

LOEX 2007 *Uncharted Waters: Tapping the Depths of our Community to Enhance Learning*

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LOEX packs more into its day-and-a-half long conference than most professional conferences do in a week. In between the kick-off dessert extravaganza aboard a sternwheeler boat on Thursday night to the wrap up session on Saturday afternoon, LOEX featured a number of engaging and practical sessions focused on a variety of topics related to library instruction and information literacy. On top of all that, they also managed to squeeze in a dinner show featuring giant millipedes, a small alligator, a huge boa constrictor and a medium-sized capuchin monkey, among other creatures.

The theme of this year's conference encouraged attendees to look beyond the traditional bounds of our libraries and institutions to see what else might be out there which we could learn from and apply back in our "real" worlds. The plenary speaker was an excellent example of this. Dr. Pat Wolfe spoke about the connection between recent brain research and how we teach. She said that it has only been in the last thirty years or so that the technology has developed so that we can actually see what live brains do in response to various tasks (previously only dead brains could be studied). Now that we know how the brain responds in certain ways to various teaching methods, Dr. Wolfe emphasized that we need to "teach to the brain" and it behooves anyone in education, including teaching librarians, to know about how the brain works. She didn't mean to imply that anyone is necessarily a bad teacher, but that we're not able to articulate our methods and that "we've been working with brains that we don't understand." For example, we know that active learning results in better retention, but why? Brain research can explain this and, when understood, can help us craft more meaningful and effective assignments and exercises for our students.

I was particularly interested in attending Leslie Foutch's presentation on How to Embed a Librarian as a colleague and I will be working on a similar project in the upcoming Fall 2007 semester. Foutch actually attended every session of a Vanderbilt class over an entire semester and made herself available to the graduate-level students in it who were all focused on the final 20 page APA style research paper. This level of infiltration, combined with a series of extracurricular workshops she offered to teach the students APA citation style, certainly was admirable, though I worry about the scalability of this kind of embedding. I'd like to experiment with some combination of this kind of personal attention as well as technical components, like links in course management systems and tailored assignments tied to library resources, etc.

Speaking of tailored assignments, one of the best sessions I went to was called "From Guest Lecturer to Assignment Consultant: Exploring a New Role for the Teaching Librarian." Kathleen Gallagher of UC Berkeley gave an overview of a grant-funded research initiative in which she and a team of faculty and staff, including educational technologists, graduate student assistants and assessment specialists, targeted a few courses and partnered to review assignments and re-evaluate them with an expanded focus on information literacy. Gallagher discussed how, as librarians, our knowledge of students as learners and of information literacy and of the library's collections and other resources complement that of the faculty. When we move from being a one-shot "guest lecturer" towards this collaborative assignment consultant model, a number of beneficial things result, primary among them, to me, is that the ownership of information literacy broadens to include a role for everyone, from the students themselves who now see less of a boundary between their course work and the "library piece" as well as for the course instructor and the graduate student instructors (who will someday be instructors themselves, in many

cases). In the examples Gallagher discussed, often a one-shot library session was deemed unnecessary given the new, more thorough research assignments and activities. Not only that, but these assignments lend themselves to being assessed so that the success of the learning can be measured. I truly feel that this model of assignment consultancy is where we as teaching librarians need to move towards to expand and strengthen our information literacy programs. The trick will be determining how to build up these kinds of relationships with all of the different partners involved, especially if you're not as fortunate to have a grant to help provide some framework and support for the project.

The plenary panel that met on Saturday morning was a mix of faculty from Palomar Community College, Alliant International University and Cal State San Marcos who shared their approaches to information literacy and with using their libraries (and librarians) as a teaching resource. It was refreshing to hear from those in the classroom frontlines and it was agreed that students are as smart as ever but that they just need to be trained in what library databases have to offer and in critical thinking skills needed to evaluate information sources and searching strategies. It was also agreed that it takes faculty working in tandem with librarians to make this work effectively.

The discussion sessions I attended showcased a variety of interesting projects and collaborations. Presentations by Clarence Maybee of Colgate University on phenomenology – asking students to describe how they *feel* about information and research and using their answers to refine instruction approaches, and by a panel of librarians and writing center staff from Longwood University and Cal State Channel Islands on collaborating with your campus Writing Center to improve learning outcomes were very informative. Judith Downie from CSU San Marcos told of her experiments with videocasting software which she uses to create online tutorials and, in effect, “clone” herself. Librarians Sara Prah from Colby College and Shana M. Higgins from the University of Redlands presented media literacy as a sexy new re-imagining of information literacy. In the last session I attended, UCSD's Susan Shepherd and Teri Vogel presented on Instruction 2.0 and I came away from it with a lot of ideas.

As we met one last time as a group to wrap up LOEX 2007, we were asked two very difficult questions. The first was “What *one* thing that you saw at LOEX do you want to try back at your home institution right away?” And the other was “What will you give up in your list of responsibilities in order to have time to work on this new thing?” I really don't know that I can narrow all of the great ideas I saw at LOEX down to just one that I'd like to try—let's suffice it to say that I'm mulling over an amalgam of a few of the highlights to put into practice. Nor can I say what could be cut from the seemingly ever-growing list of daily “to-do's,” but I'm hopeful that ultimately some of these new projects will maximize the efficiency of my and my colleagues' time so that our daily calendars become a little less hectic. I do know that I left LOEX 2007 with some newfound inspiration and ideas and am looking forward to this summer and beyond to try to work some of them into the Columbia College Information Literacy Program.

I encourage anyone who is interested to check out this blog which I kept during the conference: <http://caross.edublogs.org>. You'll find related links to some of the programs I reviewed here as well as additional thoughts and commentary on LOEX 2007.

Finally, thank you to LIBRAS for their support.

--Celia Ross
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