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# LILAC 2023: Preparing to succeed in new positions

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[LILAC 2023](#) was held from April 19–21, 2023, at the University of Cambridge. This year, there was no specific theme to guide presentation proposals—instead, presenters were invited to submit proposals that focused on information literacy (IL) practice or research in any of its forms. This generated a wide, rich set of sessions, which ran the gamut of delivery types and topics. Between interactive workshops, short and long presentations, panel discussions, posters, and even a wildcard that used postcards as its medium, LILAC attendees were treated to an array of professional development opportunities over 3 days at the David Williams Building on the University of Cambridge’s Sidgwick Site. Along with a networking event held in the shadow of a 21-metre-long Fin Whale skeleton at the Museum of Zoology, and a lively conference party at the Graduate Cambridge hotel, the events of LILAC 2023 provided ample chances for inspiration, connection, and inquiry.

Across this broad range of presentations, one thread emerged that linked several sessions together: a focus on new professionals and new roles. In several sessions, presenters described their experiences entering the library profession or acclimating to new professional roles. In attending these presentations, I learned a great deal about the inventive and resourceful ways that librarians have grappled with the uncertainty of entering a new position. Day 1 kicked off with Eva Garcia Grau’s presentation, [“Why don’t they like me? The trials and tribulations of a newly qualified Science librarian.”](#) Garcia Grau spoke of the challenges she faced upon first assuming her role as the liaison to a subject area that was traditionally disengaged from the library. In reviewing the LIS literature for her Masters dissertation, Garcia Grau confirmed that there are widespread barriers to embedding IL in the Sciences, including lack of institutional support, academic perceptions of IL, and lack of integration at the point-of-need. To address these challenges in her own portfolio, Garcia Grau adopted a multi-faceted approach, including seeking invitations to committees, attending college social events, and developing rapport with academic and school administrative staff. As a result, Garcia Grau observed an uptick in teaching opportunities and student appointments, fostered deeper relationships with staff, and increased her confidence in her own abilities.

The title of Melissa Hamdani’s presentation, [“Breaking through the concrete ceiling: Surviving a difficult start as a new professional.”](#) captures the overwhelming circumstances that she encountered upon assuming a part-time job share position with a significant workload and challenging set of responsibilities. In order to break through to a distant liaison area, Hamdani created a self-paced library skills guide for Psychology students, which served as a visible point of contact for library services. This creative intervention was effective: now, she interacts with Psychology students across all years of study via IL sessions. She shared her top tips for coping with a similar situation, including proactively asking for support and advice from colleagues, engaging with a professional network, practicing stress-relieving activities, and pursuing a passion project to sustain your own enthusiasm.

The keynote on Day 1 harkened back to similar themes, as [the New Professional Panel](#)—comprised of Naomi Cassidy, Tom Peach, Naomi Smith, and Kristabelle Williams—highlighted the voices of library workers who are relatively new to the field. In a pre-recorded session that conference attendees watched in advance, these new professionals responded to a variety of prompts on IL. Viewers learned about their perspectives on cultivating new generations of librarians who teach, and their visions for a future where critical theory and equity are central to

the conversations that shape IL instruction. In the live, in-person keynote session on April 19th, the panel fielded follow-up questions on teaching-related topics. Panelists discussed the interpersonal aspects of professional life, such as their experiences in managing relationships with academic staff, receiving support for their individual research interests, and finding like-minded colleagues with shared values. They also responded to questions around instructional practice, including the importance of promoting alternative sources in scholarship, how to address gaps in pedagogical training for librarians, and the interplay between theory and its real-life application. The panelists shared practical suggestions and tips, contemplated the power dynamics that affect IL work, and wondered aloud about ways to promote equity in the library classroom.

Finally, Rebecca Maniates's presentation, "[How to start well: Strategic beginnings to your next IL-focused position.](#)" offered an actionable framework for envisioning the first year in a new professional library position. Maniates described how her work history, which has spanned a diverse set of institutions and locations, has informed her approach to optimizing the initial months upon entering a new role. She asserted the importance of developing a plan to manage job requirements, achieve personal and professional goals, and maintain work-life balance, and posited guiding questions to attendees that prompted reflection on each of these elements. To encourage participants to consider their own individual contexts, Maniates facilitated moments of active exploration, in which attendees drafted ideas for their own workplans. She also discussed the importance of networking in cultivating relationships with key stakeholders, and in taking calculated risks to develop new skills. Finally, she led attendees through a planning exercise that guided us in mapping out the major milestones and time commitments that will arise in the year ahead.

In attending these thought-provoking presentations (and many, many others), I gleaned valuable insights that I excitedly brought back to colleagues in Canada. In particular, I found the attention paid to new professionals and/or those in new roles to be unique and important, as it shed light on the complex work of building a career in LIS, and reminded me of the importance of building equitable, supportive workplaces that welcome the unique perspectives of emerging and established librarians alike. Thank you, LILAC 2023, for the memorable experience!