

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars, an alliance of scholars working independently outside the formal academic environment, held their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference on June 18-21, 2015, at Yale University, New Haven, CT. The theme was “Traditions and Transitions: Independent Scholars and the Digital Landscape”.

The conference was attended by NCIS members and affiliates; in addition, numerous members of the public attended the Keynote Address.

The meeting brought together scholars and researchers from Europe as well as all parts of the US, and benefitted from the expertise of archivists, curators, and experts in other fields such as information technology, personal branding, social media, translation and editing. A book table was open throughout the conference with publications by NCIS members available for purchase.

Accommodations were made available in a quadrangle dormitory on the Yale campus and at nearby private hotels. The concurrent New Haven International Festival of Arts and Ideas provided a stimulating backdrop of performances, events and terrific food for after-meeting socializing.

All sessions were sequential, that is, none were concurrent and so attendees had the important and rewarding opportunity to fully experience the range of works and issues presented. This is of particular importance for a society of independent scholars: while some members had previously “met” via electronic media such as Skype and of course email, this was the first time for most to get to know each other in person, become familiar with their current work, and build a flesh-and-blood community of independent scholars. The conference theme of needing and using digital resources for scholarship was a prominent aspect of most presentations. As unsolicited post-conference feedback attests, these two aspects were particularly helpful and even inspiring components of the conference.

The conference started June 18<sup>th</sup> with a reception for the presenters, followed on June 19<sup>th</sup> by the Welcome and Opening Remarks (Mona Berman, President of NCIS; CEO Mona Berman Fine Arts) and Keynote Address. Over the two and a half days of the conference, proffered papers in four excellent Paper Sessions covered a diverse range of topics in the Arts and Humanities; subjects of general relevance to attendees were handled in the two Issues Discussions; and the four Issues Forums and the How-To Workshops featured practical information and guidance of considerable significance for today’s independent scholar.

This summary first provides an overview of the Keynote Address, then the proffered Paper Sessions, the Issues Forums, the How-To Workshops, and concludes with the Issues Discussions.

### **Keynote Address:**

Mona Berman (President, NCIS) introduced the Keynote Speaker, Mr. Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of PBS and NBC News and current Vice Chair and co-founder of “Digital Promise” [the National Center for Research in Advanced Information and Digital Technologies].

Reflecting the conference theme, Mr. Grossman's address was entitled "A Personal Journey Through the New Digital Landscape (without Footnotes)". In an entertaining but provocative style, he spoke from the perspective that the new technology should be used to serve the public good. Reminiscing about his work during the past six decades, he focused on both the benefits and the challenges deriving from the new digital information age in a democratic society. Of particular relevance to the independent scholar working in an environment of owned media and limited access for scholarly purposes was his emphasis on the need for NCIS, as an organization, to fight for public access to digital information particularly if it was generated from work paid for with public money. In closing, Mr. Grossman discussed the evolving role of the public as a fourth Estate using digital media to keeping an eye on government, and the need for continuous education as to the rules of decency and responsibility in this public forum.

**Proffered Paper Sessions:**

NOTE: All presenters are encouraged to submit their work for publication in *The Independent Scholar*, the online journal of the NCIS.

Revisiting History I and II:

Two sessions focused specifically on changes ("transitions") in understanding historical phenomena ("traditions"), and the use of digital resources to effect this new understanding.

Session I, held on June 19th, was chaired by Amanda Haste (Vice President, NCIS).

(a) Serena Newman (Independent, NCIS) presented "They Came Here to Fish: Early Massachusetts Fishermen in a Puritan Society". She discussed her use of old court, merchant and church files, including newly digitized resources, to research the place of fishermen in the contentious society of Puritan Massachusetts. She concluded that in contrast to the old stereotypes, fishermen appear not to have been specifically marginalized or more prone than other elements of society to run afoul of important social mores.

