Wading in before Diving in: Preparing Library Students for Professional Participation

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Preparing Library Students for Professional Participation
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What is QuasiCon?

What:
Unconference + professional-like conference = QuasiCon

Who:
• Host: American Library Association (ALA) student chapter
• Attendees: Library and Information Science (LIS) students and professional librarians

When:
Annually in February, since 2012

Where:
University of Michigan School of Information (UMSI), Ann Arbor, MI

Theme for 2016:
What Libraries Can Do for You!

Why is a student-led conference needed?

LIS students need ...
• an introduction to professional conferences during graduate school
• experience giving presentations to a professional audience
• space to informally discuss ideas, outside of the classroom
• to learn how to network in a low-stakes yet professional-like environment
• an opportunity to engage in service work

QuasiCon 2016 by the numbers

47 attendees
27 presenters
9 Planning Committee members
5th annual conference

Benefits of a student-led conference

For library students

As presenters
• Learn to submit a conference proposal
• Prepare visual aids; practice presenting
• Experience presenting and addressing audience questions
• Add presentation to their CVs

As attendees
• Choose among conference sessions
• See a model for professional presentations
• Gather ideas for their own presentations and projects
• Network with professional librarians
• Interact with professional organizations

As members of the Planning Committee
• Develop valuable skills: marketing, fundraising, proposal evaluation, event planning, project management, and service work

For professional librarians

• Hear the range of interests of students
• Glimpse the current LIS curriculum
• Scout future talent for their library
• Recruit for professional organizations
• Share their expertise from the field
• Demonstrate professional engagement and lifelong learning
• UMSI alumni: Reconnect with their alma mater

Lessons learned
✓ Create a diverse Planning Committee. Each member brings unique strengths, experiences, and professional network.
✓ Send targeted requests, which yield more responses than blanket email requests.
✓ Provide food for attendees, including those with dietary restrictions. Ending the day with cake has been a hit!
✓ Pick swag that adds value to the conference.
✓ Build a support network.
✓ Assess the impact of the conference by gathering attendee feedback.
✓ Collect suggestions for improvement from the Planning Committee members.

QuasiCon promotes...

Diversity
• Keynote speaker: Jennifer Taggart, Assistant Head of Youth Services at Bloomfield Township Public Library and Library Journal Mover & Shaker

Presentation: Creating inclusive programming and collections for patrons with special needs

Information literacy
• Attendees participate in the scholarly conversation, one of the frames in the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education.

Inclusion
• QuasiCon is free and open to the public. Held at UMSI, the conference is accessible to all UMSI students.

Acknowledgements
• ALA student chapter at UMSI
• QuasiCon’s founders (UMSI graduate students during the 2011-12 academic year)
• Members of the Planning Committee
• All attendees