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
10 librarians

27 presenters
3 UMSI faculty

9 Planning Committee members
+ 1 keynote speaker

5th annual conference
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

• 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

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

QuasiCon 2016 gave attendees dry erase markers to use on the whiteboard tables during the unconference discussions