(b) Boria Sax (Independent, NCIS) discussed growing up as the son of a father actively engaged as a Soviet spy at the Manhattan Project, in "Experience Versus History: A Story Told Through Gaps in a File from the FBI". He recounted not knowing of this activity while a child, and as an adult trying to reconcile childhood memories of his father with the frustratingly limited unredacted data he has been able to obtain from the FBI. He particularly mused on the ways in which such severely limited access to official documents affects the ability to know truth and to place events in historical and personal contexts.

(c) Patricia Klindienst (Independent, NCIS) held the audience in rapt attention with "No One Remembers Alone: Digital Archives and the Restoration of Lost Histories". She presented successes and continuing challenges in using extraordinary digital resources along with personal interviews and other standard sources, to reconstruct and then write for the first time the profound migration narrative of a large Russian Jewish

family as it spread across western Asia, Europe and North America during the turmoils of the 20th century.

Session II, held on June 20th, was chaired by the very dynamic Marcus Freed (Independent, NCIS).

(a) Lori Stokes (Independent, NCIS) in “Codes of Law and Conscience in Digital Research” discussed the importance of digital resources to independent scholars who generally do not have access to travel budgets, as well as concerns and prejudices encountered when needing to rely on digitized rather than truly primary materials. As a specific example she recounted her experiences in researching the founding decades of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

(b) Toni Vogel Carey (Independent, NCIS) focused more on information gleaned than on process. In “Town-Gown Collaboration: The Example of Eighteenth-Century Scotland” she explored the dynamic interactions between university (“gown”) and independent (“town”) intellectuals in Scotland of the Enlightenment, and the significance of this unique collaboration for higher education and intellectualism not just locally but internationally, continuing to the present day. “Mutual improvement” became the guiding policy for scholars, aspirants and professionals alike, and independent scholars, including Benjamin Franklin, contributed many of the most enduring advances in knowledge at the time.

(c) Piri Halasz (Independent, NCIS) in “Transition from Mystery into History: How the Internet Revived My Faith in ‘Swinging London’” recounted her involvement with journalism of the 1960’s covering popular culture of the day, journalistic controversies that ensued over the intervening decades and their impacts upon current historical perceptions of a time many of us recall with some nostalgia. Her entertaining presentation emphasized the importance and sometimes surprises in using digital resources as she resolved conflicting perceptions both of the period and of the journalism of the day.

#### Traditions in Transition:

Three diverse topics were presented in a session held June 19<sup>th</sup>, chaired by Joan Cunningham (Board member, NCIS).

(a) Marla Harris (Independent, NCIS) outlined parallels in themes and even main characters of crime fiction from 17<sup>th</sup> century English tragedy to Scandinavian crime film of the present day. In “Reading and Watching Nordic Noir in the Shadow of Jacobean Tragedy: Generic Continuity and Change”, she provided examples from specific plays, films and books highlighted the continuing but dysfunctional Western attitudes to social issues revolving around sexuality and roles of women, as reflected in the crime genre of the times.

(b) Valerie Abrahamsen (Independent, NCIS) took the session in a completely different direction with “Death, the Ultimate Transition: Current Research on the Afterlife in Dialogue with Christian Traditions”. This presentation explored what has constituted

evidence in various times and places for the afterlife, a traditional concept of personal transition and central to basic questions of suffering and the very meaning of life.

(c) Fuambai Sia Ahmadu (Independent, NCIS) presented “Traditions and Transitions: Changes in Perceptions of Female Circumcision among African Girls and Women in the US”. In a comprehensive anthropological and also personal account of this practice, she provided a refreshingly explanatory review, not without controversy, of its place within some African traditions and even modern Western society, and the strength women of traditional societies derive from the associated initiation into adulthood and resulting membership in the society of women.

#### Art and Heritage:

The final (and equally excellent) paper session was held on June 20<sup>th</sup>, chaired by Boria Sax (Independent, NCIS).

(a) Barbara Ellertson (Independent, NCIS) and Janet Seiz (Independent, NCIS) co-presented “The Painted Page: Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art”. They summarized their work-in-progress investigating the iconography of books in digital copies of Renaissance art from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. Preliminary results of this massive and original undertaking promise a thorough and illuminating examination of the uses and significances of books spanning a period when they were only starting to become commonplace in society.

