

Pebbles, rocks, and milestones

The librarian as an intellectual

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When a pebble is dropped into a calm pond, the ripple effect is quite distinctly visible in the form of concentric circles – that is, in calm waters. Substance-abuse librarians and information specialists are not just the dependable rocks who anchor research in tradition; we also play a dynamic part in shaping the field, whether visible or not – dropping pebbles into the calm ponds, murky waters, and vast oceans of addiction studies for over forty years.

The 2018 Annual Conference entitled “Never Neutral: Resistance, Persistence, Insistence” held jointly with the Association of Mental Health Librarians on May 1-4 in Berkeley, California marked an important milestone in the life of SALIS as an organization: this was the 40th conference when SALIS professionals gathered to celebrate, exchange ideas, and strengthen relationships.

Combining two small organizations to hold a joint conference was a great initiative and rewarding in so many ways. Gaining insight into problems of colleagues and institutions not only helps us find out that we are not alone but, eventually, might bring us closer to solutions. We have no choice but to recognize that we are not working in our silos any more. A professional organization has the potential to add value for its members along with their host organizations and means so much more than simply helping each other with occasional article requests or answering tough reference questions.

As is unfortunately the case each year, many SALIS members missed the opportunity to travel to California and participate in person. For those grappling with the feeling of being left out in the era of constant connectedness, the current issue of the Substance Abuse

Library and Information Studies aims to provide a glimpse of the scholarly activities at the conference, complementing the colorful reports in SALIS News and slides on the SALIS website. The metaphor of concentric circles passably describes the ultimate goal of the presentations, that is, to show how the work of information professionals and/or policy makers intersects with “what can only be described as an assault on facts, privacy, and access to information resources.” Small pebbles into a cloudy ocean, words uttered in the conference room now have their chance to expand into the next circle, as the SALIS Journal is proud to announce its 5th volume with the publication from the 40th conference. Another milestone, with some pearls rather than just pebbles.

In the center of these concentric circles, there lies the eternal question: what do librarians bring to the table? Call me old school, but I still strongly believe in librarianship as an intellectual activity first and foremost. Amidst admirable databases and search platforms, innovative discovery services, state-of-the-art communication tools, and adorable kitty cats, we shouldn't lose sight of the values that a librarian can add to the mix of research, instruction, and treatment in the field. The ability to find the right information at the right time, securing and providing access to information in a non-judgmental manner, serving and relating to a variety of users at their levels, and teaching skills indispensable for evaluating information are just a few on my list. The focus, however, should be on our intellectual curiosity and on passing it on to the next generations. After all, this curiosity comes from the inquisitive mind, which is destined to search for information by seeking knowledge and hunting down facts, no matter where they lead us.

Any gathering on addiction-related topics in 2018 cannot avoid touching on the opioid crisis of our times. A broader historical context

highlights the shift from punitive prohibition to harm reduction driven by the drug policy reform movement. In his talk “Drug Policy Reform in a Time of Trump” invited presenter and keynote speaker Craig Reinerman from the University of California, Santa Cruz “traces the progress of the drug policy reform movement and explores whether the current epidemic of opioid overdose deaths combined with the rise of an authoritarian regime will breathe new life into punitive prohibition.” With a bold and explicitly polemic stand, the transcript of his presentation commemorates an important moment in the history of SALIS conferences, following a tradition of practicing free speech and taking sides as a scholar.

Who else other than librarians, who possess and advocate the skill of critical thinking, would be more suitable to navigate among fake news? Christine Goodair's review entitled Fake of false news: How can you spot it? provides a thorough overview of the topic including its history, interpretations, and various approaches to the phenomenon in a geographically and politically divided user environment. Anyone who teaches information literacy at any level can benefit tremendously from this paper, including the extensive bibliography with direct links. Remarkable is the conclusion that highlights the relevance of librarians, hoping that the resources and training on information literacy libraries provide will be recognized and utilized.

Another article from a historical perspective, Isabelle Michot's “The history of the documentation on addiction in France”, points to the same important role librarians and libraries need to assume and maintain with regards to all resources available on the Internet. Documenting the history of Toxibase, the French network on addiction, the author walks us through the notorious stages of unsustainable national or local endeavors in addiction science. With its content selected

and indexed by experts, this database used to provide indispensable services for 30 years before its final closure in 2007. It is somewhat comforting to hear that the preserved historic collection, although not updated, will be available for on-site use.

Written by Chad Dubeau, a brief report from Canada entitled "Reporting on addiction trends using an established current awareness service" provides valuable insight into tasks librarians routinely perform, such as monitoring and tracking trends. Demonstrating with data and results from a current awareness service called Addiction News Daily, the author ventures into reflections with his intellectual approach of performing mundane duties. Fulfilling the increased needs to monitor trends in the field of substance use and information, the reports and results show a great potential for addiction professionals for the benefit of the field.

