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Conference update

ISSoTL 2016: exploring opportunities for librarians

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The 13th Annual Conference of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) convened October 12-15, 2016 in Los Angeles. While not focused on information literacy (IL) specifically, the conference brings together academics interested in improving teaching through research, both directly in the classroom and through institutional support.

The theme of the 2016 conference, appropriate for its proximity to Hollywood, was storytelling: 'how the stories we are constructing and telling define and support us, individually and as a community, and what forms of storytelling can sustain and enhance our work'. The conference also featured the largest number of librarians presenting at ISSoTL ever, and several of us thought it might be useful to share our observations of the conference with an IL audience, as there appears to be a lot of potential for cross-fertilisation. While this review provides some information on the conference itself, we also hope to encourage others interested in disseminating work outside of libraryland by including notes on the topics we presented and the response from (mostly) non-librarian audiences.

Many of the presentation topics will be familiar to librarians – fostering undergraduate research, encouraging active learning, various forms of assessment, and the effects, or lack thereof, of various teaching and support interventions. The conference brings together people who teach across the disciplines, and it's fascinating to see both the commonalities and the differences in the challenges we face and the solutions we attempt. Many of the presentations included undergraduate and graduate students as project partners, something perhaps that IL events could learn from. For a glimpse into the sessions, check the Storify series here https://storify.com/margymaclibrary/issotl-16-part-1.

Coming together to share our experience after the conference, we each answered five questions and found there was quite a bit of overlap in our responses.

1. What did you gain from attending ISSoTL?

Overall we appreciated the diversity of the sessions, the opportunities for networking and involvement, and seeing a range of presentations that provided new directions for theory and practice, deepened our thinking, or challenged current approaches. There was also a sense of affirmation of some of our practices.

A few sessions were singled out: Charissa says 'I learned more about the power of visual aids, such as paintings or photographs, to create a critical discussion,' and Brian wrote that he enjoyed Michael Bunn's presentation on transfer and reading like a writer: 'As a professor of biology writing, I am familiar with the struggle to help students develop the voice of a professional, particularly when dealing with very complex molecular biology topics. Bunn's observations on motivation and his approaches to assigning readings helped some of my own ideas gel.'

2. What would you like to say to other librarians who might be intrigued by ISSoTL?

In short, the collective response was GO! As well as the benefits of exposure to a wider range of content, and exposing others to the wonders of IL, interacting with the SoTL community has notable benefits. Ann enjoyed being able to 'listen to the conversations going on around me and glean information that I will continue to use as a librarian and as a PhD student in education'. Charissa, Brian and Caitlin all commented on the welcoming and diverse community and the rich potential for collaboration both in teaching and research.

3 What motivated you to present at ISSoTL?

The motivations here were both personal – wanting to share knowledge and participate in conversations, and also professional – wanting to insert the expertise and experiences of librarians into the wider discourses of higher education. As with any presentation, seeking feedback, particularly from those outside the discipline, was a motivator. Charissa, Ann, Margy and Caitlin were all presenting as part of cross-disciplinary collaborations, and this aspect was also important. Finally, both Ann and Caitlin have institutional responsibilities to work with SoTL scholars, and both saw attending and presenting at SoTL as critical to this role.

4 What did you present?

Charissa: I collaborated with a geography and systems librarian, and an instruction designer to create a series of online learning modules for data visualisation. The presentation highlighted the purpose of the project, which is to provide a learning tool for undergraduate students to get basic skills on understanding and utilising open data, that is, public data or government data, accessible online. The tutorials are available open access and can be used in any learning management system. (http://scholarworks.csun.edu/handle/10211.3/164788)

Figure 1: Visualizing Data to Tell Students' Stories

Brian: My presentation highlighted several practices and approaches related to information literacy integration projects going back several years. In my poster, I emphasised the models of collaboration and information literacy integration over specific data and results. More specifically, I shared examples of learning progressions developed for undergraduate programmes, associated assessment tools, and efforts to involve faculty and graduate students in the development process. Finally, the presentation attempted to show that these progressions, learning outcomes, and assessment approaches, (while designed in the context of a single academic discipline) have been successfully transferred to, and adapted by, instructors in often very different disciplines. In other words, information literacy teaching and learning should be discipline-specific, but there's no need to 'reinvent the wheel' each time a new discipline tries to integrate and assess it.

Ann: I was part of a panel presentation on stories of teaching and learning in Latin America and the Caribbean. I have been involved with teachers and schools in Haiti for a number of years. Other countries represented were Belize, Honduras, and Jamaica. We discussed challenges and opportunities of being engaged in these efforts, as well as how those experiences had impacted on each of us personally and professionally.

Caitlin: I presented a poster on "Librarians & SoTL Scholars: Stories of Advancing the Field" with Margy MacMillan (professor and librarian at Mount Royal University) and Nancy Chick, the Academic Director of the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning (University of Calgary) and a widely respected SoTL Scholar. Our poster was the result of conversations about the

intersections of librarianship and SoTL, and sought to demonstrate the benefits of collaborations.

Figure 2: Librarians & SoTL Scholars: Stories of Advancing the Field

Margy: In addition to the poster, I was part of two presentations. One was on how undergraduates develop disciplinary and research identities, based on interviews from a large, long term study at my institution. Much of this identity formation appears tied to research assignments. The other was about broadening the dissemination of SoTL work using the recent migration of *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, the Society's journal, to Open Access as a case study.

5 What was the response to your presentation?
Overall the presentations generated rich discussions and interesting questions, both about the content more generally and about the contributions librarians make to teaching and learning. They also prompted, as Caitlin writes, '[a] lot of curiosity such as thinking about how to engage

with the library in Teaching and Learning / SoTL initiatives. Other participants were wondering whether the structure of the library and the status of librarians at their institutions would allow for such partnership flexibility'.

Charissa summed up the conference well: 'Do you ever get the feeling, when you talk with some non-librarians about your work, that you're not seen for what you really do? Some may call this micro-aggression. Well, I didn't feel like that at all at the conference. I felt like I was really a part of a community of like-minded thinkers and not bound by a discipline but joined together for the same purpose: to push boundaries of the status quo in instruction to actually make it impactful for all learners, including ourselves.'

If this review has intrigued you, the next ISSoTL conference will be in Calgary, Canada, in October 2017. (http://www.issotl.com/issotl15/node/172) More about the 2016 conference can be found here: http://issotl.com/conf/index.php/issotl16/index/pages/view/conference_home