UKSG
Harrogate, April 2017

NASIG
Indianapolis, June 2017

The UK Serials Group (UKSG) Conference is a major event in the UK conference calendar that attracts a mix of delegates from librarians to publishers and intermediaries. The conference aims to encourage collaboration and networking whilst improving awareness of ongoing developments and good practice in scholarly communication. NASIG (formerly the North American Serials Interest Group, Inc.), the sister organisation of UKSG, aims to promote communication and continuing education about serials, electronic resources, and the broader issues of scholarly communication.

The John Merriman Joint NASIG/UKSG Award, sponsored by Taylor and Francis, offers UKSG members the chance to attend the NASIG Conference in the United States, whilst also attending UKSG. The award is named in honour of John Merriman, in recognition of his work in founding both UKSG and NASIG.

To apply for the John Merriman award, applicants complete a written piece on an assigned topic, and must secure a reference from their line manager in support of their application. I was fortunate enough to be awarded the 2017 John Merriman prize. I attended UKSG, held in Harrogate in April and NASIG, held in Indianapolis in June. Both events provided up to date information on the current issues facing the community and gave me the opportunity to learn about best practice in other institutions.

This year was the 40th Annual UKSG Conference. The conference consists of keynote talks, lightening sessions and breakout sessions. There are also many opportunities to visit publisher stands in the exhibition hall and network with other delegates including at the conference dinner.

I work in the Open Access Team at Queen's University Belfast so the sessions focused on open access and the future of scholarly communication were of particular interest to me. For example, Stuart Lawson (Birkbeck, University of London) spoke about the popularity of http://scihub.org as a means of circumventing paywalls. Unfortunately, as Stuart highlighted, piracy is not the same thing as achieving open access to research by transforming current publication practices because pirated articles are not licensed under Creative Commons. They may be free to read but are not free to reuse in ways that can be beneficial to the research community.

Whilst considerable progress has been made in the UK towards open access, there is still much work to be done to achieve the end goal of all research being free and reusable. Open Access 2020 is one European initiative that

aims to reach this point by re-directing the existing subscription spend into open access funds so that subscription journals are converted to open access. The initiative has been embraced by more than 560 institutions and an OA2020 roadmap has been prepared in principle by the Max Planck Digital Library.

UKSG highlighted that much can be done at a local level to increase institutional awareness of, and propensity towards, open access publication. Both the University of Kent and University of Sheffield have taken steps towards supporting open access research through service partnerships. In the University of Kent an Office for Scholarly Communications has been created, comprised of Library and Research Office staff. At the University of Sheffield, whilst no formal team has been established, local partnerships between the Open Access Team, Subject Librarians, the Research Office and IT have been formed. Both approaches have yielded positive results and these models have been adopted by other UK institutions.

Overall UKSG was extremely beneficial for me. I found the talks interesting and I was able to connect with UK colleagues that I communicate with on JISC mailing lists but do not often have the opportunity to meet face to face. Many of the breakout sessions are available on SlideShare for those who are interested.

The attendance at UKSG of Anna Creech, the then NASIG President, piqued my interest for what was to come at NASIG. The theme for the NASIG conference was **Racing to the Crossroads**, a reference to the Indy 500 race event for which Indianapolis is famous. Similar to UKSG, the conference was comprised of vision sessions and smaller breakout sessions that offered the chance for group discussion. The social events were well attended- especially the dinner at the Dallara IndyCar Factory which included a ride in an IndyCar, if you were brave enough!

I attended many informative sessions at NASIG. Of particular interest to me was the session delivered by Heather Crozier (Ohio Northern University) on Open Educational Resources (OERs). OERs are teaching and learning resources that are available either in the public domain, or under a license that allows reuse. Heather noted that OERs, especially open textbooks, offer the potential to reduce course costs for students and this is particularly compelling at a time when tuition fees and textbook costs are prohibitive. OERS are not currently being promoted at my institution but I hope that this can be explored in the future.

One of the vision sessions was delivered by April Hathcock, Scholarly Communications Librarian at NYU. She questioned efforts made thus far to democratise information and diversify a library community that is undeniably homogenous. She drew on the conference theme of "racing to the crossroads" to question the value of arriving at the intersection if we all look the same and have taken the same route there. She emphasised that we should be conscious that open access is about more than just putting material online; it's about making information truly open and accessible. For example she encouraged following the FAIR data principles promoted by FORCE 11.

I am grateful to Taylor and Francis for awarding me the chance to attend UKSG and NASIG. Both conferences were very well organised and I made many valuable contacts for the future. I would encourage others to apply for the John Merriman Award. It is an excellent opportunity to attend two highly regarded conferences and to immerse yourself in the current issues affecting us.

Eimear Evans, Institutional Repository Officer, Queen's University Belfast.

Winner of John Merriman Joint NASIG/UKSG Award, sponsored by Taylor and Francis