

# ALA Conference Report

## Chicago, IL, July 11-July 13, 2009

Conference report by **Laura Burt, Reference and Instruction Librarian,  
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I attended ALA in Chicago this summer hoping to think more deeply about library research and the larger roles academic libraries play in communities. As always, ALA was a whirlwind experience as I attended several sessions, met up with colleagues, and enjoyed the chance to see what new database changes are coming with trips to the exhibits. The following report summarizes some of the more thought-provoking presentations I attended.

### **FYE: Connecting First-Year College Students with the Library**

This presentation was packed, and I'm looking forward to spending some time at a future date putting together my notes with the handouts that were distributed. Donna Younger, who spoke first, discussed college retention, providing students with momentum, and a sense of belonging in the college. In her work, she used the acronym WISE to help her college staff to better connect with students. I look forward to reading the source material Younger referenced, and thinking more about the concept of the timeliness of instruction, and how to reach students in helpful ways. Librarians who followed Younger discussed their work with instruction, FYE, and assessment. A common theme presented by the participants was that of collaboration, and willingness to evaluate and change library practices to suit different user groups. A breakdown of the WISE acronym follows:

- Welcoming: Providing hospitality, and anticipating the needs of students. Offer them your best.
- Informing: Making information (about the college and the educational process) available to all. Making sure that the **right information** is available at the **right time**.
- Supporting: Providing support services to students as the students deem them necessary.
- Engaging: Creating situations where faculty and staff have the opportunity to have personal, active involvement with students.

### **Librarian/Scholar: From Research Question to Results**

This was an interesting session to attend, as it gave me some ideas about how to present the research process to students, and hearing about the experiences of other researchers presenting was fun. Some of the material from the Qualitative Research presenter, Dr. Robert Larabee, was reinforced by the session I attended Monday morning and nearly every presenter stressed the power of the IRB. I also very much liked the idea of a research agenda fueling future projects and ideas, as well as having the viewpoint and background information that would help the research process move more smoothly.

## **Net Neutrality and its Implications for Libraries**

I was able to learn the latest developments in net neutrality, and hear what experts had to say about the topic at this session.

## **Pay Attention to Your Users! Conducting Qualitative Research to Reinvent Library Services**

This was a fascinating and well-led presentation about the methodology and purpose for conducting qualitative library research. The leaders opened with a strong plea that librarians conduct library research, both to learn about the needs of our patrons and to advance knowledge in our profession. Highlights of the presentation included:

- Qualitative research builds the theoretical models that quantitative research can test; therefore, it can be a good method to choose if there is little research on a particular group of people/context.
- The context provided by the research is often the most valuable part of the research, providing information about people and processes in a particular user group.
- The sample size of qualitative research subjects can be very small, so long as the research is sufficiently detailed (deep).

## **ACRL President's Program: Advocacy in Today's Environment**

This session, led by Stephanie Vance, was an interesting opportunity to imagine the role of librarians as citizens. Vance discussed the role of the political process in the day-to-day lives and how to best approach political figures at all levels to make requests. Tips that Vance taught (such as paying attention to your audience, and following up to answer any questions the leader may have) made sense and would work with academic administrations and community leaders, as well as political figures. Other highlights of the session:

- Political leaders are mainly concerned with their own constituents. Make sure that you either are a constituent yourself, or that you highlight how you serve their constituents (and how following up on your request would similarly help them serve their constituents.)
- Make sure that contacts with political leaders are personal, well informed, and well-orchestrated. Don't walk into the office to read a form letter to them.
- Know the context of your request: does what you are asking dovetail with the goals of the elected official? How?