(b) Lea DeLong (Independent, NCIS) presented “An Anonymous Victim of War: Christian Petersen’s ‘Unknown Prisoner’”, discussing this intriguing work in the dual contexts of memorials that celebrate war and Petersen’s unsuccessful efforts to bring public attention, through a monument, to the costs and tragedies of war and in particular torture. She concluded this thoughtful presentation by relating the theme to current attitudes in American society towards war.

(c) Rena Tobey (Independent, NCIS) presented “Modern Girls by the Modern Artists: Sofonisba Anguissola and John Singer Sargent”. She focused on two paintings, one portraying the roles of women and girls in the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (by the former, a female painter) and the other in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (by the latter, a male painter). Her detailed explorations of techniques and content employed by each of these two very different yet highly perceptive artists demonstrated the similarities of subject matter yet profound differences in mood and presentation by these two surprisingly modern artists.

#### **Issues Forums:**

*NOTE: Handouts, websites and email addresses for several Forum presenters are available to NCIS members on the NCIS website.*

### I. Digital Tools Explored and Applied:

Chaired by Samantha Boardman (Independent, NCIS) on June 19<sup>th</sup>, this session illustrated how the latest technologies and digital research tools (DiRT) can be effectively applied to scholarly analysis. Panelists were faculty or graduate students from universities in the New Haven area, discussing and demonstrating their use of such tools in multi-disciplinary projects.

(a) Samatha Boardman (Independent, NCIS) explained in “Think Outside the Talks: Oral History, Digital Humanities and Mapping the Landscape of Urban Renewal” the ways in which Photogrammar (a web-based platform for organizing, searching and visualizing digitized photographs) and other public domain software and Internet resources can be utilized to conduct high-quality scholarship. She described digitization and indexing of images and audio files for research and preservation, and GIS mapping to integrate this archival data with contemporary geospatial information to study and present social change and conditions.

(b) Ben Bogardus (Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT) in “Do-It Yourself Radio Stories and Audio Presentations” described using free resources to create and share professional-sounding audio presentations. Software demonstrated included the Audacity app for editing soundclips and Soundcloud.com to share the finished product.

(c) Holly Rushmeier (Yale University, New Haven, CT) in “Using Visual Tools to Analyze Images and Text in Large Collections” presented examples of her work using software to enable arts-based large-scale visual analyses of digitized images and text in medieval manuscripts, and in the Vogue magazine archive.

(d) Lauren Tilton (Yale University, New Haven, CT) further demonstrated Photogrammar and tools that made its development possible, in her presentation “Digital Mapping of Photographs from World War II and the Great Depression”.

### II. Digital Libraries and Archives:

Presented June 19<sup>th</sup> and chaired by Isabelle Flemming (Secretary, NCIS), the panel was comprised of three experts in library sciences and computers. They discussed practical aspects of using digital technologies in the library environment and commercially-produced DiRT in general.

(a) Nancy Florio (Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT; and Geier Library Berkshire School, Sheffield, MA) presented “Free and Open-Access: The creation of Digital Memorials and Cultural Archives”. She stressed that scholarship is based upon both information and the exchange of ideas, and that access to each is important not only for the scholar but also for the public. She emphasized that, although digital media are efficient for archiving and quick access, paper is actually the most durable format for posterity of some types of archival materials: digital archives are subject to bit rot (slow and random spontaneous deterioration of digital bits) and require periodic checking and repair. As practical guidance, she advised the use of metadata in archived collections for rapid retrieval and analysis. Major digital archives available for use include the Digital Public Library of America (10 million items, from the Library of

Congress, Smithsonian and other public-funded sources), Europeana (over 29 million items) and Google Cultural Institute, among others.

(b) Robert Flemming (Independent, NCIS) in “Virtual Libraries and the Impact of Digital Technologies” emphasized the huge investments being made in developing digital virtual realities and associated hardware. These technologies will enable virtual “visits” to distant places such as major galleries and museums and even other planets, but input is needed now by likely end-users such as independent scholars and librarians to help ensure their availability and appropriate design for our needs.

