

2022 AERA Conference Report

ACRL Liaison to American Educational Research Association
AERA Annual Meeting Report
May 2022

As the liaison between ACRL and the American Educational Research Association, I have been taking steps to revive the previous liaison relationship between the AERA and ACRL by attending the AERA Annual Meeting April 21-26, 2022 in San Diego. The last liaison, Ann Dutton Ewbank, concluded her work almost ten years ago, so there has been a need to understand how our respective organizations and professional landscapes have shifted, particularly in light of the impact of the global pandemic on teaching, learning, and information access, the focus on the conference theme of “Cultivating Equitable Education Systems for the 21st Century.” A majority of my liaison activities took place around the AERA Annual Meeting.

As we renew our liaison relationship, I have considered what opportunities are the best fit in line with ACRL's Plan for Excellence goals. AERA is made up of 12 major divisions focusing on different aspects of educational research, with additional association-wide standing committees whose work overlaps with areas of interest to ACRL, such as book and journal publishing, and social justice committees. There are 155 additional Special Interest Groups (SIGs) within the association, where many members find a professional home focusing on specific educational methods, theories, or populations. Promising areas for liaison connection include AERA's Division J: Postsecondary Education division, as well as certain SIGs that relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, open scholarly publishing, and literacies, three core components of the ACRL Plan for Excellence.

In advance of the 2022 AERA Annual Meeting, I reached out via ALA Connect groups for the ACRL Instruction Section and Education, Behavior and Sciences Section (EBSS) to conduct a small environmental scan of librarians who attend or have interest in participating in AERA activities. From the environmental scan, I learned that academic library colleagues are interested in topics such as pedagogy, high impact teaching and learning practices, supporting faculty in learning effective pedagogies and tools, assessment, quantitative research skills, research related to specific student populations, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and social justice. And librarian colleagues believe that librarians can offer skills related to literature reviews, systematic reviews and evidence syntheses. Responses indicated interest in the creation of an academic library-related SIG, as well as interest in closer ties between ACRL and AERA and support structures for academic librarians working in, or interested in, educational research.

At the Annual Meeting in April 2022, I attended meetings and sessions that focused on initiatives of interest to ACRL related to working with underserved populations in education, and expanding ways of knowing, including through the use of innovative research methods. While many sessions touched on topics of interest or adjacent to academic libraries, such as universal design for learning, Open Educational Resources, and online learning pedagogies for educational access and equity, there were relatively few sessions featuring academic library presentations.

There were three academic library-focused papers, “Academic Library Power Dynamics as Experienced Through the Pandemic Response,” from the roundtable session, “Transforming Educational Systems: Views from Campus Units,” sponsored by the Special Interest Group for Qualitative Research. A second academic library-focused paper, “Black Student Experience and Perception in Libraries at Predominantly White Institutions” was featured in the roundtable “A Critical Examination of Racial Identity Development in Higher Education Spaces” sponsored by the Special Interest Group “Writing and Literacies.” A third academic library focused session, “Designing an Accessible User Experience Study for Undergraduate Students With Disabilities” was situated in an academic library and sponsored by the Special Interest Group “Inclusion and Accessibility in Educational Assessment.” Digital libraries were briefly referenced in “Chilean Students’ Experience of Online Learning During the COVID-19 Sanitary Crisis.” Open Scholarship was discussed in the session, “The Open Scholarship Knowledge Base: An Open Science Platform,” sponsored by the Special Interest Group for Research Use.

Sessions focusing on public libraries included “Exploring Active Learning Preferences of Youth and Subject Matter Experts in Library-Based Youth STEM Programming.” An additional poster, “Library Making Goes Home: Adaptations and Lessons Learned,” focused on public libraries during the COVID pandemic. Three roundtable sessions focused on school library contexts, “Text Censorship in Catholic Schools: Framing of Consensus and Resistance Arguments” and another, “Computational Thinking in Elementary School Libraries,” as well as “Elementary School Library Collections: A Content Analysis of Science Trade Books.”

I noted that the wide array of SIGs that overlap with topics related to academic libraries and the lack of a library or information-science focused SIG makes it challenging to identify academic library-related sessions in the conference program.

To engage colleagues around the Annual Meeting, I invited librarians who attended the in-person AERA to a lunch gathering at the conference for information sharing and professional networking, and arranged a virtual gathering for those attending the conference virtually this year. These activities allowed me to better understand the interests and needs of our librarian colleagues who attend the meeting, as well as areas where librarians are already actively engaged within AERA. The move from ACRL-affiliated listservs to ALA Connect for communication did impact the numbers of attendees at both the in-person and virtual events. One colleague met me for lunch at the in-person conference, and six others joined a virtual discussion on May 9, 2022, with additional colleagues expressing interest but unable to attend the day and time.

From these conversations, it became clear that librarian colleagues are interested in the creation of a SIG, perhaps focused on Information Science or Academic Libraries as an umbrella group that could include a range of issues of interest to librarians. Given the complexity of AERA as an association, there is also a need for support among librarians wanting to submit conference proposals in how best to navigate the proposal process and which division or SIG is best suited for presenting library and information science-related work. There could also be value in conversations with Division J: Postsecondary Education leaders about the value and relevance of academic-library related conference sessions at future AERA annual meetings. Finally, the group expects that these topics and conversations are of interest to many more colleagues than were able to attend the virtual discussion or access the survey, and that additional support structures for communication and networking would be beneficial. I hope these findings will help inform future liaison work between AERA and ACRL.

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