Conference Report by Treshani Perera, Music and Fine Arts Cataloging Librarian, University of Kentucky Libraries

I would like to thank the University of Notre Dame Diversity Committee for sponsoring the 2018 OVGTSL Diversity Scholarship. As a Diversity Scholarship Awardee, I attended my first OVGTSL annual conference a few weeks ago. I am not new to the Ohio Valley region, but as a newcomer to librarianship in the region I was very much looking forward to connecting with other cataloging professionals during the 2018 annual conference. I’ve been in my current position since January 2018 and was thrilled to find an annual regional conference entirely dedicated to technical services work and professionals. Indeed, my excitement and eagerness to attend the 2018 annual conference led to a very positive conference experience!

I got to attend a variety of sessions focusing on cataloging workflows, project management, leadership, and hiring and training in addition to social events throughout the conference. I enjoyed starting my conference experience with Karen Estlund’s opening keynote, inviting technical services professionals to be creative and innovative in our daily work. One of the key takeaways was becoming comfortable with “acceptable loss” during data migrations, procedural changes, personnel changes, and resource reductions, all of which are perhaps challenges faced by library professionals today. The discussion following the keynote continued to reveal other challenges in library technical services, including automation, specialist cataloging, lack of cataloging training in formal education, reenvisioning our work in the 21st century, and user experience as part of ILS/catalog design. These are questions that I had not pondered on as a new technical services librarian, and this opening keynote and discussion provided a good mental model for the remainder of my conference experience.

My favorite session was the one titled “Ethical Concerns in Cataloging,” a conversation and discussion led by Jennifer Liss, Thomas Whittaker, and Andrea Morrison from Indiana University. The topics highlighted in this session mirror current discussions in the greater cataloging and metadata profession, and session attendee experiences relating to cataloger’s judgement created a lively and engaging conversation. I was somewhat surprised to hear about various local practices and biases based on type of institution (e.g. public vs. academic), and how discovery is facilitated with limited LCSH for controversial topics. Another session I really enjoyed continued to explore cataloger’s judgment, this time beyond bibliographic cataloging into project management and student roles in time-sensitive cataloging projects. The session titled “Decisions, Decisions,” by Patty Falk from Bowling Green State University, took session attendees on a journey of modified institutional practices that take place with personnel changes, utilizing student labor to process cataloging backlogs, and creating templates and training documentation that work for multiple projects.

I attended a couple of sessions where I did not know what to expect but sensed that there may be a takeaway or two from each session. The first one was titled “Surviving the Tidal Wave of Change,” by training manager Scott Siler of University of Notre Dame, and the session provided an overview of how to prepare employees through change as an effective leader. The three takeaways from the session were understanding one’s role as a change agent, creating the process for change, and tools and skills
for managing change. The second session was titled “Welcome Aboard. Now Get to Work,” by Craig Boman of Miami University Libraries and Cara Mia Calabrese of University of Wisconsin Madison. Both presenters talked about their path to transitioning to current position, lessons learned along the way, and offering some insight to session attendees on how to prepare for a new professional in your area/department. Key takeaways here include good documentation for workflows, status reports from predecessor for project work, a fair and thoughtful onboarding process, training and professional development opportunities to perform job duties, and writing realistic and accurate job descriptions to avoid surprises for new employees. Tuesday’s sessions continued to be as engaging and lively as the day before. I attended two sessions involving an archivist and a cataloger as presenters, and got to learn about how their collaborations and skills led to creatively processing collections, envisioning a digital presence for archival collections, and facing and overcoming challenges and supporting each other through various stages of each project.

Overall, my first OVGTSL conference turned out to be a memorable and informative experience. I am very much looking forward to welcoming everyone to Lexington, KY next year when the University of Kentucky hosts the 2019 annual conference. The 2018 conference exceeded my expectations, and I look forward to seeing some familiar faces in Lexington next May.