(c) Isabelle Flemming (Independent, NCIS) presented “Understanding the Basics of Intellectual Property Rights and Copyright Issues for the Independent Scholar”. She reviewed these two concerns in depth, and discussed how the independent scholar can retain rights to her/his publications, even if only partial, under current law. She outlined methods for copyrighting one’s own work, and when it is appropriate to register a work with the Library of Congress. The concept of Fair Use was described, as well as what constitutes Public Domain, the meaning of Open Access journals (with brief reference to pirate journals), Creative Commons, Share-A-License, orphan works, and what is considered public in the National Archives.

### III. Social and Public Media:

Given on June 20<sup>th</sup> and chaired by Phillip Simon, this session enthusiastically recommended full use of social and public media by the independent scholar as a means to become visible online and then to control that online presence for greater professional success. The presenters were all experts in the creative and productive use of these media in industry and in academia.

(a) Robert Kalm (Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT) in “Writing for Interactive Media” stressed the its usefulness in helping writers reach and then receive feedback from the intended audience, as a twist on “peer-review”. He recommended using Twitter (forces the development of a concise and precise writing style!) to catch the eye of the target audience and build an accessible online record of the essence of one’s scholarly work, leading the online reader to that work.

(b) Susan Katz (Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT) provided highly practical advice for designing web pages to best visual effect. In “Get Read - Layout Design and Simple SEO [Search Engine Optimization] for Web Writing” she emphasized that most readers of online and downloaded pages scan the text, rather than read it word-for-word. As such, the page needs to be highly scannable, quite different from the “wall of words” of professional scholarly paper-based publications. She stressed the importance of making good use of open space, bite-sized paragraphs, highlighting, hyperlinks and related digital speed bumps embedded in flowing text, plus subheadings, ordered and unordered lists, pull quotes and any other visual devices which will maximize finding relevant material quickly and unambiguously. Images should be used liberally, with titles, and with alternate text relating directly to the title of the page or post. She also emphasized designing for search engine optimization (SEO) by putting key words (particularly proper nouns where appropriate) in headings, subheadings and tags.

Links to, or otherwise embedded, multi-media such as photo galleries, videos and sound all provide interest as well as additional ways for web material to be found via search engines.

(c) Eleanor Hong (LE Brands Digital Media, LLC and Quinnipiac University, Hamden CT) and Lloyd Sexton (LE Brands Digital Media, LLC) gave a polished joint presentation entitled “Digital Branding 101: Get Discovered Through Social Media”. They discussed developing and utilizing a consistent strategy for self-branding. This includes finding and exploiting the platform that fits the target audience using social media and online communities, with a goal of self-publishing (you keep control and ownership of your work but have to find your readers). They outlined some of the mechanics for maximizing search engine and social media attention, such as the page-design methods presented by Susan Katz (above) and using videos and images to create a distinctive brand: the more your pages are clicked-on, the higher you rise in the search algorithms and you then become the “expert”. Because search engines do stick to English-language sources, they recommended consulting with a translator to ensure using key words that can be picked up in different languages. The importance of using hashtags (e.g. #independentscholar) was stressed, as well as creating videos for YouTube to attract followers and disseminate ideas. Using Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other on-line networked communities to bring attention to a scholarly book or other in-depth content was strongly encouraged. The presentation ended with a powerful video by Erik Qualman, entitled “Social Media Revolution” (can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jottDMuLesU>).

(d) Phillip Simon (Quinnipiac University School of Communications, Hamden CT) in “Learning and Using Social Media: Evolution or Revolution” discussed changes and enduring similarities in pedagogy over the ages, and explained that using digital social media for learning is really just a new twist on old ideas.

Audience discussion included concerns that many older scholars have with many of these digital platforms, including lack of facility with them and problems finding time to learn and then use them.

#### IV. Digital Humanities: Managing, Teaching and Learning:

This final session on digital resources and the independent scholar was held June 20<sup>th</sup>, chaired Trip Kirkpatrick. It focused on new DiRT and DH (Digital Humanities) tools.

