My main sabbatical project focused on investigating how the Mookini Library could create and manage a digital image collection that depicts our local history and culture and make it accessible on the Internet. I am particularly interested in preserving images of the landscapes and cultures of Lower Puna that have been lost due to volcanic activity.

Most of my career thus far has revolved around providing public service in an academic library and teaching information literacy so this sabbatical gave me an opportunity to explore a different facet of librarianship. It was rewarding and educational to gather advice from other librarians, journalists and archivists, visit local museums and archives, and explore the literature and online resources about digital image preservation and collection. The question I asked myself was “What do you really need to consider when developing an online image collection?”

I identified several key considerations:

- First, I was advised to define the scope of the project at the beginning, or it can quickly get out of hand. Even though I tried to do this, my project has already taken on a life of its own and it evolves with every step I take.

- Addressing copyright issues is also very important and starts with a lock-tight Deed of Gift. Our library’s Deed of Gift was very vague and minimal. An effective Deed of Gift needs to address digitization and unrestricted access via the WWW or successor technologies. I developed a comprehensive Deed of Gift that would be appropriate for collecting images and would allow for digitization.

- It is essential to be respectful of the need to protect culturally sensitive images, such as images of rituals, sacred places or objects, or people who are deceased. Not all images are appropriate for public viewing. Consulting with authorities, such as kumu or kahuna or experts, such as the faculty of Ka Haka ‘Ula O Keʻelikōlani is an important consideration before making images accessible. It is important to develop a “take down” policy to document circumstances that would justify removing an image from a collection.

- It is helpful to use digital photography software to store and organize a master image collection. In my case, I don’t plan to upload all images to the WWW. Following the suggestion of several professionals who are engaged in digitizing and collecting images I am using Adobe Lightroom, which allows for tagging, geo-location, face recognition, keeping all iterations of a photo and includes more sophisticated tools for metadata collection and searching. Lightroom includes the tools you may need to compensate for deterioration or damage.

- Choosing the right internet platform is imperative for success. There are quite a few out there, and I reviewed the four that were suggested to me: Content DM (OCLC), Past Perfect Museum Software, Streetprint and Omeka. They all have strengths and weaknesses so it is worth talking to others who are using them and doing some research to find the best one for your needs. Cost is also a factor as some are open source, and some have price tags. For my pilot project, I decided to let Omeka.net do the hosting.

I began looking for historical photos of Lower Puna (particularly Kapoho and Kalapana) in the obvious places (such as the archives at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, the Center for the Study of Active
Volcanoes, Hawaii Volcanoes Observatory, Lyman House Museum and NHERC, as well as the authors of books about the history of Puna and collections of oral histories, and local residents), where I found some great images to start my collection.

But, as I continued to search, I realized that to get the rich, more personal images that I wanted to include, I would need to look deeper and further and reach out to the people and the communities in the area I was interested in.

This led to a collaboration with Dr. Kerri Inglis, a faculty member and Public Historian from the UHH History Dept., and Helen Wong Smith, a librarian who has extensive experience collecting and working with local archive collections. We realized we had a common interest in preserving the history of the Puna district, which has been ravaged several times in the last century by volcanic activity that has altered the landscape, destroyed communities and inundated many cherished archaeological remains. We identified and wrote a grant proposal for a national grant that is geared to funding activities that focused on partnerships with the community to preserve local history and culture. We selected the NEH’s Common Heritage Grant because it:

- Recognizes that the public can be effective partners with libraries, museums and archives in preserving history and culture
- Supports community events sponsored by cultural institutions focused on preserving local history and expanding the knowledge and understanding of the community’s history
- Supports projects that include digitization of historical materials, collection of appropriate information about the materials and provide relevant programming

Our Project Abstract: Ho‘omanaʻo a nā wahi pana o Puna: Recalling storied landscapes of Puna is a project to collect, digitize, and provide increased access to resources reflecting the history of areas dramatically impacted by recent natural events in the district of Puna on Hawai‘i Island through community education and outreach programs providing for persistent online access. Commencing with a day long event held in Pāhoa for the residents of the Puna district to collect historical material and capturing them in digital format accompanied by metadata in standards to assure interoperability with other public digital collections. Public programming will also be provided at the collection day event (with information on preservation of personal collections by conservation professionals) and a follow-up public presentation reporting on the outcomes of the project to the Puna community. Pāhoa was chosen as the focal point for this project as it represents a central meeting place for the Puna community as a whole, but it also is at/near the center of ongoing transformations in the landscape due to the June 27th (2014) lava event most recently, as well as on-going lava activity since the 1980s.

Collaborating with Kerri and Helen on writing the proposal was a learning experience for me as I had never written a proposal for a national grant before. I did attend an excellent grant-writing workshop sponsored by CCECS (with Jeani Navarro) during my sabbatical, which was very helpful and informative. Recently, Helen Wong Smith and I provided a well attended 50-minute presentation about our project at the Hawai‘i Library Association Annual Conference at UH Manoa in December.

If you are interested in more information about our grant proposal narrative, budget and timeline, or our PowerPoint presentation, please contact me (tconner@hawaii.edu).
Unfortunately, we were not awarded a grant for this project, although we got some good feedback from the selection committee. We plan to revisit the project at a later time.

My sabbatical was based on the premise that an image is worth a thousand words and tells its own story. During my sabbatical, I also had an opportunity to go to Egypt, which was one of the most enlightening and educational experiences I have ever had. I had a chance to see many examples of the power of images from thousands of years ago and how such a rich legacy was captured in carvings and symbols that depicted every aspect of ancient life. The scrolls and the magnificent library at Alexandria are no more (although I did get to visit the new library there), but the carved images, hieroglyphics, and statues at Dendera, Edfu, Kom Ombo, etc., still speak to us. My trip to Egypt expanded my view of the world, both past and present, and gave me more of an understanding of other cultures. Walking through the many ancient temples, learning about Egyptian history, exploring the cities and archaeological sites, and being in a Muslim culture was inspiring and thought provoking. If you are interested in reading the short story I wrote about my experiences, “Waking Up in Egypt” please contact me.