

Inspiration and adventure at Library Instruction West 2018

As with so many things, it all started with an e-mail.

I'm a listserv lurker. One morning – admittedly, I recall being in a meeting at the time – I saw an e-mail come through seeking proposals for hosting the Library Instruction West (LIW) 2018 conference. Instantly, my thoughts spun to our recently renovated library (we had been back in the building for only four to five months by that time), our nearly full roster of staff (which can feel like a rarity in academia) and the combination of my professional experience (events management) and goals (learning more about library budgeting and finance)[. . .] and I thought: *We could do this*.

It never came to mind that we are a staff of only 18-20 (a mix of salaried librarians and hourly state employees) or that we often already feel the burden of a full plate or that many people had probably never even heard of our school before. Instead, I thought about the natural beauty of our region, which many people may not otherwise have a good excuse or reason to visit. I thought about our hands-on, service-oriented campus climate (within and beyond the library). I thought about our pride as an organization and the dedication I knew would be required to plan and execute a great conference. We had the potential to do this and do this well, so [. . .] why not make a pitch?

I pitched the idea to my Library Director – quite literally, I forwarded the e-mail directly to her and wrote something along the lines of: *I think we can do this. Thoughts?*

I suppose it is not spoiling anything to say she was interested, that we moved forward with the proposal and, ultimately, that the selection committee offered us the opportunity to host.

LIW – formerly LOEX of the West – was founded to enable academic librarians (particularly in the Western USA) to have easier access to professional development opportunities. The Western US states are big, the terrain can be challenging and airport locations vary from major cities (such as Seattle or Los Angeles) to smaller, regional locales such as Grand Junction. Furthermore, anyone is welcome to attend LIW; one need not be based in the West. A biannual conference since 1994, LIW hosts have ranged from Burbank to Boise to Bozeman, and from Calgary to Kohala (Hawai'i). But LIW had not been to Colorado – yet.

As it turns out, when you are hosting a conference, receiving session proposals and selecting and scheduling sessions is just a small part of what must be done. The LIW conferences are defined by their themes. Sometimes these are inspired by the place itself. Mount Royal University in Calgary, for example, hosted in 2010 and set their theme as

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The author would like to thank the planning committee (Sylvia Rael, Jay Ballenberger and Rose Petralia), the irreplaceable Lisa Hughes (Acquisitions Librarian) and the rest of the library staff, as well as the marketing guru Lisa Smith, Sodexo catering staff (Meredith Cromer-Agbande and Carrie Ann Wright in particular), University Center team (Breanne Meier, Amara Hobbs and Ciara DePinto in particular), IT staff, Residential Life team, bus driver (Russ Cadman), local hotels and businesses for receiving the librarians, Office of Academic Affairs, the President's Office and the Business Office staff. Nothing of LIW would have been remotely possible without their support, creativity, problem-solving attitudes, responsiveness and collegiality. The authors also thank the past hosts who believed in them.



“Crossing Borders, Expanding Frontiers.” Other times, the conference focuses more explicitly on librarianship, like when the University of Oregon at Eugene hosted in 2002 – their tagline was “Expanded Conversations: Collaborating for Student Learning.” At least two meetings of our LIW planning committee were dedicated to the theme; we understood that this would shape our conference. Did we want to be place-focused? Field-focused? What would the theme mean for our conference favors? Our conference logo and other graphic design elements? Essentially: *What would our theme say about us?*

We brainstormed. Used whiteboards. Dry erase markers. Free association. Thesauri. A lot of back and forth. Ultimately, the theme verbiage and the “look” of our conference came together all at once. We chose *The Confluence of Inspiration and Adventure* as our tagline in celebration of the pioneers who crossed the Rockies and found this region, and the region’s tremendous natural beauty, and as a nod to the “grand junction” of the Gunnison and Colorado Rivers for which our city is named. Further, we wanted the vastness of the Colorado landscape to reflect in our openness to the session content that our colleagues would propose and that we would host. We sought to craft a setting where librarians from anywhere could inspire and be inspired, experience compelling surroundings and provide enriching experiences for others.

Regarding the direction of our logo and design elements, one of our planning committee members, Jay Ballenberger, Reference and Instruction Librarian, had old Work Projects Administration (WPA) posters on his mind. We are forever indebted to Lisa Smith, Graphic Artist and Special Projects Coordinator within Colorado Mesa University’s Marketing Department, who took our WPA poster inspiration (particularly the “See America – Montana” poster) and our tagline, and created a stunning series of logos for our conference materials. Focusing on our conference favors, or SWAG, we were committed to the idea of reusability, of lasting gifts for our attendees and of gifts that would be beneficial during and after the conference itself. We also wanted to show appreciation for the time and expense to attend LIW 2018, so we budgeted with *gratitude* and *utility* in mind. Infuser water bottles (it was July in the high desert, after all!), padfolios debossed with our logo and with a Velcro element to prop up a smart phone, totes with zippers and water bottle compartments, and pens with a wax highlighter feature (always get sample pens to test before ordering!). Then, we decided to celebrate our presenters with a little something extra – a custom LIW 2018 presenter patch, similar to those individuals receive for their accomplishments as a Scout. As chair of the planning committee, I especially wanted the conference to feel personal, specific and thankful for attendees and presenters alike.

