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## Don's Conference Notes-Celebrating Serendipity and Collaboration; Looking Back to Look Forward-The 2017 NFAIS Miles Conrad Lecture

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# Don's Conference Notes

by **Donald T. Hawkins** (Freelance Conference Blogger and Editor) <dthawkins@verizon.net>

## Celebrating Serendipity and Collaboration: Looking Back to Look Forward — The 2017 NFAIS Miles Conrad Lecture

The 2017 meeting of NFAIS (the National Federation of Advanced Information Services) was held in Alexandria, VA on February 26-28. Its theme was “The Big Pivot: Re-Engineering Scholarly Communication.” As usual, one of the meeting highlights was the presentation of the **Miles Conrad Memorial Award** and its accompanying lecture. Given in honor of the late **G. Miles Conrad**, one of the founders of NFAIS, the award is NFAIS’s highest honor. The list of recipients is a stellar collection of leaders in the information industry, and this year’s award winner, **Judith C. Russell**, is a highly worthy recipient. Currently Dean of Libraries at the **University of Florida (UF)**, **Russell** was formerly Superintendent of Documents at the Government Publishing Office, and has worked in a variety of special libraries and government agencies.<sup>1</sup> She is also the author of the Foreword to *Public Knowledge, Access and Benefits* (**Miriam A. Drake** and **Donald T. Hawkins**, *Information Today*, 2016).

In her lecture, **Russell** traced some of the highlights of her career, including the principles that have governed her. She said that she has had an exhilarating and challenging career and noted that although technology has changed the way organizations operate, a common goal of libraries is to provide essential and reliable information to users at the point of need. If she were called on to choose a single word to describe her career path, it would be “serendipity,” and when she has changed jobs it has been because of the new challenges offered. One lesson she mentioned is that because of its content and services, a research library is an essential tool for its users, and is as valuable as any piece of equipment. Although technology has changed dramatically, the issues and importance of access to information have remained constant.

After working for a number of commercial organizations in the information industry, **Russell** joined the Government Printing Office (now the Government Publishing Office) and managed the transition of the Federal Depository Library Program. She recounted an amusing incident when she was at the White House demonstrating the first showing of the WhiteHouse.gov site, and the projector failed. She had to sit with her legs dangling over the edge of the stage and use her own laptop to connect to the backup projector. She decided that there could never be a more awkward and uncomfortable presentation (and learned what I call “Murphy’s Law of Live Demonstrations”: the odds of the technology failing at a critical point are extremely high!).

**Russell** was the second librarian and first woman to serve as Superintendent of Documents. She led the transition from print distribution (formerly 95%) to nearly total electronic access. One of her challenges was to foster acceptance by government documents librarians of digital access without print access — a fundamental change in the organization’s culture.

**Russell** also became active in the **National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS)**, and she urges everyone interested in establishing information policies to read the Preamble to its document “Principles of Public Information.”<sup>2</sup>

Some time after joining UF, **Russell** learned that the university President had asked his search committee to find a non-traditional candidate who was not boring. She emphasized how delighted she is with her present job and how grateful she is that UF was willing to hire someone who had not worked in an academic library since graduating from college but who has been deeply involved in the massive changes in the publishing industry.



**Judith C. Russell**

At UF, 87% of its materials budget now goes to electronic resources, and many of its large print collections have been moved to off-site storage. The space they occupied has been devoted to students. Recently, 26,000 square feet that was formerly the science library was transformed into group study rooms and 700 seats and over 1,400 power outlets were installed. Attendance at that library quickly jumped from less than 1 million users a year to 1.6 million, with little impact on usage of other UF libraries.



**NFAIS President Chris Burghardt Presents the Miles Conrad Award Plaque to Judith Russell. (Photo by Marcie Granahan.)**

**UF’s Smathers Library** was the first research library to become a member of NFAIS. It has recently established the *LibraryPress@UF*, an imprint of the **UF Press**, so the library has become a publisher as well as a research library, which has led to a collaboration between the library and **Elsevier**<sup>3</sup> and a project to identify UF faculty research publications (over 8,000 journal articles annually, including over 1,100 in **Elsevier** journals) without placing a significant burden on the library staff. The collaboration has resulted in these benefits to both the library and **Elsevier**:

- Collecting information without burden on **UF** faculty publishing in **Elsevier** journals.
- Facilitating the university’s oversight of compliance with public access mandates.
- Achieving cost savings and efficiencies for the libraries and **UF** through automation.
- Testing and refining **Elsevier** APIs to provide smooth scalability of the process with future academic collaborators.
- Improving understanding of publisher and academic library perspectives and addressing constraints inherent in these roles.

The library’s institutional repository now has metadata for over 30,000 articles dating back to 1949 by **UF** authors published in **Elsevier** journals, and the scope of the project continues to be expanded.

For the future, **Russell** sees that in any project such as that between **UF** and **Elsevier**, the most important goal is facilitating compliance. Although some of the participants are motivated by profits and others deliver no-fee services, they are not adversaries but colleagues who benefit from collaboration and learn from one another. Every collaboration has its risks, and not all of them will succeed or be sustainable; nevertheless, they take us much farther than we can go alone. We must be able to identify the risks, convince others to participate, and have the patience to persevere. Successful collaborations build trust, surprise and delight, and the rewards are great.

**Russell** concluded by urging both publishers and librarians to share their ideas and seek opportunities to collaborate with each other. Librarians especially have limited resources, but they should participate in those efforts and benefit from them. She is optimistic that the future holds more changes that will inspire and delight us, and it will challenge us to provide better quality information and experiences to our users. 🍀

**Donald T. Hawkins** is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for **Against the Grain**, he blogs the **Computers in Libraries and Internet Librarian** conferences for **Information Today, Inc. (ITI)** and maintains the **Conference Calendar** on the **ITI Website** (<http://www.infoday.com/calendar.asp>). He is the

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