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Chan, L. et al. 2002. Budapest Open Access Initiative. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Accessed: 18 November 2015].

Thinking of going to LILAC? How to get the best out of the experience

**Lisa Gardner, Senior Library Assistant – Medicine (NHS Support),
Charing Cross Campus Library, Imperial College London.
Email: l.gardner@imperial.ac.uk Twitter: @HistoryMistress**

I had long heard about LILAC as a 'must-do' for information professionals seeking innovation and a unique learning experience. Colleagues who had attended LILAC previously recommended it as 'the conference where *everything* is useful', applauded its information skills practice development opportunities and highlighted the networking possibilities. All had urged me to attend. As I began my PGDip in Library and Information Management last September with Ulster University, and also started a new information literacy focussed job at Imperial College London last November, LILAC again became a beacon in the conference schedules. Doing some more research, I decided to apply for the student bursary to attend LILAC 2018 in Liverpool. I was amazed and excited to be selected for the bursary and I can only thank all those involved again and again for giving me the chance to attend.

There are many reports, blogs and write ups about LILAC, along with the archived presentations, which provide ideas about the plethora of information, ideas and events which take place at the conference. Here, I draw on my first experience of attending LILAC to provide some tips. I found these really useful for my learning, and to get the most out of the conference.

Consider what you want from LILAC. You can decide what your aims are for attending LILAC before you go, but be open to experiences and learning you never expected. There are always new innovations, new perspectives and new research presented at the conference which you would not have encountered before so make the most of these.

Do your homework. Look at the schedule before you go, read the descriptions of the sessions carefully as sometimes the titles are a bit general, and maybe find out a bit more about the topic or the presenters to prepare for the session. Book sessions in advance online – popular topics get booked up quickly! Think about which sessions relate to your practice but also try something totally different and outside of your field. I tried a session on bibliotherapy for example, which is not something I have ever been involved in, and it opened up some new perspectives for me.

Ask questions. The sessions are a great way to engage with researchers, experienced professionals and idea-leaders at the cutting edge of information literacy directly. When reading journal articles would it not be great to be able to instantly interact with the authors and raise your questions? We cannot quite do that yet (though technology will no doubt create this in the future), but we can engage with the conference presenters face to face. Remember, you also have a lot to contribute. Seize the opportunity.

Find a buddy. The organisers run a buddy scheme so first time attendees do not feel they are on their own. I did not do this, but in retrospect it would have perhaps helped me feel less overwhelmed.

Talk with people. Some of the most unexpected and interesting learning exchanges can come from a conversation over lunch, or in the line outside the seminar room. If, like me, you can get a bit tongue tied in groups of people you do not know there are a few things to try. Look around the room on the fringes of the group and see if there is anyone else not engaged and go and

ask them about the last seminar they went to, or what they thought of the keynote address. This can open up the conversation. Or at lunch or coffee, sit down with people you do not know – ask if the seat is taken and then ask them if this is their first LILAC for example. If that seems a bit daunting, find the presenter of a seminar you attended and go up and thank them for their presentation. Respect people who wish to have some quiet time though.

Have a business card. Even if you do not have a business card provided by your employer, consider getting some cheap ones printed. There will be people there you want to keep in touch with and even though you can take photos on your phone of their details from them, I find exchanging cards makes the contact more memorable. You can also take a photo of the card as back up. Also I hate writing my details out on little scraps of paper – so cumbersome and they are more likely to get lost too. Check to see if the person you want to keep in touch with is on Twitter, and follow then straight away. After the conference follow up your key contacts to keep the conversation going.

Take notes and review them. With so much going on, it is easy to get all the sessions overlapping in your head. Review your notes for the points you want to think more about or do some extra research on, and for contacts you want to follow up. Reflect on the experience and then action the points you have identified.

Give yourself some space. There is a lot going on at LILAC and it can be overwhelming. There are some spaces in the schedule for time for reflection – these are really valuable. I used a session like this to go for a walk and have some quiet reflective time – LILAC is noisy and busy and many of us need some down time to reflect on our learning, to re-energise and relax, and be ready for more learning.

Make the most of the evening events. If you can attend these, they can offer some interesting down time (the Terracotta Warriors exhibition was superb!), and provide a way to chat with others in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Look after yourself throughout the conference. Walk to the venue and really appreciate the new sights on the way, listen to some calming music before bed, do that morning run in an exciting new location. LILAC packs a lot in to three days so be mindful of relying on caffeine too much!

Share your experience. Disseminate good practice and new ideas through your team. Talk about initiatives you discovered with your manager. Put into practice those new skills when you are teaching. Make the most of the learning by sharing it.

LILAC is a great conference to attend for you and your service right now. Whatever point you are in your career, you will have something to contribute at LILAC, something to learn from LILAC, something to take back and put into practice in your library service from LILAC, and something to share with colleagues from LILAC. I wanted to expand my knowledge and skills to help me in my new job role – working with NHS staff on information literacy, to bring back ideas to share with my colleagues, and enrich my studies. I am pleased to say all of these aims are being met. Make the most of the experience.