Armed with our tagline and burgeoning thoughts on our logo, the planning committee turned to the next challenging task: choosing a keynote speaker. Here, we shifted perspectives a bit and considered our mascot, the maverick. We debated a “library world” voice or an “outsider” and reviewed the “carryover” funds that we needed to spend down. We decided to pursue Maria Konnikova, author of several books, including *The Confidence Game* (about con artists) and *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*. Both of those topics connect with information literacy, with the observation and critical thinking skills required of both smart criminals and smart detectives, and we liked the idea of a speaker outside the sphere of academic librarianship but who might present a national draw.

So how did it go?

In a presentation later delivered to our Library Advisory Council, I shared that we saw approximately 200 attendees from 131 institutions, including from beyond the contiguous USA, three from outside USA and quite a few from within the state of Colorado. Our pre-conference capped at 40 attendees, who had the opportunity to participate in a mindfulness

exercise with Maria Konnikova – part of learning how to think like Sherlock Holmes. With 65 conference presentations, spread out over 2 days and 13 venues across our University Center and our Library, the conference offered considerable variety. Sessions of interest to the audience included several that addressed librarian-faculty collaborations, e.g. those from the University of Northern Colorado, Scottsdale Community College and our very own Colorado Mesa University. These collaborations were with Communications, Biology and English faculties, respectively.

LIW 2018 session topics included everything from the new edition of MLA (University of New Mexico); data literacy (Eastern Michigan University); academic and high school librarian collaboration (Middle Tennessee State University); emotional intelligence and information literacy (University of Nevada, Las Vegas); infusing instruction with drag queen and king engagement-strategies (Cal Poly Pomona); supporting autistic students (Trinity University); multicultural outreach and metaliteracy skill-building through library programming (Colorado Mesa University); and fake news instruction and critical librarianship in a for-credit setting (Oklahoma State University). We also had poster sessions where attendees could learn about supporting undocumented students (Cal State Fullerton); information privilege and incarceration (Salt Lake Community College); oral history and the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (The College of William and Mary); and a scientific approach to teaching information literacy skills (University of Oregon).

To enable attendees to get to know each other outside of the presentation rooms, our welcome event was laden with appetizer stations, local beer and wine, and held in a mingle-friendly environment – the library’s event space. Thursday night featured a ballroom dinner, a DJ (with Joel Burkholder’s [Instruction Librarian and Assistant Professor at York University of Pennsylvania] information literacy playlist on hand) and photo booth fun. Friday night featured a “brewlery” tour (brewery + winery + distillery) in gorgeous Palisade, Colorado (with a stop at a local lavender farm as well, just because *why not?*) and travel charcuterie for all excursion attendees. Lastly, Saturday morning, Jay from our planning committee – with two representatives from our Outdoor Program – set out in vans (replete with warm burritos and parfaits) to lead 42 conference attendees to the Colorado National Monument for a breakfast hike. The excursions presented an opportunity to share our home with conferees, from near and far, all of whom had chosen to share their talent, ideas and enthusiasm with us – and the full busses and vans affirmed their interest in what our region has to offer.

Then, in the calmer aftermath of the conference, it came time to work on this issue of *Reference Services Review (RSR)*, about which I had been excited since the moment I heard about this opportunity from *RSR*’s editors. It has been thrilling to realize the follow-through many presenters have shown when it comes to translating their live sessions into scholarship of any kind – I want their ideas, experiences, research, partnerships and perspectives to reach an even broader audience. I am so excited to share that there will be not one but *two* *RSR* issues with significant contributions from LIW 2018 presenters. Even with the conference a year in the rearview mirror, there remain sessions I want to investigate, librarians I want to contact and content I want to devour.

In this issue, readers will get a first taste of what our presenters have been working on since last July. Whitver and Riesen address the complexities of transfer learning within the course-embedded library instruction environment; Jankowski, Russo, Beene and Townsend approach student (non-expert) struggles to evaluate the trustworthiness of information sources through the threshold concepts of format and authority; and Beatty and Hernandez Jr bring visual literacy and critical information literacy together and highlight the value

students place on information literacy when it comes to social justice topics. Maxson *et al.* explore peer teaching implementation strategies and student feedback on different approaches; Martinez and Forrey foray into the psychological elements of imposter syndrome within academic library instruction work; and Murphy investigates the potential for collaborative research assignment design between academic librarians and new graduate teaching assistants toward the establishment of shared-goals and better-leveraged expertise. I hope you enjoy the *amuse-bouche* of LIW 2018 presented in this issue and relish the opportunity to have a second helping of LIW 2018-inspired articles when the next issue comes out later this year.

Overall, I believe LIW 2018 at Colorado Mesa University was a feast for the librarian brain, in addition to being a feast for the eyes. The papers in this issue of *RSR* represent a sample of that intellectual smorgasbord – but readers are also invited to look at the conference archive (<https://liw2018.sched.com>), as many sessions added attachments of handouts, slides and more. I also encourage readers to reach out to our presenters directly with questions and discussion. We librarians know – better than most – that scholarship is a conversation, so please read on, join in, share your voice and become part of LIW 2018.

Laureen P. Cantwell

Tomlinson Library, Colorado Mesa University, Grand Junction, Colorado, USA