

## Conference report

# LILAC 2024: A newbie's report

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As the title implies, this was my first time at LILAC. It wasn't my first conference by any means, and it did add to my belief that librarians are fab.

Before LILAC 2024, potential presenters were encouraged to write abstracts that “sold” their presentations to attendees, demonstrating the value of attendance, and showing how the content could have impact on attendees' practices—or at least that was some of the feedback I received on my initial submission. There was also an online meeting to help presenters write such abstracts and presentations. I very much appreciate this—I can't stand 'death by PowerPoint', and I believe that people can always read published papers later. Instead, I want conferences to enable conversations and relationships between people, share back-stories behind presenters' work, and stimulate attendees to think. LILAC 2024 did all of these in spades.

This spirit of “participation to make you think” started with the first presentation,<sup>2</sup> with lots of activities to stimulate thought about engaging honestly with students. The presenters asked attendees—mostly teaching librarians—if they ever tell students to do things that aren't, ahem, “best practice” (e.g. googling rather than using library search) or tell students not to do things they do themselves—and why? You might think this was wasted on me, a non-librarian who currently has almost no engagement with students, but I may do in the not-so-distant future. Anyway, we all advise others how to do things, so thinking about how to do so honestly is a good thing.

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<sup>1</sup> My Napier web-presence: <https://napier-repository.worktribe.com/person/110770/bruce-ryan>

<sup>2</sup> “Never have I ever used Google Scholar”: *hypocrisy and authenticity in library and academic skills teaching*, presenters Rachel Davies and Joe Larkin ([slides on Slideshare](#))

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This spirit continued through other sessions, including the final session of day 1 on communication for impact.<sup>3</sup> This included attendees 2-on-2 debating whether academic language alienates students and is a barrier to engagement. I can now see both sides of that debate; previously I might have only seen one. (The first to email [b.ryan@napier.ac.uk](mailto:b.ryan@napier.ac.uk) stating which and why—apart from *JIL* and Napier people—after this review is published will win a micro-prize.) The other presentations I attended<sup>4, 5, 6, 7, 8</sup> also used tech (mostly Padlets<sup>9</sup> but occasionally Mentimeter<sup>10</sup> and Slido<sup>11</sup>) to stimulate audience participation and thinking. Whatever the tech, I now have much to think about, as noted on my ‘research-ish’ blog.<sup>12</sup>

The spirit of relationship-building was exemplified by two main events—the networking and awards event on the first evening and the conference party on the second. Yes, a conference **party**, not a conference dinner. (There was food—all vegan I believe—at the party before dancing began. However, I seem to recall that omnivores and carnivores could satisfy their tastes at other conference meals.<sup>13</sup>) Even this ancient plodder was seen to report to the dance floor.<sup>14</sup>

The spirit of conversation was perhaps best exemplified by two Danish attendees I met at lunch on the second day. We chatted about Nordic history<sup>15</sup> (which countries held power when, the various unions), linguistic variations stemming from this history and from rural/urban and mainland/island differences, other travel, the attraction of Edinburgh. Clearly these topics have nothing directly to do with information literacy (IL) but have much to do with international understanding. I only wish I spoke any Nordic languages, but don’t hold your breath because I still need to improve my (Austrian) German and make any headway at all with (Brazilian) Portuguese.

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<sup>3</sup> *The information literacy behind information literacy: a (wild!) discussion. How do we communicate for maximum impact?*, presenters Amy Haworth, Georgie Broad and Helen McNaughton ([slides on Slideshare](#))

<sup>4</sup> *Librarians and teachers co-designing for information literacy: creating informed learners in the classroom*, presenters Clarence Maybee and Michael Flierl ([slides on Slideshare](#))

<sup>5</sup> *"Typically, I keep looking for a little bit longer": examining changes in students information behavior and emotional responses to research, pre- and post-COVID-19 shutdowns*, presenters Katie Blocksidge and Hanna Primeau ([slides on Slideshare](#))

<sup>6</sup> *Information literacy: social class perspectives*, presenters Darren Flynn, Rosie Hare, Jennie-Claire Crate, Ramona Naicker and Andrew Preater

<sup>7</sup> *Talk that talk: creating a research support program for faculty members*, presenters Sandy Hervieux, Ana Rogers-Butterworth ([slides on Slideshare](#))

<sup>8</sup> *'What does research mean to you?': unpacking information hierarchies and creating context-specific research plans*, presenter Salma Abumeeiz ([slides on Slideshare](#))

<sup>9</sup> <https://padlet.com>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.mentimeter.com>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.slido.com>

<sup>12</sup> <https://bruceryan.info/2024/04/15/everythings-coming-up-lilacs>

<sup>13</sup> I make no apology for this language—I’ve been vegan for 37 years.

