May 2016

2016 State of the Visual Resources Association

Elaine Paul

University of Colorado Boulder, elaine.paul@colorado.edu

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Abstract

During the 2016 Annual Business Meeting of the Visual Resources Association in Seattle, Washington, the president highlighted the accomplishments and challenges of the Association in a state of the association presentation. This article provides the transcript.

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

Elaine Paul is the Director of Visual Resources with the University of Colorado Boulder's Department of Art and Art History. She received her graduate degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her experience and interests include metadata coordination and curation of digital collections, image research instruction and outreach, and support for digital scholarship and research data management in the arts and humanities.

VRA's Annual Business Meeting offers a time to reflect on our Association's activities over the past year, and consider how to sustain our relevance as the future unfolds. We are now overdue for our next strategic plan, having produced our last in 2009. The Executive Board has decided that VRA needs more data before proceeding with an assessment of our opportunities and challenges and a comprehensive set of recommendations to address them. Last year the Board convened a Professional Status Task Force to investigate various current professional issues within the fields represented by our organization. This task force has been working hard to create, disseminate, and now analyze data from a survey of our members and nonmembers in the profession. The task force will produce a report early this summer, from which the 2017 Strategic Plan Task Force can proceed with its charge.

We will hear from Treasurer Allan Kohl next about VRA's financial matters, but I do want to mention membership numbers, which are key to our annual operating budget. These numbers comprise a moving target at this time of year, but so far we are in good shape compared to recent years, with an overall increase since 2011. The Membership Committee has been concentrating on outreach, and the Board has continued to consider the benefits that attract and retain members. We have concluded that VRA's educational offerings throughout the year are a logical place to focus our attention. We are in the midst of forming an Online Learning Task Force, which will make recommendations relating to VRA's pursuit of online professional development offerings. In addition to supporting our members' needs, this initiative will also provide new membership benefits, help attract new members, potentially offer a source of Association revenue, and further establish VRA as an authority on a variety of digital content issues.

Relating to membership is the issue of engagement with and service to the Association. As a volunteer organization, we need your assistance with our work. VRA's impressive accomplishments, which are too many to enumerate here, can only occur when individuals are willing to contribute their time toward our organizational operations and professional engagement activities. The community we share and the standards we create all turn upon the efforts of people like you. If you have not yet found a way to become involved with VRA, please take a look at the descriptions of our committees' work on our website, and contact committee chairs to learn about how you can contribute. Whether you are a student, a new professional, a mid-career professional, or a retiree, your perspective is valuable and it is never too early or too late to join in. VRA service is a great way to build your professional network, gain valuable knowledge and experience, and enhance your CV or resume.

Speaking of new professionals, I am pleased to report that our Visual Resources Emerging Professionals and Students group, or VREPS, remains an active presence within VRA. Last year they established a list of mentors willing to assist others with their resumes; hosted a virtual conference with the student and new professionals group of ARLIS/NA; updated the list of available internships in visual resources; and posted job announcements and other news on their blog. At both this and last year's conferences, they have hosted meetings and social events, as well as sessions and workshops.

Our relationship with the VRA Foundation, a separate but closely allied 501 (c) 3 organization, has been maturing in recent years. A significant development in 2015 was the convening of a VRAF/VRA Joint Task Force on Development and Fundraising, charged with

identifying, planning, and implementing a portfolio of development initiatives for both VRA and VRAF. Its final report, which is imminent, will help harmonize the fundraising activities of our two organizations, and contribute to a clearer picture of our complementary missions.

VRA continues to collaborate with and reach out to other organizations. I am particularly happy to be delivering this talk at this joint conference with ARLIS/NA. I invite you to join ARLIS/NA President Kristen Regina and me at the Presidents' Session tomorrow from 5:00pm - 6:30pm as we engage our speakers and attendees in a conference capstone discussion about the digital realm, core competencies, opportunities beyond our organizations, and collaborative possibilities that ARLIS/NA and VRA can explore as we rise to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

In addition to our collaboration with ARLIS/NA, VRA has been focusing on communications and ties with other affiliated and related organizations. These efforts are too numerous to list in their entirety here, but I will now share a few highlights.

This year VRA is hosting the first recipient of the VRA + DLF Cross-Pollinator Travel Grant. This falls under a reciprocal program with DLF, which also brought a VRA member to the October 2015 Digital Library Federation Forum in Vancouver, BC.

VRA's Slide and Transitional Media Task Force has recently drafted a survey for VRA members as preliminary step towards greater collaboration with the Society of Architectural Historians, specifically with their Color Film Emergency Project. The task force hopes this upcoming survey will identify interested VRA member institutions that might be willing to accept at-risk slide collections.

Last year the College Art Association asked VRA to endorse its *Code of Best Practices for Fair Use in the Visual Arts*. VRA's Intellectual Property Rights Committee corresponded with ARLIS/NA's Public Policy Committee about our two organizations' responses to the Code, and worked with the VRA Executive Board to draft a statement and letter of endorsement for CAA's leadership.

Our other professional engagement committees continue their excellent work in the areas of standards, tools, and education. The Data Standards Committee has been working on creating and improving embedded metadata plugins and tools, and has joined the VRA Core Oversight Committee to create a Cataloging and Metadata Survey. The Core Oversight Committee has created an online form for submitting and registering VRA Core tools and implementations; developed a mapping from Dublin to VRA Core; and completed an RDF ontology and XSLT stylesheet to convert Core 4 XML to RDF. Our Education Committee has continued to provide up-to-date educational resources on the VRA website, and facilitated the submission of seven successful proposals at this year's conference.

Special thanks go to the *VRA Bulletin* Content, Production, and Copy Editors for their outstanding work, as well as the authors who contributed content to the two stellar issues published in 2015. Many visitors from around the world access our electronic journal, with over 4,500 downloads in the last year alone. If you want to reach a truly global audience, consider publishing an article in the *VRA Bulletin*.

Finally, the committees overseeing VRA's operations, which include the Awards, Development, Financial Advisory, Membership, Nominating, and Travel Awards Committees, ensure that the Association's business proceeds smoothly and is duly recognized in the field. I urge our members to read the annual reports from committees, appointees, and task forces posted in MemberClicks, as they illustrate the inspiring dedication of our volunteers and reflect the vast knowledge that our Association offers collectively to the profession. I sincerely thank everyone who supports our mission of furthering research and education in the field of image and media management.