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Wading in before Diving in: 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
- 4 mos. of planning
- 50-60 volunteer hours per member
- 90 bagels, 2 sheet cakes, and countless cups of coffee and tea!

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**

- **As presenters**
  - 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

**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.

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

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