<sup>14</sup> This phrase is from an old friend’s [PhD thesis about raving](#). N.B. I do not suggest that any illegal drugs were consumed at LILAC.

<sup>15</sup> I stopped formal study of history as soon as I could—2<sup>nd</sup> year of secondary education—because the teaching was all about monarchy and wars, both abhorrent to me. I received almost no teaching about Nordic history apart from “*there were these huge hairy Vikings – they raped and pillaged, and then some settled down in England and became decent chaps, what*”.

Closer to LILAC's topic, I realise I need to know more about how IL is understood and practiced outside of the anglosphere. This is why I was so disappointed that the final session—on primary education and IL in six countries—that I attended on day 2<sup>16</sup> was so sparsely attended. I think primary age IL and digital literacy learning are important foundations for later learning, so [here](#) are my thoughts on a previous presentation about this project.<sup>17</sup>

The other formal events at LILAC 2024 included three keynotes. The ones I attended were on *AI and IL*<sup>18</sup> and *Playful and compassionate approaches for inclusive Information Literacy instruction*<sup>19</sup>—again much food for thought. I'm sorry I missed the other keynote on *Teaching Critical AI Literacy*<sup>20</sup> but my body-clock over-ruled me. The final formal session at LILAC 2024 was an interactive debate on where we will be after another 50 years of IL.<sup>21</sup> I guess I'll be pushing up the daisies by then (I'm currently 58) but I hope that by then we will have made much more progress towards creating information-literate societies in all possible ways.

I want to commend the friendliness and organisation of LILAC 2024. These are perhaps best exemplified by the conference and venue staff going to great lengths to print things for me after I'd left my copies at my hotel, allowing me to take extra freebies, helping me and others get to where we wanted to go by talking with us enthusiastically and without a trace of the tiredness I'm sure they felt, by placing posters in the lifts saying which presentations were in the various levels and rooms, and by providing stickers to decorate our name-badges.

If I have a criticism of LILAC 2024 (N.B. not of the organisers or the sessions), it's that much of the content was about IL in the context of tertiary education. I know that the ILG shares this concern, so will say no more here.

However, I wish every conference was and will be like LILAC in how it welcomes, engages, stimulates and feeds attendees. Thank you!

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My presentation was on the *Information Literacy and Society*<sup>22</sup> project I undertook in 2023 with Napier colleagues Peter Cruickshank<sup>23</sup> and Marina Milosheva<sup>24</sup>, to whom I am very grateful—especially to Peter for getting us past an impasse in filtering the raw hits and to Marina for the discussion questions in the presentation. My speaking notes, slides and padlets are on my

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<sup>16</sup> *View from the BRIDGE: information and digital literacy for primary schools*, presenters Stéphane Goldstein, Sarah Pavey and Konstantina Martzoukou ([slides on Slideshare](#), [project website](#)) I have to admit a little bias towards the presenters: on behalf of [MILA](#), Stéphane was mentor for the [Information Literacy and Society](#) project I spoke about at LILAC 2024.

<sup>17</sup> <https://blogs.napier.ac.uk/social-informatics/2024/02/view-from-the-bridge>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.lilacconference.com/lilac-2024/keynote-speakers-1#ai-panel>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.lilacconference.com/lilac-2024/keynote-speakers-1#andy-walsh>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.lilacconference.com/lilac-2024/keynote-speakers-1#maha-bali>

<sup>21</sup> <https://infolit.org.uk/information-literacy-at-50>

<sup>22</sup> [https://mila.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ILS-final-project-report-AS-PUBLISHED.bmrV2\\_.pdf](https://mila.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ILS-final-project-report-AS-PUBLISHED.bmrV2_.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://napier-repository.worktribe.com/person/110751/peter-cruickshank>

<sup>24</sup> <https://napier-repository.worktribe.com/person/2568010/marina-milosheva>

research-ish blog<sup>25</sup>, as is a slightly tongue-in-cheek but more detailed account of my LILAC 2024 experience.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://bruceryan.info/2024/04/01/lilac-materials>

<sup>26</sup> <https://bruceryan.info/2024/04/15/everythings-coming-up-lilacs>