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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
- 3 librarians
- 27 presenters
- 9 Planning Committee members
- 1 keynote speaker
- 50-60 volunteer hours per member
- 9 mos. of planning
- 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

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

Information literacy
- Attendees explore online resources during a presentation of data visualization and literacy

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

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- Members of the Planning Committee
- All attendees