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Fifth International Conference on
Technology in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
Conference Report

Thanks to funding from LIBRAS and Benedictine University, I was able to attend the above conference held at the Wyzsza Szkola Biznezu in Novy Sacz, Poland, July 23 – 25, 2007. WSB has an affiliation with National-Louis University, and some NLU faculty have been instrumental in organizing this conference since its inception. I was invited to the conference to serve on a panel discussing library support for distance learners. This panel came at near the midpoint of a very intense couple of days packed with sessions and conversation. The conference itself was not a library conference, and the members of the panel were the only librarians in attendance. The main focus was on ways to use technology to serve students better, whether local or remote.

There were approximately fifty attendees in Novy Sacz. The organizers were disappointed in the turnout because previous conferences had attracted larger numbers. They felt that the location was the drawback this year. There had been some pressure to hold the conference at their home campus, but Novy Sacz is not the most easily accessible location. It is located about a two hour ride from Krakow.

The program' structure was inclusive. Every session on the schedule was attended by all, and the schedule called for two very full days of interaction that started early and ran well into the evening. The first day began midday and included a welcome address from several dignitaries, a presentation on the state of technology in the European Union, and two two-hour panels followed by a dinner reception. The opening panel, titled *Institutional Perspectives on Technology in Teaching and Learning in Poland: Challenges and Rewards*, featured faculty from American universities who also taught in the programs at WSB. They provided some background and areas of comparison between the US and the Polish institutions they worked with. The second panel, *Technology, Education and Transformation*, consisted of four very distinct presentations from the perspective of the IT professional. The first portion was titled Using Technology Planning as the Engine to Drive Transformation. The presenter was from John Jay University, and he discussed the development of a technology plan designed to lead the institution into new arenas and to strengthen curricular offerings by building from a technology base. The second session was presented by two IT professionals from

the University of Pretoria, South Africa. They focused on the development of smart classrooms to support instruction. The third session, The Multimedia City as the Polish Key Pro-Innovative Venture, was presented by a faculty member of the WSB. He talked about network initiatives between the university and the city aimed at developing a networked environment. My sense of this project was that it resembled the Blacksburg Project in some ways. His enthusiasm for the topic was clear and contagious. The final piece of this panel didn't seem to fit with the preceding pieces, but it did describe an interesting venture in distance learning. This session was titled Virtual Education in Rubber Technology. The author had developed a curriculum for remote delivery to provide career development for the employees of a specific industry in Finland. Although she didn't make this jump in her presentation I could see ways that her backbone preparation could be transferred to other areas of education.

The first session of day two was titled *Collaboration and Leadership: Facilitators' and Learners' Perspectives*. Of the five sub-presentations within this set, the most interesting were the first and the fourth. The first, A Text Book as a Mean for Knowledge Construction in a Collaborative Work, was presented by two faculty from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Their project involved developing an interactive textbook for an educational psychology course through social interaction. The textbook consisted of seven chapters, each housed in its own website, designed to elicit interaction and discussion among the students and the faculty. Given the basic parameters of each chapter, all participants in the class collaborate to expand on the framework while creating an interactive textual experience. The fourth presentation was by a professor from the Technische Universitat in Berlin and was titled Interactive Screen Experiments in Collaborative Environment. This project provided interactive access to real science experiments from remote locations, giving students the opportunity to observe and question the processes taking place on screen. The goal was to be able to provide the laboratory experience for students in remote locations.

The second morning session was titled *Student Support and Learner Performance*. The library presentation was included in this segment. Our panel, titled Librarians Online!: Innovative Models for Integrating and Delivering Library Services, included three librarians and a business faculty member. We discussed the models in use at our individual institutions for supporting remote and non-traditional students from both the library and the faculty point of view. We also provided some information on the *ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*, produced by the Distance Learning Section of ACRL.

The first afternoon session, *Technology Formats in Teaching, Research and Beyond* included segments on Blackboard, Information Communications Technology, gaming as an instructional tool, and peace education. The session on peace education didn't really seem to fit the format, although the presentation on their work with high school and college students was entertaining.

The final session was titled *Evaluation and Assessment*. The four presentations reported on tools and approaches to collecting useful feedback for evaluative purposes. The presenters discussed the benefits of online versus paper evaluation tools, assessing online information sources, and using web-enhanced materials to support under-prepared learners. The prefect of WSB gave a closing speech as we set off for a short trip to a local industry's headquarters for a reception, dinner, and tour. We were taken to a production facility that makes doors and gates. The owner started his business in his garage and now has a large modern facility that produces over 200 various doors (entry doors, security doors, garage doors, etc.) every day. He is a graduate of both the WSB in Novy Sacz and National-Louis University. His company places a high value on its employees and their families, and he feeds over a thousand people daily at his production facility.

The final day of the conference was a recreation day of sorts. All participants and any accompanying family or friends were loaded onto a bus early in the morning. We spent the morning on a quick walking tour of Krakow, followed by a trip to the birth town of Pope John Paul II for lunch. After lunch most of the group went on for a tour of the camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. That was a very intense experience.

In all, I found this conference to be well worth the trip. It is always a good thing for librarians to listen to as well as talk to faculty about their respective points of view. The entire conference was conducted in English, which served as the most common language for the participants. The attendees traveled from a wide variety of locations. I've already mentioned some of them, but others included many faculty from institutions across the United States and Saudi Arabia. I thank LIBRAS and Benedictine for supporting my attendance at this conference.