Journal of Information Literacy

Conference Corner

The Librarians Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) 2010

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There was a librarian named Jo...

...to LILAC she was sponsored to go,
So armed with technology
And thoughts of pedagogy
She prepared herself for a great show!

Evidently not destined to be a poet, but had to give it a go in honour of the host city, Limerick!

I'd heard so many positive comments from previous LILAC delegates that when I spotted they were offering sponsorship for a student to attend this year's conference, I jumped at the opportunity and was thrilled to have been selected. Considering I had such high expectations, I was amazed to find that the actual experience exceeded them.

The event was very well organised which was evident before the conference even began with the online booking system for parallel sessions, and the discussion amongst both organisers and delegates on Twitter using the #LILAC2010 hashtag. You can see an archive of all tweets before, during and after the conference at Twapperkeeper archive:
http://twapperkeeper.com/hashtag/lilac2010.

From left: Jo Alcock and Jane Secker

I was really impressed with the use of social media at LILAC;
I used it to find a few people I wanted to meet up with, and during the event it enabled coverage of different sessions – I learnt to multi-task so that I could make notes from my own chosen sessions whilst also keeping an eye on, and occasionally joining in with, discussions on Twitter from other sessions.

Tag cloud of tweets from LILAC 2010 (from Dave Pattern on Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/photos/davepattern/4480981821/)

Without exception, I enjoyed each session I attended and they all gave me something to take away and reflect on. The conference

keynotes were excellent – a good variety of different approaches whilst also keeping to the core information literacy focus. Key themes emerged throughout the conference, some of which are highlighted below.

One of the main themes throughout the conference was the evaluation of information literacy pedagogy and teaching methods. Almost all the sessions I attended which discussed an information literacy teaching technique or tool also discussed its evaluation in terms of how effective it was in that situation and also how this may be applied to other situations. One such example which I was particularly interested in was active learning; I attended two different sessions comparing active learning methods with a more traditional lecture style approach. Evidence generally showed that an active learning approach was more effective, but more research is needed in this area, particularly as there were other variables such as the use of technology and the nature of the skills taught.

Another theme I was interested in was embedding information literacy into the curriculum and its associated hurdles and obstacles (along with some successes!). It was particularly refreshing to hear experiences from different countries, different types of institutions, and different viewpoints. One session I found particularly interesting was a pre-conference session "Building brick by brick: a pragmatic approach to measuring impact" which was presented by Sarah Faye Cohen (librarian), Janet Cottrell (library director) & Michelle G. Miller (senior associate provost) from Champlain College, USA. The different perspectives gave a really interesting slant to the presentation and demonstrated how collaboration has worked well in their institution to embed information literacy support throughout each course. I also attended "Damned if we do and damned if we don't", a thought-provoking session about the sustainability of information literacy support from Valeria Kendlin and Lorna Dodd at University College Dublin. It was interesting to hear their thoughts on how to continue to support the strategic aims of the institution when success of information literacy provision leads to demand which exceeds resources. Suggestions included greater collaboration with academic schools to ensure support is timely and effective, and developing online supporting material which could be used within the curriculum.

As a keen user of new technologies, I was particularly interested in how some of these are being used to support information literacy teaching. I attended a session by Andrew Walsh on the use of QR codes at University of Huddersfield, and one by Anthony Holderied about different technologies he has tried including clickers, interactive whiteboards and document viewers. Again it was particularly good to hear evaluative data on the use of each of these technologies to support information literacy, although it is clear more research is needed to separate the true value of these technologies from the novelty factor.

Something else I was reminded of at LILAC, which it can be all too easy to forget, is the danger of making assumptions about information literacy skill level or information needs. I heard about an interesting piece of research recently undertaken at the Universities of Gloucestershire and Worcester looking at studying habits of students, which challenges many of the assumptions we make about traditional (i.e. straight from sixth form) undergraduate students. In her keynote speech, "Lay information mediary behavior and social information literacy", Karen Fisher also discussed the danger of assumptions at the enquiry desk but from quite a unique angle. Her research focuses on lay information mediaries or LIMs (i.e. non-information professionals seeking information on behalf of somebody else). This has multiple implications for libraries, in that the person asking the question at an enquiry desk may not be the end user of the information, and also the need for libraries to support LIMs by developing their social information literacy skills.

It wasn't all hard work – the social events in the evenings were also very entertaining and extended the opportunity for networking; I met so many fascinating people and some I have

wanted to meet face to face for a long time. The venue for the conference dinner, Dromoland Castle, was a stunning building and I enjoyed exploring it after the awards were presented.

Dromoland Castle
http://www.fanpop.com/spots/castles/images/322125/title/dromoland-castle-ireland

One thing which particularly stood out at LILAC was the range of delegates in terms of age, experience, job roles (including non-librarians!), and location. I had many interesting conversations with international delegates and enjoyed hearing their experiences regarding information literacy and comparing it to my own as an academic librarian in the UK. There were also librarians from different sectors of information work as well as academics and researchers.

I would like to thank the LILAC organising team for such a fantastic sponsorship opportunity, and also extend my thanks to the conference speakers and delegates for making it so enjoyable. I can certainly see why people say LILAC conference is the highlight of their year!

Banners at the LILAC 2010 Conference