

## LOEX 2019 Conference Report: Minneapolis, MN

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The 47th annual LOEX conference was held May 9-11, 2019 in downtown Minneapolis. The conference theme of *Up North: Reflect, Reconnect, Renew* was based on a core idea of conferences like LOEX—that we need to take a break, recharge, and come out inspired & refreshed with ideas from our colleagues. A full-capacity crowd of librarians (430 people) were in attendance to discuss the latest in library instruction and information literacy. After preliminary activities on Thursday—including a tour of the Walker Art Center’s library archives and contemporary art collections, and a very practical pre-conference workshop on creating usable & accessible online library instruction—we set forth with a Friday morning plenary session and then spent two days attending 68 breakout sessions and 11 student poster sessions. Some highlights:

### Whole Person Librarianship: Relational Literacy in an Information Framework

Sara Zettervall brought a welcome broad perspective that included public libraries to the mostly academic library crowd at the LOEX 2019 conference in her plenary talk titled “Whole Person Librarianship: Relationship Literacy in an Information Framework.” She is the founding consultant and trainer for Whole Person Librarianship, “which applies social work concepts to library practice,” and also works as a Community Engagement Librarian for the Hennepin County (Minn.) Library System, serving populations such as East African immigrants and refugees.

Zettervall began by sharing her collaboration with Dr. Mary C. Nienow, who directs the BSW program at Saint Catherine University. Together they have recently published a book titled *Whole Person Librarianship: A Social Work Approach to Patron Services*. The title comes from Dr. Nienow’s observation that “social workers serve the whole person.” Zettervall herself came to “whole person librarianship” because she felt that while librarians stand at a “pretty cool” intersection where they both help people and organize information, in library school she didn’t learn much about actually helping people who, for example, may be housing insecure or have a mental illness. And why take a social work approach to learning about how to help people? Zettervall quotes Brené Brown, who in *Daring Greatly*, wrote, “Social work is all about leaning into the discomfort of ambiguity and uncertainty, and holding open an empathic space so people can find their own way,” a perspective that likely resonates with many librarians who recall having those very feelings when working with patrons and their own desire to help.

The relationship between librarianship and social work began to be more formally established at least a decade ago, when the San Francisco Public Library [hired a social worker](#) in 2009. Now there are over 100 library and social work partnerships across the world, as documented on a map at the Whole Person Librarianship website: <https://wholepersonlibrarianship.com/>. These collaborations generally fall within one of three different configurations: social work interns in libraries, social service office hours, and social work-

ers who are on staff as library employees. Because many libraries—public and academic—serve diverse groups of patrons, libraries are excellent sites for social work interns, and Zettervall recommended that we librarians reach out to placement directors.

Turning to our own work as librarians, Zettervall argued that our role is not just about connecting people to books and articles, but also to community resources. To be most effective, librarians need to develop personal connections with and in-depth knowledge about the individuals and organizations who provide social services so when we do make referrals we can give our patrons the confidence they need to follow through.

Zettervall then introduced us to a key concept in social work that librarians can use to better understand our own patrons: person-in-environment (PIE). In practice, social workers look “at the whole context of a person’s life as a way to understand that person better.” This context can be conceptualized as three different layers. The micro level can be defined as the “unique aspects of the individual: health, disposition, ethnicity, gender, spirituality.” The next level, mezzo, includes information about a person’s family, community, friends, and school. Finally, the macro encompasses the larger social forces, including politics, culture, and structure of society. Another important social work concept is trauma-informed care, which offers a perspective to help us focus beyond human behavior, to the possible causes of behavior. Indeed, TIC is what most social workers in libraries immediately notice that library personnel need to learn more about. While one’s current circumstances and past history cannot predict their behavior, they can help us understand it. And, by better understanding someone’s behavior, we can prepare proactive responses for when we work with our patrons and develop library policies. As a profession, we are mindful about patron privacy so we are not going to systematically collect all of this information whenever we work with patrons, but we can use the concepts underlying PIE and TIC “to help us hold ourselves open to others.”

Zettervall is not advocating that we librarians solve people’s problems for them. Rather, she advocates for boundaries with working with our patrons. To clarify this point, she said, “The cookies are not your responsibility.” In other words, if someone tells you they do not know how to make cookies, we librarians provide them with them resources, like cookbooks, or tell them where to find the ingredients, but it is not “on you” how the cookies ultimately turn out.

