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

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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
5th annual conference
10 librarians
3 UMSI faculty
+ 1 keynote speaker
50-60 volunteer hours per member
4 mos. of planning
90 bagels, 2 sheet cakes, and countless cups of coffee and tea!

Benefits of a student-led conference

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

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

For library students
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

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

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

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

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