



Theory, Practice, Experience

Shari Laster

Libraries exist because people make decisions and take actions based on a framework of practice that is informed by theory and experience. Research in the library world can build on any or all of these elements: understanding former and existing practices, identifying potential new models for our work, engaging with conceptual models from other disciplines and arenas, or articulating a vision for the future that matches the values we hold today.

Our government information community has a great deal of potential to connect our concerns and experience with key emerging threads in other disciplinary clusters within the areas of library, archival, and museum studies, as well as the myriad academic and professional disciplines and practices that rely on government information as primary sources. And as we build, support, and encourage emerging models for distributed collection and preservation strategies for government information, we can learn about work underway in archives, nonprofits, and academic communities to bridge the gaps between government information dissemination and its collection for long-term use.

A new practice that I hope will become a tradition within GODORT is the facilitation of conversation that engages with research. Based on a concept proposed by Catherine McGovern, Government Information Librarian at the University of Ottawa, GODORT now hosts a forum for informal discussion about research related to government information.

Starting with the 2017 ALA Midwinter Meeting, and continuing at the 2017 ALA Annual Conference, these Research Round Robin meetings have been engaging and inspiring. These sessions are open to any conference attendees with an interest in research and government information. We begin by going around to describe our current projects and any ideas we have percolating about future areas of research. Following this initial overview, conversation opens up around shared interests that have emerged, and on advice and insight from one researcher to another.

Some attendees are researching and writing about libraries and library practice, while others are immersed in projects that delve into the documentary history of government activity and function. While we have many experienced researchers in our midst, including social scientists, historians, and policy analysts, we also have many who are new to scholarly research and publishing. These meetings provide an opportunity to connect with others who share interests in topics and methodologies, and to get advice on scope, process, and intended outcomes for any kind of project.

In the coming months I hope we can build out space for our community to grow outside of conferences. Check out <http://godort.libguides.com/research> for resources, and get in touch with me if you are ready to take on an active role in building and supporting this emerging community. I plan to continue this program throughout 2018 in the hopes that it will bring people together in a supportive environment, from which we can enrich our shared understanding of our work.