

LOEX 2009 Conference Report: Albuquerque, NM

Joan Shedivy and Owen Ellard, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology

LOEX motored out on Route 66 to have its 37th annual conference, “Blazing Trails: On the path to information literacy” in Albuquerque, NM on April 30-May 2, 2009. Over 275 attendees had the chance to listen to a plenary speaker each morning, which then led to 50 breakout sessions to choose from over the two days. Here are some highlights from the Land of Enchantment.

Plenary Sessions: Stephen Abram

Leading library thinker Stephen Abram kicked the conference off on Friday morning with his talk on “Information Fluency in a Virtual World.” Abram, Vice President of Innovation at SirsiDynix, has a unique, high-energy style that was combined with his up-to-the minute technology knowledge and tales of traveling the globe. His main topic was how libraries should deal with change in order to still provide what is at the heart of libraries – learning, interaction, community, innovation, passion and progress. In his travels, he keeps hearing concerns about where libraries and librarians “fit” in this increasingly virtual world and what technologies “belong” in library activities. He encouraged librarians to be the change they want to see.

Abram stated that we have to make sure we do not keep our heads in the sand as technology increasingly becomes a part of everyone’s day-to-day lives, particularly the under-30 year old millennials, who tend to be optimistic multi-taskers who are agnostic about what format they get their information in as long as it works for them. Tools such as MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, SecondLife, and whatever the latest innovation is/will be are tools we have to readily experiment with and use to connect with our communities. As he pointed out, when YouTube is the second most popular search engine, it is clear we have to think beyond the printed book and make sure we give our patrons context for the great amount of content that is out there in the world (virtual or otherwise).

Plenary Sessions: Susan-Deese Roberts

Saturday morning speaker, Dr. Susan Deese-Roberts gave a fun session called “Leading Student Learning”, which focused on an in-depth discussion of students learning modes & styles. Dr. Deese-Roberts, a Professor Emerita at the University of New Mexico, reminded attendees that ability and preference are not the same – just because a stu-

dent can learn something one way does not mean they prefer it that way. Thus, learning mode preference (be it auditory, visual, or kinesthetic) is important and instructors should not rely on only one mode. However, concern for these modes shouldn’t cripple us as we attempt to craft everything to each student’s individual style. Just make sure to figure out what are the 1-3 key learning takeaways and that each of these key points is covered in each learning mode – that way, as many students as possible will be reached.

Dr. Deese-Roberts also discussed a useful assessment tool when an instructor meets with students more than once – have each student create their own handout. When they develop their own guide, an instructor will be able to see a) what they have learned and b) how they best learn it. It will make more evident their learning preference and allow the instructor to provide feedback on the content.

Finally, she discussed learning styles, which have overlap with modes, and the different types of learners – imaginative (who ask **why** is this meaningful?), analytical (who ask **what** are the facts and how are things organized?), common sense (who want to know **how** to do this, so they experiment and tinker) and dynamic (who think **what if** – what can this become if I refine it or make it my own?). An instructor can utilize these styles to design instruction by focusing on “what” needs to be learned, followed by why, how and what if, but when the information is actually presented, be sure to move the “why” ahead of the “what” to give the students upfront the reason they are there.

In addition to the plenary sessions, here are some highlights from three of the 50 breakout and interactive sessions:

Breakout sessions & interactive workshops

(1) As instructors, we want our students to succeed, but can this come about by making sure they fail? The popular interactive session “Failing to learn: embracing failure for successful library instruction” by Brent Nunn of DePaul University and Terrence Bennett of The College of New Jersey dealt with this question. The session began with a brief introduction to the work of Roger Schank, a cognition specialist whose theories about teaching and learning include his belief that real learning has to be tied to some memorable, emotional experience (including, often most effectively, direct failure). The audience listened to recordings of

Schank speaking on the mistakes of traditional education such as the disassociation of learning from doing and the separation of instruction from the learner's motivations for actual use.

Then, discussion was generated amongst the group through a role-playing exercise in which a "librarian" gave a lecture on Boolean searching. Each table had a secret identity of librarian, professor or students with varying issues and motivations. For example, one "student" had broken up with his girlfriend the night before and had gotten two hours of sleep. His motivation for the class was to learn something that would help him get an "A" on his paper. In his case, not only did the lecture not capture his interest, but he didn't see how it was relevant to his goal and he eventually fell asleep. The outcome of the "class" demonstrated how the conventional sit-and-listen approach fails with students. This was followed by a discussion of how we tend to focus on teaching goals, but must also focus on learners' goals. The questions were asked: How do we inspire learners? How can we create a more memorable learning experience? After listening to recordings of a librarian, a professor and a student discussing how library instruction can fail and ideas about how it could be a success, a lively discussion followed on issues such as how to be relevant without wasting time, making learning personal, creating interest and establishing relationships with students.

(2) Preparing a quality dissertation or thesis requires some real skill, but helping time pressed grad students get those skills is a real challenge. Merinda Kaye Hensley, from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, led a lively interactive session addressing this called "The Savvy Researcher: Teaching Information Management Skills to Graduate Students." She began by providing a framework for answering, "Where do open workshops fit into an information literacy program?" UIUC pioneered a drop-in series for graduate students called "The Savvy Researcher", covering topics such as current awareness services, fair use and copyright concerns, scholarly communications issues, advanced searching skills, and citation management. The workshops encourage students in learning how to "think like a librarian", which means more than just knowing how to type in a search box, but understanding all the aspects of gathering and effectively using information over the long period of time grad students do their work. It was noted drop-ins have fallen somewhat out of favor, as librarians worry about lack of interest, but UIUC has been able to get capacity crowds by marketing the programs and tailoring them specifically to a target audience with real needs.

