

Conference Report

LILAC 2026: Community, creativity and criticality. Conference report from the 2026 Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference

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LILAC 2026 was held in Sheffield from 30th March–1st April. This was the third LILAC I've attended in the last four years, and it did not disappoint! From the most amazing range of eateries and craft ale spots to daily tram rides, Sheffield as a city really delivered. This year's conference marked a milestone for me as I delivered my first conference presentation. I hope that sharing our experiences of developing library staff taking on new teaching roles can help other institutions meet this challenge of building skills and confidence through peer-learning and a compassionate approach.

The big highlight of LILAC this year for me was the two-part zine-making workshop by Sara Kern, Denise Wetzel and Elliott Rose from Pennsylvania State University, as I'm keen to embrace creativity more in my work and reflective practice. The workshop helped me to see how zines can fit into embedded teaching sessions and co-curricular library activities, particularly to develop reflective learning. This connects nicely with exploring the "creative turn" in information literacy (IL) mentioned and exemplified in the session on makerspaces by the University of Sheffield's Graham McElearney, Rosa Sadler, Vicky Grant and Jack Emmens. We know creation is a key aspect of IL but in my current work it tends to get crowded out by discovery and evaluation. Zines feel like the perfect medium to explore with our learners how they see themselves as creators of information (or not!).

Unsurprisingly, a lot of parallel sessions at this year's conference focused on making sense of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) through the lens of the library. I'm grateful to LILAC 2026 for creating so many spaces to think about Generative AI from different angles in community with others. I left Sheffield feeling reassured that it's okay to be ambivalent, that it's okay to still

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be feeling your way and navigating through the spectrum of how people feel and think about it. The presentation from UCLA's Salma Abumeeiz and Jamie Hazlitt on opting out of inevitability and reflections on critical refusal of Generative AI introduced me to the idea that there's a spectrum of refusal. You don't need to use Generative AI tools to be AI literate. You can question the inevitability of AI hype whilst envisaging different possibilities and different futures. Ohio State University's Jane Hammons led a workshop on AI in Education that really unlocked something in my thinking, both about the role of Generative AI in my role and teaching in general. During the workshop we reflected on authenticity and vulnerability in teaching and being prepared to make mistakes and admit we don't have all the answers. This invited us to take the opportunity to learn together with our students, rather than simply follow an institutional line. The encouragement to just have those conversations with students really helped affirm the way that I've felt for a very long time and the contradictory journey I've been having with my thoughts, feelings and interactions with Generative AI.

One of the best things about LILAC is how it looks at IL across multiple sectors and encourages us to think more broadly about what we do and why we do it. It's easy to get caught up in the day job and forget the bigger picture. For a while I've been struggling to think about IL beyond the academy and about information beyond what gets encoded in documents. Whilst walking to the networking event at the historic Firth Hall at the end of the first day of the conference, I grumbled to a fellow delegate about how small and narrow my conceptualisation of IL had become. When Sheila Webber, from the University of Sheffield's Information School, delivered the second keynote the following morning, it was like she'd overheard that conversation and come up with a beautiful and brilliant riposte. Sheila's keynote reminded me why I decided to teach IL. Her passion for seeing information as much more than documents, how information can come to us from the environment and our senses, and how information can create positive outcomes, inspired me to start thinking bigger again about IL and its role beyond finding journal articles for course assignments (important as that is). I found Sheila's statement that no one is information illiterate very powerful and something to think deeply about.

This year's LILAC conference didn't just pose questions though. It helped me start finding answers, particularly around how to promote IL beyond academic study. I've always felt that we do our students a disservice by not making and critically examining the connections between information and technology, power, privilege, politics and other domains. We have such limited time with our learners in the classroom. Teaching the information practices of scholarship is crucial to enable our students to take their place in their disciplinary communities but it does mean we don't get space to do much else with them. There are so many aspects of IL we should be engaging with our students on, but it's not sustainable to keep adding new workshops on new topics all the time. The session on Global Collaborations for AI Literacy with Vicky Grant, Nabila Cruz, Maria De Brasdefer, Alanna Rossa and David Thomas, inspired me to think about a different approach, making me think about how a wide range of IL issues and concepts could be explored with students through small scale, low budget DIY exhibitions. With this approach, I can finally see the beginnings of an answer to a professional question I've been asking myself for a long time.

One of my main reflections on LILAC 2026 is that it really is all about community and the idea that you're not alone. Whatever professional struggles or challenges you're facing, other people share them too. We've had so many conversations across different sectors, user groups, institutions, and roles during the three days of LILAC. You always seem to be able to find

someone who is struggling with or curious about the same thing. There's something deeply reassuring in knowing that you're not alone.