Pebbles and milestones; the list could go on and on, drawing upon previous SALIS conferences, SALIS News, social media, and listserv activities. Impact is not necessarily directly proportional to the effort, or not always measurable. Andrea Mitchell has been providing the list of new books tirelessly for decades, providing the personal touch in a time when vendor databases are available for convenient selection and acquisition. The impact on addiction collections is not quantifiable with a download count like the DIGS project. And, as all librarians will confirm, download counts merely indicate interest and won't prove impact. Regardless, SALIS members will be delighted to read updates, written by Sheila Lacroix, Andrea L. Mitchell, and Barbara S. Weiner, on the SALIS Collection in the Internet Archive, aka the DIGS project, which, celebrating its fifth years, another milestone, had reached its target of 1,800 books by the end of 2017. As an example, Jellinek's *Disease concept of*

alcoholism ("the most frequently cited and least read book in the field" according to William White) had been borrowed nearly 300 times and there is a waiting list.

The issue starts with a polemic topic covered by a renowned addiction scholar, so it is appropriate to end it with another controversial subject presented by one of our own. Taking the idea of resistance to a new level, Meg Brunner's article, "Let's Get Critical: Critical Librarianship as the Way Forward", introduces the core concept of critical librarianship to addiction librarians for the first time. With their popular approach to keep our profession current, relevant, and capable to meet certain needs of our times, critical librarians provide a fresh approach to traditional areas of librarianship, including collections, information literacy, publishing models, peer review, and more. The article offers examples of how the concept can be translated into mental health and substance use disorder librarianship.

The 2018 conference presentations show many similarities with the topics from previous years. In addition to sharing best practices and case studies in the field from the past year, strengthening our ties, redefining and solidifying our roles are recurring patterns. Promoting the latest technologies and innovative methods for collecting, preserving, and delivering information and providing perspectives from the past via historical alcohol research seem to be the two key roles these presentations carve out for librarians and information specialists in the field. No doubt that preserving the intellectual component of librarianship requires the audacity of stepping out of our comfort zone whether via participating in systematic reviews or in other research studies, assisting with instructional goals or consulting on treatment modalities.

If we revisit the history of SALIS conferences, documented for posterity in the first issue of the SALIS Journal, and look at conference and paper titles from the first meeting to the present, not only can we see the milestones, but also some of the circles the tiny little pebbles created. It is refreshing to read about all the activities our fellow librarians have been doing all over the world. This includes some fantastic resources and curated lists that are promoted outside SALIS in the field. A great example is the third edition of *Publishing Addictions Science*, edited by long-time SALIS supporter Thomas F. Babor, who consulted substance abuse librarians for three chapters. Used by our constituents all over the world, the book has been downloaded over 13,000 times, as of March 2019 – a statistic which both makes us proud to be part of this important endeavor and indicates the ongoing relevance of addiction librarians.

Just a few more small pebbles thrown in were the updated history of E.M. Jellinek's life and contributions to alcohol science, introduced at the SALIS conference in 2014, and later published in more details in the inaugural volume of the SALIS Journal. Now part of the Wikipedia entry on Jellinek (Wikipedia) and more, this pearl has become one of the biggest promotional items for SALIS and its librarians, cited as the 36th Annual SALIS Conference and linked to our journal, the *Substance Abuse Library and Information Studies*.

Among the achievements should be mentioned our contributions to knocking down predatory publishing that affects our field gravely. Inviting Jeffrey Beall to the 2016 conference in Denver (and the subsequent interview with him published in SALIS News snowballed within and outside SALIS) resulted in the Rutgers Predatory Publishing LibGuide. Consulted over 2,500 times and linked from all over the world, this research guide is a great example of the sort of

intellectual activities that makes us remain relevant for the field.

Where are we going? The future is bleak and unpredictable. Libraries are shutting down, and collections are endangered by ignorance, incompetence, or unawareness of what they are worth. What we librarians can do is preserve our persistence, our dedication to the profession, our passion to serve those who need it the most, and the intellectual curiosity we bring to the table. An important lesson from the past was taught to us by the five pillars of alcohol studies, with the dissemination of information as one of the original five most important components of the discipline as formulated at Yale in the 1940s. This alone should entitle us to claim our role as information professionals, on equal footing with researchers and clinicians. Library and Information Science has grown up to measure up with the other disciplines that take part in addiction studies.

I am looking forward to brainstorming with colleagues about our potential to remain relevant and meaningful players in the field. The SALIS conferences, SALIS news, listserv, and the SALIS journal have been making waves in our small pond and in the larger disciplinary ocean. Discovering that our articles were downloaded in China or Hungary from an open depository also indicates our importance, disseminating cutting-edge research across geographical barriers. On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to tip my hat to all those who tirelessly put that effort into creating content, adding value, not only justifying our profession, but also moving it forward by keeping it relevant.

Dizzy from the latest buzzwords, we should keep in mind that we have been making a difference with our intellectual curiosity and open mind. Some of us are good at connecting seemingly disconnected pieces of information, others have fantastic people skills. Identifying

potential needs before they pop up as needs also keeps us relevant in our jobs. All in all, while we are working hard to hang on to our archives and our expertise in this brave new world let's preserve our best selves as librarians and remain open-minded,

resourceful thinkers. Let's remain well-read and well-informed intellectual librarians, with integrity and pride, all together.

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