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Conference report

LILAC 2023: A first-timer at a snack-fuelled friendly knowledge feast

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Abstract

A lighthearted report from the LILAC 2023 conference, held in Cambridge, covering summaries of several talks and the overall conference experience from a first-time attendee.

If I told you librarians from Ohio, Indiana and London were sat having an intense discussion about Chelsea buns in Cambridge, where would you think we were?

It's the LILAC 2023 conference of course! This was my first LILAC—and I'll go through how it went from my perspective.

Figure 1: The Information Literacy Awards at the Museum of Zoology. Photo by author.

First up, I'm LC, from King's College London where my work involves co-facilitating workshops on literature searching and critical appraisal, and a big fan of unicorns. So I was delighted to see there was an option to customise our name badges on the first day with our preferred names, pronouns and of course unicorn stickers. It made waving our name badges at people across busy croissant-filled rooms much less awkward as we showed off our creations.

Heading into the first parallel session by Eva Garcia Grau, I appreciated the points about librarian self-confidence and academic reluctance when it comes to integrating information literacy (IL) into curricula, and becoming familiar with different disciplines and their needs. I do think we tend to underestimate our own expertise, particularly people like me who came into the profession via the shelver and customer services route rather than formal librarianship qualifications or degrees. Another good point was around the importance of multiple points of contact, so knowledge is shared rather than relying on a single staff member who could leave.

Luckily there was lots of knowledge shared and no one leaving from the first refreshment break stand—thank you to the caterers for your unfailingly cheery coffee and pastry serving—free food is something librarians can acquisition very quickly indeed, and fuelled our brains for the first keynote.

This new professional panel (Naomi Cassidy, Tom Peach, Naomi Smith, and Kristabelle Williams) dynamically answered multiple questions around the importance of understanding the inherent value of diversity and inclusion measures rather than just using these in a superficial

way to create a good image—I appreciate the panel's mention of the cost of emotional labour when dealing with issues which are often deeply personal and extend beyond the daily work environment.

A more light hearted but still important workshop by Clair Trowell and Clair Castle followed, on cartooning the library—as a keen amateur illustrator and maker of GIF animations it was fun to collaborate on a panel cartoon and admire each group's artwork. I stayed in the room for a workshop on making the most of your digital readings, taking away ideas on temperature checking learners' understanding and advertising other related training.

The evening ended with a visit to the Museum of Zoology—congratulations to the winners of the Information Literacy Awards, and many thanks to the museum staff for staying so late and giving informative talks as we walked round pointing at more skeletons than exist in the staffroom cupboard*.

Figure 2: The Graduate Lounge, the social venue. Photo by author.

The second day commenced with Maria King's keynote on accessibility. I really liked the use of the recorded talk with an option to submit questions online, as well as Maria outlining boundaries around how questions would be answered. It gave lots of food for thought around the intended audience and uses for accessibility options and the taking up of work and learning time for working on, or asking for, accessibility adjustments.

Having worked in London and the South East all my life, mostly with users who are directly involved with the health services as medics and/or students with high levels of health literacy, I entered the next talk on building digital health literacy with a great deal of curiosity, with Ruth Carlyle, Paul Howarth, and Kate Carr outlining variations across different UK counties and user groups. Takeaways included helping users to the starting point around health literacy, engaging with users who may be reluctant or unable to access digital services.

The next talk, on maintaining online learning objects, strayed back into more familiar territory, with Emily Hector covering organisation of objects using software such as Notion and Trello. Typing this very article on Notion right now, whilst various learning objects float around on my OneDrive like kids in a swimming pool, it was great to see another potential usage for this software.

I pranced through the Law building, mysteriously picking up snacks on the way, for a great pair of talks. The idea of students being authors and co-creators of learning materials, rather than just users of information, is a new interest waving at me, so hearing ideas from Elena Azadbakht and Teresa Schultz of the University of Nevada including social annotation had me jotting down more experiments to try.

At this point my Body Battery (a feature on my fitness tracker) was voicing mild concern after two days of hard learning and snacking, which was fitting as the attitudes of LGBTQ+ students to their self- and fitness-tracking habits were analysed by Pam McKinney, Corin Peacock, and Andrew Cox. Listening to the binary-reinforcing nature of various trackers made me realise my

own unconscious habits when customising my own tracker's health analyses. It was quite surreal to hear my work (IL) and personal (sports obsessed) worlds collide in this talk.

Further surreal moments popped up at the conference social, held at the Graduate Lounge. Watching my fellow librarians shatter the cardigan-and-shushing stereotypes, whilst violating every single Library noise policy ever created as we danced and ate, was highly enjoyable. I'm not sure what IL practice I could take home from this, except that I can beat any student sneaking hot food into the Silent Zone with my ability to acquisition extra portions of dessert.

It is testimony to the fascinating talks at LILAC that anyone turned up the next day for 9:30, booting ourselves up like outdated self-service book machines. King's is very lucky to have Special Collections and Archives, so seeing Mary Feeney lay out options for creating lesson plans using primary sources was great.

Regina Everitt was the perfect choice for the last day's keynote, keeping us extremely energised whilst highlighting the opportunity to try new things in unusual situations like the pandemic. Being based in the library, surrounded by computers and internet, I appreciated the emphasis on the need for digital learning support, both in terms of training and infrastructure. With eyes straying to home, another note of familiarity was struck with a talk by Meredith Knoff and Margaret McLaughlin on research consultations, which have similarities to King's Libraries' one to one sessions. I liked the idea of it being a learner-centred 'research jumpstart' and encouraging students to lead by trying their own search first.

I wanted to stay a little longer and chat to new friends, but the train timetable put paid to that as I went dashing through the town to catch the last non-cancelled train. Luckily the conference had a cloakroom, cheerily staffed and perfectly categorised (of course it would be, being run by library and library-adjacent volunteers!). This is a moment to say thank you to the organisers of LILAC and all the volunteers who were always ready with a smile and helpful direction.

To anyone thinking of attending LILAC as a first-timer, I'd definitely recommend it—bring a lot of empty brainspace and an empty stomach to fill, and don't be afraid to talk to complete strangers as everyone is so friendly.

Figure 3: Excellent food choices. Photo by author.

Figure 4: Acquisitioning snacks (multiple copies). Photo by author.

*I jest; there are no skeletons in the staffroom cupboard. There is, however, an unclaimed pot of hummus in the staffroom fridge, old enough to count as Archival material.

Talks referenced (in order of mention)

Garcia Grau, E. Why don't they like me? The trials and tribulations of a newly qualified Science librarian

Cassidy, N., Peach, T., Smith, N., & Williams, K. New professional panel

Trowell, C. & Castle, C. Cartooning the Library: why and how to use applied comics for information literacy!

McCaul, L. & O'Toole-Mills, T. 'Making the most of your digital readings': planning and delivering a new workshop

King, M. Accessibility – what does it mean for libraries and education?

Carlyle, R., Howarth, P., & Carr, K. Building digital health literacy into existing services: a partnership approach

Hector, E. Developing a practical workflow for maintaining online learning objects

Azadbakht, E. & Schultz, T. Exploring open pedagogy in a credit-bearing library course

McKinney, P., Peacock, C., & Cox, A. The information literacy practices of LGBTQ+ students' self-tracking: attitudes to data collection, data privacy and data sharing

Feeney, M. Information literacy lightbulbs: creating instructional resources and partnerships for teaching with primary sources

Everitt, R. Pivot ponderings: Musings about one library's role in supporting tech-enhanced learning

Knoff, M. & Mclaughlin, M. Building critical thinking skills by fostering inquiry-based and dialogic learning in research consultations