Research Section Spotlight

Reflections on the 2018 MLA Annual Meeting

Elizabeth Kellermeyer, MSLS
Biomedical Research Librarian
National Jewish Health
Denver, CO
kellermeyerl@njhealth.org

I was honored to receive the travel award from the Research Section to help fund my attendance at the 2018 MLA Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. While a lot of information and connections are available online, attending this conference in person is a reminder of the value in community. There are many intangible benefits to being able to meet new people and connect over shared values and exciting ideas.

I was very strongly affected by the themes of diversity, inclusion, and social justice that emerged from the conference. Atlanta, the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr. and home of the Center for Civil and Human Rights, was a fitting setting for these ideas that ran as an undercurrent through many sessions, presentations, and discussions at the conference. While a general commitment to diversity is nothing groundbreaking, there was more urgency to the messaging this year—less of a friendly reminder to be welcoming and more of a call to action.

In particular, the theme was prominent in this year's Janet Doe Lecture, presented by Elaine R. Martin, "Social Justice and the Medical Librarian." In her riveting talk, Elaine laid out an argument for medical librarianship developing a new professional orientation, one focused on recognizing societal injustices and their effect on access to information and healthcare and to be inspired to advocate on behalf of the patrons we serve.

Beverly Murphy gave her first address as the incoming President. "In the 120th year of the association I am proud and honored to be the first African American president of the Medical Library Association," she stated. "I want to thank you….for giving me this honor and opportunity and in doing so, taking a positive stance, considering the world that we are living in today." She emphasized that she wanted her time as president to be an extended conversation with all members, drawing strength from the collective expertise and knowledge of our members.

Both speakers extolled the importance of education and in being thoughtful and purposeful about reaching out to the next generation of medical librarians to ensure we build a community that is as diverse as the ones we serve. Their messages are powerful and left me both humbled and inspired. Moving forward, matters of diversity and inclusion can be big motivators for research. What challenges and disparities are we witness to and how can we bring these topics to the forefront of discussion? Research that brings them

Research Section Spotlight

into focus or that uses them as a backdrop against which we can understand other issues will be crucial in defining our role in librarianship in the coming years.

The conference was an excellent place to collect information from disparate places about a particular topic. For instance, I have been learning more about the systematic review process and I was able to enhance my knowledge by taking a CE course on identifying clinical trials for systematic reviews, attending a sponsored Lunch and Learn about how the Joanna Briggs Institute conducts systematic reviews, and comparing features of systematic review software by talking directly to vendors and seeing product demonstrations. While presenting my poster, "Covidence vs. Rayyan: A Comparison of Systematic Review Tools," I had the opportunity to talk directly with other librarians with similar interests and questions, generating a lot of discussion and opportunities for continued collaboration.
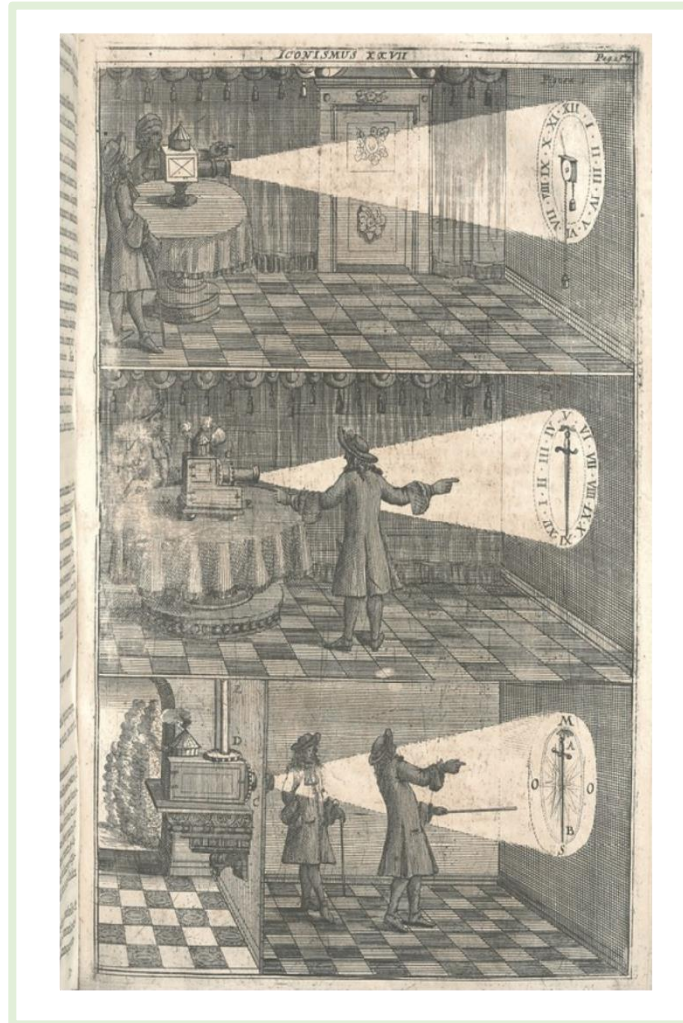
It was also a chance to meet with groups and people that I otherwise primarily know through online interactions. This included new committees I will serve on, an introduction to the Rising Stars program, and section meetings. I collaborated on my first research project this past year, "Measuring Impostor Phenomenon among Health Sciences Librarians," led by Jill Barr-Walker. Our group presented initial findings at a program session and it was great to meet with my co-authors in person and to showcase our work to colleagues. One of the conference highlights for me was getting to hear about the research undertaken by medical librarians across the country. I am planning on doing more research in the upcoming year, and was accepted into the MLA Research and Training Institute to further that goal. The conference offered a first introduction to this year's cohort during a session by Project Director Susan Lessick, who provided an overview and answered questions.

Of course, some of the most prominent discussions this year focused on the proposed MLA restructuring. The Communities Strategic Goal Task Force presented their proposed model of MLA architecture, including the dissolution of Sections and SIGS as they currently exist. They are reimagining interests being organized around what are tentatively called "Affinity Groups" and "Domains of Practice" and discontinuing section dues. I was able to attend several forums—a general one, and two held at Section meetings—where representatives from the task force fielded questions and engaged in discussion with members. It was very beneficial to attend these in-person, as the general atmosphere was starkly different between groups, and conversations about how the restructuring would work continued among members throughout the conference. This was an excellent opportunity for me to be able to hear diverse perspectives and gain an understanding about some of the history of MLA and how the impending changes will affect different groups.

Research Section Spotlight

I am grateful for the opportunity to attend this year's annual conference; what I learned will help shape my research goals and inform my future interactions with MLA and my colleagues.

National Library of Medicine (US). Digital Collections [Internet]. Bethesda (MD): Three vignettes demonstrating light projection apparatus. In *Oculus artificialis teledioptricus*, 1685-86.
Available from:
http://resource.nlm.nih.gov/101435223