



Interview with Shannon Keller, 2018 John Merriman Award Winner

Please start by describing your current position and how you've been involved with serials?

I am the Helen Bernstein Librarian for Periodicals and Journals at the New York Public Library. I curate the General Research Division's periodical collection, primarily humanities and social sciences, and coordinate the e-journal collection across NYPL's four research libraries. I also have the opportunity to work with researchers and students when they come to the library to access the serials collection.

What initially led you to NASIG and why you continue to stay involved?

I first learned about NASIG when I worked with Betsy Appleton at George Mason University. She introduced me to the organization and inspired me to attend the conference. My first NASIG conference was in Buffalo in 2013 and I have not missed a NASIG conference since! I continue to stay involved because I value the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues outside my institution on challenges facing our profession. I've also really enjoyed serving as a mentor in the Student Mentoring Program and learning from the next generation of librarians.

What prompted you to apply for the Merriman award?

When I first learned of the Merriman Award I knew I wanted to try and apply for it because it combined the opportunity for travel with meeting librarians and information professionals around the world.

How did you react when you found out that you were the recipient?

I had a very physical reaction. I was at work, and I jumped up out of my chair in excitement. I significantly startled my colleague who sits in the cubicle across the aisle from me!

What were your first impressions of the UKSG conference?

My first impression at the first timer's reception the evening before the conference officially started was that everyone was very friendly and welcoming. Overall UKSG is a fantastic conference. The conference program allowed plenty of opportunity for breaks to meet new people, and the sessions were practical, informative and engaging. The dinner and quiz are great fun. I found myself brainstorming ways to attend future UKSG conferences on the flight back afterward!

How do you think the experience of attending the UKSG will affect your career?

Attending UKSG broadened my perspective about how libraries, and their collections, serve research and scholarship. We serve a very diverse group of patrons at NYPL, the nature of being a public research library, but through attendance at UKSG I realized how great the potential is for libraries to affect change across the globe. Now I take this perspective with me when I am making collection development decisions, or teaching a class of undergraduate students about the resources available to them via research libraries.

How was the UKSG conference different from the NASIG conferences that you've attended?

Most significantly, by number of attendees, UKSG is a bigger conference. I did not find it overwhelming or unnavigable. There were plenty of opportunities to meet people during the breaks, meals, and in-between sessions.

Also, the concurrent sessions are presented more than once, at different days and times. I thought this was great because if there are two sessions at the same time you want to attend, you can go to both.

What was your favorite USKG session and why was it your favorite?

I have to highlight two sessions, because they were insightful and informative for different reasons. I attended the breakout session presented by Vibeke Christensen and Inge-Berete Moltke from the Royal Danish Library about their experience merging the two largest university libraries in Denmark. This session was helpful for me for practical reasons, as NYPL's Science, Industry, and Business Library is moving in 2019, and some of its collection, staff, and services will be integrated into the General Research Division (which will impact my work). It was reassuring to hear that we shared similar roadblocks in these types of situations, and to hear that the transition period is ultimately temporary and eventually this will not be one of the major focuses of my work.

The Lightning Talk Sessions (two sessions, each a half hour in length, six presentations total, each presentation being 10 minutes or less in length), are very similar to the NASIG Snapshot Sessions. I really enjoyed these sessions because they provided a diverse set of topics and presenters.

What are the differences between the two organizations, USKG and NASIG?

My takeaway is the UKSG serves a similar, but different,

set of stakeholders than NASIG. I was surprised at how international the attendees were, not just librarians, information professionals, and vendors from the UK were in attendance. At dinner one evening I sat with attendees from the UK, South Africa, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Qatar. There was a large international publisher and vendor presence as well. The program reflected this broad set of stakeholders and had a wide range of session topics and plenary speakers. I appreciated getting to learn from new and different professionals in this regard.

For those who might be interested in going to UKSG and perhaps applying for the Merriman award, what advice would you give them?

Go for it! The atmosphere is welcoming and diverse, and the program is fantastic. I would highly recommend it!