(a) Trip Kirkpatrick (Yale University Center for Teaching and Learning, New Haven, CT) presented “Digital Humanities on a Shoestring”, a brief but very useful overview of digital tools most helpful for scholarship in the Digital Humanities. Recognizing that facility requires a significant time investment, he commented that many digital tools actually come from the sciences and are now being used effectively by scholars in Humanities; the tools discussed are listed on the NCIS website. As had presenters in the previous Issues Forum, he stressed the importance of participating in online virtual communities for success, and emphasized the role of engaging in the Q&A components of these communities. Ultimately, the “independent” scholar cannot function

completely independently, but must engage in a variety of partnerships in order to be seen.

(b) Will Hochman (Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT) in “Administering The Writing Studio, a Free, Open Source Learning Management System” described this tool, which receives 5 million hits per year. It is hosted by Colorado State University (<http://writing.colostate.edu>) but available as a secure site to anyone working to build a book or other literary work. He stressed it as a secure and very usable alternative to GoogleDocs.

(c) Ruth Barnes (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT) presented “From Cabinets of Curiosity to the Virtual Museum: The Education of a Curator”. She described her involvement in an exhibition of art from Indonesia and New Guinea, focusing on development and utilization of an app designed for the iPad to greatly enhance the visitor’s experience. This tool provided context to each element of the exhibit not normally available in the standard museum display.

(d) Terri McNichol (Independent, NCIS) in “Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) for Independent Scholars” described her very rewarding experience with the MOOC “ChinaX”, a guided tour by Harvard sinologists, covering 6,000 years of Chinese history, philosophy, arts, culture, politics and economics. MOOCs are available on a huge variety of STEM (e.g. MIT) and Humanities (e.g. Harvard) topics, and can be used to tremendous advantage by the independent scholar.

Audience discussion included concerns about privacy and control of documents in Google-based platforms (e.g. GoogleDocs). Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) was suggested as another secure alternative with the advantage of being a clearinghouse for scholarly books and articles with a great editorial review team. Concern was raised as to how to keep up with all the digital traffic and just Twittering one’s own comments, in addition to the work one already does, illustrating that most attendees at this session were from a different generation than the presenters and have challenges and barriers to using social media effectively in the realms of independent scholarship.

### **How-To Workshops for Independent Scholars:**

Held on June 21<sup>st</sup> and chaired by Amanda Haste (Vice President, NCIS), this session addressed practical aspects of writing and presenting.

(a) Leslie Arthur (Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT) in “How to Write an Effective Abstract” used her experience as a book editor to discuss the do’s and don’ts of writing an abstract, recognizing that an abstract submitted for a conference presentation may not be as detailed in specific scholarly content as an abstract of a published work.

(b) Leslie Arthur (Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT) and Amanda Haste (Independent, NCIS) in “How to Respond to Questions about Your Presentation” together discussed the common terrors and necessary strategies for handling questions in a professional manner and productively obtaining feedback for the presented work. It was agreed that the question period can be the most important element of a scholarly



presentation, initiating dialogue with other scholars and leading to new insights which may drive the work forward.

(c) Amanda Haste (Independent, NCIS) gave a very informative, practical and entertaining presentation entitled “How Not to Lose It in Translation”. Based on her own work as a professional academic translator, she discussed accurate translation of one’s own work and the nuanced translation of source materials. This included pros and cons of machine translation, including unexpected (and oft humorous) errors from online translation websites. Paid translation services can be obtained from professional agencies and freelancers, and free advice and services are available online from professional linguists and translators (see her handout on the NCIS website). Amanda Haste discussed how to handle foreign language quotations from source materials, careful and clear use of foreign words to express specific concepts lacking English equivalents, and how and when to explain subtleties of meaning via a “gloss”. This topic was particularly relevant to attendees, as most had familiarity or proficiency in at least one language in addition to English and some experience with the challenges of nuanced translation in scholarly work.