Additionally, with a version of speed dating Hensley called "PowerLearn", LOEX participants went through brainstorming exercises on information management topics that graduate students and faculty could learn from the library. They then interviewed one another in various pair sets to get ideas for lesson plans that they could take back to their own institution. Hensley wrapped up this portion with some thoughts on assessing open workshops of this type. She recommended the 1-minute paper, asking questions such as, "What is one particularly baffling aspect of the research process for you?" She uses the responses to improve teaching strategies in future workshops and get ideas for new topics to cover.

Hensley finished with a Pecha Kucha presentation, "Every path has its puddle: We wore rain boots so you don't have to." Pecha Kucha is a format in which the presenter shows 20 images for 20 seconds apiece to share an idea and she used it to share some of the things she had learned in the past year, so we could learn from the successes and not repeat the mistakes. It also modeled a way to present information in an open workshop that is energetic, and it wrapped up the session in a thought-provoking manner.

(3) During the conference's final time slot, Marc Mason (Arizona State University) gave an engaging presentation on "Beating the Competition: Librarian as Performance Artist" to a capacity crowd. Mason, a former stand-up comedian and improvisational theater actor, advised us that we need to beat the opposition (Facebook, cell phones, fatigue, etc.) by capturing our students' attention. One way to do that is to see our students not only as learners but as an audience we can entertain with wit, creativity and charisma, leaving them with a positive feeling about the library.

Mason began by taking about the great teachers he has had throughout his life. They each were creative, passionate and had a captivating personality. He then encouraged the audience to "find these qualities in yourself." Mason listed three new tools that he uses in his library instruction. First was "lying" (e.g., perpetuating a student myth about the secret vault in the library basement) – this has the benefit of capturing students' attention and creating a sense of mystery and intrigue about the library. Next he advocated using "mockery". He often arrives early to class and talks to students so that he can find out which ones will "give it back to him" if he has fun with them during class. Finally, he has learned to "not take it personally" by keeping things light-hearted in the classroom.

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(*Student Peer-Teaching ...Continued from page 9*)

Choinski, E. & Emanuel, M. (2006). The one-minute paper and the one-hour class. *Reference Services Review*, 34(1), 148-155.

Dabbour, K. S. (1997). Applying active learning methods to the design of library instruction for a freshman seminar. *College & Research Libraries*, 58(4), 299-310.

Germain, C. A., Jacobson, T. E., & Kaczor, S. A. (2000). A Comparison of the effectiveness of presentation formats for

instruction: Teaching first-year students. *College & Research Libraries*, 61(1), 65-72.

Senecal, K. S. & Fratantuano, M. J. (1994). Active learning: A useful technique for freshman library instruction. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 1(2), 139-152.

Walsh, J (2008). The effects of library orientations on student usage of the library. *Library Hi Tech News*, 25(1), 27-29.

(*We're in this Together...Continued from page 7*)

which we use instant messaging and shared e-mail could be accomplished using more traditional communication methods such as team meetings, telephone conversations, personal e-mail, and/or in person office visits. However, we have found that by using these tools we are able to communicate more expeditiously, and just as effectively, which has significantly increased our overall efficiency.

For example, our programmer often needs someone to test new site functionality. In the past, he would send an e-mail and then wait for a response. Now, he can quickly identify available team members, send a chat message including the link to the page to be tested, and get a response within a matter of minutes. He can then use that feedback to immediately continue working on his project. Similarly, we have significantly improved the turnaround time for implementing requests for routine web page changes through the use of our shared e-mail account.

Conclusion

Obviously, chat and e-mail are two simple to use and widely familiar technologies. As such, they are ideal collaborative tools since most team members will already be comfortable with their basic use. Of course, depending on the culture and makeup of your team there may be one or more members who are resistant to using such tools. They may be disdainful of tools like chat that they think of as "always on", because they fear that constant interruptions will impair their ability to get work done. In such situations, I hope that you can use some of the information provided in this article to discuss the management features that mitigate this issue (e.g., the "away" feature), and more importantly, the collaborative benefits for your team.

Although using these two technologies for collaborative work may seem like a simple idea, we have found that few of our colleagues are taking full advantage of these tools to enhance their collaborative work. With just a small investment in setup time, we have found that you can get quite a bit of "bang for your collaborative buck". In Part II of this article, we will move on to discuss a slightly more complex tools designed to provide a collaborative work-

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During the last part of the session, Mason gave the LOEX audience a taste of a three hour "improv workshop" he has conducted; all 80+ audience members participated. The first game was called "Yes and . . ." Mason began with various leading sentences such as "A 50-foot basketball rolled down the streets of Albuquerque crushing buildings in its path..." Each person following said "Yes and (fill in the blank)" which produced themes ranging from Godzilla to zombie librarians. The second game involved two audience members reciting a poem at the front of the room. The first person said the poem in a language they did not know (e.g., Russian) and the second person "translated" it, often with

hilarious results. These exercises encourage teamwork and build confidence in performance skills.

Mason made good on his promise that we would "discover a new sense of fun, learn how to make our students laugh a little, and add some silliness to a profession that can take itself a bit too seriously."

For more information about the conference, and the PowerPoints and handouts for many of the sessions, including from all the sessions listed in this article, visit the website at <http://www.loexconference.org/2009/program.html>