



RESEARCH AND RAILS 2017 CONFERENCE

B HUYA NARAYAN of UTS, Sydney, reports on the important work of ALIA's Research Advisory Committee (RAC) and last year's RAILS conference.

ALIA's Research Advisory Committee (RAC) advises ALIA on its research directions and priorities, and it also assesses the annual ALIA Research Grant Award. The RAC meets once a month for an hour via teleconference. In 2017, ALIA constituted a new committee after co-chairs Dr Suzana Sukovic and Dr Diana Hodge finished their tenure in 2016. After a call to academics and practitioners to apply to serve on the committee, we now have a very diverse range of members.

RAC members believe that practitioner-academic collaboration and practitioner research can improve evidence-based practice, provide practice-based evidence to researchers and educators, and promote practice-based research among academics. In recent years, RAC has focused on bringing academics and practitioners together to do research, and it has also provided research workshops

Dr Bhuva Narayan

at every ALIA conference, most recently at the ALIA National 2016 Conference and ALIA Information Online 2017 Conference.

In November, several RAC members came together in Adelaide for the Research Applications in Information and Library Studies (RAILS) conference and conducted a panel discussion around the main issues that hinder and enable collaboration between academics and practitioners. The RAILS conference is an annual event that showcases research in library and information science in Australasia. This year, the RAC was very pleased to note that there were as many practitioner delegates as academics, and more than a dozen postgraduate and doctoral students in LIS, who all presented excellent research papers. The conference began with an outstanding keynote by Liz Walkley Hall, who presented her Five Laws of Practitioner Research in Libraries, a reformulation of S R Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science.

They are as follows:

1. Research is for usefulness
2. Every question its researcher
3. Every researcher their question
4. Enhance the experience of the library user
5. Library research is a growing organism.

The keynote was followed by a lively discussion on enabling practitioners in LIS to engage with research. One of the ideas that emerged was that libraries could invite an LIS academic as a researcher-in-residence to work closely with practitioners on LIS research while mentoring them on research and also collaborating with them on research projects. Such collaboration needs to have clear and specific goals and also an advance agreement about co-authorship on any research outputs.

Highlights of the conference included papers on mentoring, finding collaborators, obtaining buy-in from management, dealing with research ethics applications, working with and researching diverse communities, and also learning from failures. Papers included not only research around libraries but also library education, information management, knowledge management, archives and records management, digital literacies, user experience, publishing, and even one on antiquarian booksellers.

The RAC panel discussion led to clarification on the role of the RAC and it also generated new ideas for action. Here's a summary:


ALIA Members interested in finding a collaborator or mentor for research purposes, can write to the RAC at (relevance@alia.org.au) and we will help you find someone in your area of interest, whether you are an academic looking for a practitioner collaborator, or a practitioner looking for an academic collaborator.

Members of the RAC:

Dr Bhuva Narayan, UTS (co-chair); Fiona Salisbury, La Trobe University (co-chair); Dr Diana Hodge, University of South Australia; Dr Tina Du, University of South Australia; Dr Ying Hsang-Liu, CSU; Dr Katherine Howard, RMIT; Dr Elham Abdi, QUT; Dr Hamid Jamali, CSU; Dr Huan Vo Tran, RMIT; Dr Nicole Johnston, Edith Cowan University; Marisa Dellaca, Ashurst; Anja Tait, Northern Territory Government; Liz Walkley Hall, Flinders University; Terri Pamment, retired from Adelaide University; Janice van de Velde, State Library Victoria; Lyndall Osborne, AIATSIS (ALIA Board Liaison on the RAC); and Janine Schmidt, library consultant.

If you would like to apply for the ALIA Research Grant Award, whose deadline is in June each year, make sure to begin the process at least five or six months in advance; the award is available only to projects that have both a practitioner and an academic on the team, so this can sometimes take longer to arrange because of the different work patterns of academics and practitioners.

For practitioners who don't have access to a research ethics committee in their institutions, please contact the RAC as the committee can help and advise on matters of research ethics.

The RAC will continue to conduct research workshops at ALIA conferences, and we also invite practitioners and researchers to speak for 10–15 minutes (via teleconference) to the RAC during its monthly meetings to share research or raise issues around research. If you're interested in doing so, please contact (bhuva.narayan@uts.edu.au). 

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