(d) Marcus Freed (Independent, NCIS) in “How to Produce a Book from Your Research” continued the social media themes of Issues Forums as he discussed how to write and finance a self-published work. Drawing on personal experiences, presented with self-deprecating humor, he showed how he has grown an audience for his work using social media and how he uses crowdfunding campaigns (essentially prepayment for a copy of the finished work) to finance the development and writing phases of his own books. He recommended specific software and online resources for steps including capturing and organizing research notes, organizing one’s writing, incorporating photos, managing posted discussions of materials which may be incorporated into the final product, creating a book launch event, and selling the completed book (see his handout on the NCIS website for specifics).

*NOTE: Handouts, websites and email addresses for workshop presenters are available to NCIS members on the NCIS website.*

### **Issues Discussions:**

#### STEM and the Humanities: Crossing Over the Bridge:

This session, held on June 19<sup>th</sup> and chaired by Joan Cunningham (Board member, NCIS), just broke the surface of what could be a particularly relevant topic as NCIS expands membership to include more scholars from STEM disciplines. Discussants were Victoria Breting-Garcia (Independent, NCIS) who gave a personal account of her experience bridging the two domains, Alan Johnson (Independent, NCIS) who provided an extensive list of digital resources useful for trans-disciplinary scholarship, Janet Wasserman (Independent, NCIS) and Joan Cunningham (Independent, NCIS). Participation from the audience was enthusiastic and engaged attendees from math, science and medicine as well as the humanities.

Future of Adjuncts:

The conference ended on June 21<sup>st</sup> with a panel of independent scholars currently serving as Adjuncts at four very different academic institutions. It was chaired by Chris Rzonca (Independent, NCIS),

Yvonne Groseil (Hunter College - CUNY, Manhattan, NY) in “A Future for Adjuncts: From Plight to Fight” placed the Adjunct in the larger sociological context of growing inequalities and emergence of a “precariat” (derived from “proletariat” and reflecting the economic insecurity and short-term jobs of a changing work force) as well as the increasing trend towards online education in which a professor/instructor no longer needs to be physically present.

The session continued with discussion by Susan Breitzer (Independent, NCIS), Mary Kolisnyk (Empire State College - SUNY, Saratoga Springs, NY), Heidi Miller (Middlesex Community College, Bedford MA) and Chris Rzonca (New York University, New York, NY and ACT-UAW) who outlined their experiences and efforts – with and without the help of established unions – to improve the respect, pay and security of Adjuncts at specific institutions.

This excellent session generated spirited discussion of the under-appreciated, often-frustrating and yet expanding position of Adjunct as universities and colleges follow the trend promoted by administrators of minimizing full-time, tenure track faculty and maximizing the use of part-time, poorly paid independent contractors to teach undergrads and graduate students alike. The net result for many scholars, relegated solely to teaching positions, is exclusion from institutional academia and the legitimacy it offers. A consensus emerged, that having so many non-tenure track and Adjunct faculty is NOT a model that supports the university goals of education (or research), as the model of poorly-supported and financially insecure faculty cannot and does not lead to good student outcomes. The corporatization of education has led to the administrative practice of treating students as “customers” and faculty as just employees. Concrete suggestions were presented for working with “stakeholders” (graduate student and post-doc organizations, parents, tax-payers, progressive social movements including educators, university/college Boards of Trustees) and established labor unions to effect change. Progressive educational organizations mentioned included the AAUP (American Association of University Professors), Modern Languages Association, American Anthropologist Association, New Faculty Majority and CoCAL (Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor). The spirit of the session was summarized in the expression “It is more fun to be a troublemaker than a victim”, a clear call to action.

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All in all, this was a very successful conference. Several attendees remarked how glad they were to have attended and to have met other independent scholars working in similar and in disparate fields. Unsolicited feedback from delegates has included the following comments:

“What an extraordinary meeting [...] We are wordlessly grateful: the gathering far exceeded our hopes, and for me, personally, launched my second career as a researcher/independent scholar.”

“...a successful conference where we met lots of interesting other indies and heard fascinating papers. There was a good vibe to it all and the contacts we made and good exchanges were icing on the cake.”

“...an extraordinary conference - it was excellently curated & your good cheer & friendly enthusiasm made it a special weekend.”

Respectfully submitted July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015 by Joan Cunningham (Board member, NCIS).