Ross' Rave: Coming of Age

Ross LaBaugh, California State University, Fresno

Jason rides a long board. At least that's what he called it when I asked him during an unusual lull at the reference desk the other night.

"It's long," he said, "so it's called a long board." Jason was not a chatterbox.

I probed. "So some skateboards are longer than others?"

"Yep."

"And, you ride a long board because…?"

"It was my brother's."

"And he has a new one?"

"Nah, he just didn't use it anymore. He let me have it."

"What's Darin doing now?" I asked. Darin worked in the library his first and second year. A finance major, I think.

"He's working at Wachovia."

"I hope he's not selling mortgages," I thought, but did not say.

Darin was also a lad of few words. He'd begin with a pause, and a slender, unfading smile. Never a full grin, but a friendly acknowledgement. A mouth nod. He had heard what you said. He had accepted the package and was tasting it.

An on-again, off-again roommate from the 60s would often get that similar, smoky, Cheshire-like expression

"How's he like working there?" I asked.

Pause, wee smile, slight bob. "Ok, I guess. I haven't really seen him much."

I knew they both still lived at home. They shared the same address, the same parents, same bathroom, kitchen, cell plan and wireless service; but, apparently, shared little else. I get that.

"Well, I can't imagine him in a suit, riding a skate board down Shaw Ave. to get to work."

Pause, smile, nod.

When does that day come? When do you know you've grown up, moved on, become an adult? When do you stop wearing your cap backwards, or stop saying, *dude* and typing *kewl*?   What day do you hike up your jeans and wear a shirt with buttons? When did Darin realize he was too old to ride a board?

I expect with most little life markers, there are no demarcation lines, but rather gradient shades which blur at a distance. Darin, probably still wore saggy jeans on Friday night, and played *Fallout* on his Xbox. One day, though, he put down his long board and walked.

Last weekend, the Library, and Division of Graduate Studies co-sponsored a Literature Review Clinic. We intended to limit it to just 30. Over 200 signed up. We had all makes and models. Social Workers, Nurses, Chemists, Family Therapists, Plant Scientists, Teachers, more Family Therapists. Some were young, some old, some full-time, some part-time. Men, women. Some starting their programs, others just wrapping up. A mixed bag, but each one had chosen to give up a Saturday morning to come.

I was puzzled. Why would over 200 people register to give-up a sunny, Saturday morning to listen to an aging white man rapture prosaic about literature reviews? It certainly wasn't for the donuts. (BTW: The absolute best book about this is the second edition of Arlene Fink's

Conducting Research Literature Reviews : From Paper to the Internet)

Having been out of the loop for a year or so during my Middle East sojourn, I was feeling a bit rusty and anxious. The content of the presentation was familiar enough, but the approach and the audience, a stretch from the usual, were enough to give me the willies. I compensated by overcompensating. Handouts, PowerPoint, online guides, sign-up sheets, evaluations. There was no way I was going to wing this.

I was warned by people who know, that the actual turnout would be far less than the number who had registered, but on the day, they came; they came early and they stayed late. It was weird.

"How can I find evidence based practice? Do I really have to read a hundred articles? How do I know if this is a peer reviewed publication? What's the best way to organize the lit review? Is there a way to find who has cited whom? How do you know when you're done?"

These were not blank eyed questions from FYErs; these were questions from serious students with serious interest in doing bibliographic research in a mature, proficient and professional way. For whatever reason (e.g., motivation from their professors, pressure from peers, nagging from their families) they were sitting in a crappy lecture hall wanting answers… from me.

All of us who have been in the lib biz for a while know that teaching grad students is the best… and the worst. On the one hand, they are keen, interested, acquainted with the discipline, and adult. On the other hand, they are keen, interested, acquainted with the literature and adult! They can have an overzealous passion for the esoteric, fail to see the larger picture and take an all too serious, narrow approach to their research. Even more disconcerting, however, is their unending quest to find exactly what they think they need, when you and I know, that, a.) it doesn't exits; and, b.) the continuous search is symptomatic procrastination based on fear to start writing.

> *For the Snark's a peculiar creature, that won't*
> *Be caught in a commonplace way.*
> *Do all that you know, and try all that you don't:*
> *Not a chance must be wasted to-day!*
>
> The Hunting of the Snark, Lewis Carroll

On this day, another thought occurred to me. Perhaps, for some of these overstressed and underserved students, this was a coming of age. Wikipedia, Yahoo, dog-earned articles from bygone classes, and dead leads from their cohorts wasn't going to cut it anymore. Snagging a couple of citations from findarticles.com or E-reserves may have gotten them through Psych 251, but that was during their minor league days. This was the real deal. Perhaps they were actually beginning to accept themselves into the discourse community to which they aspired.

All I do know for sure, is that no one brought a long board.

---

or can be added via extensions (see: http://lifehacker.com/5044518/enable-chromes-best-features-in-firefox), and the rest will likely soon be co-opted by developers and integrated into the established browsers. Also, because it is beta software, Chrome may not be as stable as it eventually will be, nor does it have nearly all the add-ons that have been built for Firefox. But, as I've said many times in the past, when it comes to software development, I view competition as a positive force that pushes competitor companies to continually improve the quality of the products they produce.

Despite the fact that this time I didn't discover the next "killer app", I don't regret my decision to dive into the deep end and try out a new technology early in its life cycle. As a result of this experience, I am eager to try again and would encourage you to do so as well. In the end, I am certainly convinced of the value of such experimentation and the potential it provides for identifying "technology that matters."