the world that begin with B. So far I’ve been to Budapest, Brussels, Bruges, Bangkok, Beijing, Biarritz, Berlin, the Bahamas, and Buenos Aires. I’ll be going to Bournemouth, UK, in April, speaking about PIE-J at UKSG (the federal budget willing), in Buffalo this June for NASIG, and Bucharest in October for the ISSN directors meeting! I guess you could sum this all up by saying that I really enjoy the things that I do—my work included—and feel very fortunate to do so many things that I enjoy.

And I’ll add that those of us who work with serials, ISSN, and other aspects of the bibliographic information environment are fortunate that she does. As are her photographophile Facebook friends!