Moving on to the final portion of her talk, Zettervall noted the importance of “reflective practice,” which means taking a past incident (e.g., with a patron), breaking it down to its components, learning from it, and improving how we might respond in the future. Reflective practices can be individual, such as journaling, but she recommends “taking it outside of yourself” by working with another person, which can be as simple as getting coffee with a colleague. As both individuals and professionals, we need to be able to, in the words of Dr. Nienow, enter into a space of “sustainable practice.”

## Breakout Sessions

In “**Combating Digital Polarization: Teaching Undergraduates Web Literacy Using ‘Four Moves and a Habit,’**” Yan He, Polly Boruff-Jones, Matthew Todd Bradley, and Paul Cook from Indiana University Kokomo shared their experience implementing the Digital Polarization (“DigiPo”) curriculum (<http://www.aascu.org/AcademicAffairs/ADP/DigiPo/>). This curriculum, developed by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ American Democracy Project, aims to educate students to recognize false or misleading information and to help mitigate the polarization that can occur in our society when encountering it. IU Kokomo is one of 10 colleges and universities that were invited to participate in implementing DigiPo, where faculty across the university introduced it into their first-year learning communities, first-year seminars in sciences and mathematics, and in political science and first-year writing courses. Faculty were offered training in teaching web literacy and provided the curriculum which could be customized for their courses.

The curriculum is based the work of Mike Caulfield, which can be found in his open book, *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers*, and is summarized in an infographic titled *Four Moves and a Habit*. Moving beyond the checklist approach to evaluating web information, students are first asked to develop the habit of being able to “check” their emotions, recognizing that their initial emotional response to an article, website, tweet, etc., can diminish their “critical perspective.” Then one proceeds to the four moves: 1) Check for previous work: In short, what else has already been said about what you are reading? 2) Go upstream to the source: Find the original information, which might include using sophisticated techniques like reverse image searches. 3) Read laterally: If you are unsure about the author or website, see what other, reputable sources have to say about the person or organization. 4) Circle back: Using what you’ve learned in Step 1-3, if necessary, begin a more informed search.

A significant portion of the presentation was on student assessment. DigiPo’s national coordinators created assessment questions and rubrics, and pre- and post-tests attempt to measure students’ ability to verify and reason about information they find online in a handful of different categories, including photographs, clickbait science and medical information, and fake news. In general, post-test assessments have indicated improvement in IU Kokomo’s students’ web literacy.

The audience asked several questions during the Q&A. One person wondered why use Google to teach web literacy if it contributes to polarization within our culture? The presenters argued that Google is a powerful tool and that they wanted to stay consistent with the DigiPo curriculum. Someone else asked what we should do if students question the factchecking sites (e.g., Snopes) themselves. Dr. Paul Cook contended that as teachers we must be comfortable with “getting into the weeds” and willing to talk about the journalistic process and ethics. Also, “tenure helps.”

In “**Blazing Trails through an Untamed Wilderness: Improving your Library’s Self-Guided Help,**” Ruth D. Terry, D’Arcy Hutchings, Jennifer McKay, and Anna Bjartmarsdottir (University of Alaska Anchorage) led the audience through their ongoing web project that initially focused on updating online library guides and tutorials, but morphed into

providing students self-guided help that they could find and understand.

The presenters first described the complexity of their site (<https://consortiumlibrary.org/>) before they started their project. Recognizing several problems, they evaluated their existing help content and reorganized it into four primary groups on a new page titled Get Help with Research (<https://libguides.consortiumlibrary.org/gethelp/>): Planning, Evaluating & Citing, Finding, and Writing Assignments. Content was rewritten with a primary audience of students from 100- and 200-level courses in mind. All guides now focus on a single topic and are purposefully not exhaustive in scope.

The team adopted several foundational principles that guided their reorganizing and rewriting: 1) Treat all help content as format-neutral (e.g., video content about citing sources should be on the guide about citing sources, not on a separate page listing different video tutorials). 2) Reduce the number of external links. 3) Standardize placement of repeating boxes/information on guides, (e.g., the location of a “Need Help?” box). 4) Chunk content into boxes so it can be easily reused and updated quickly across guides.

The team noted that their work isn’t without challenges. They acknowledged both the “perfection trap” that is easy to fall into and also the issues related to dealing with instructional content “owned” by other librarians not on their team. In the end, the process was successful because 1) their team size was manageable (3-5 people), 2) they completed their work *during* meetings, 3) they kept detailed notes about where they left off so they could pick up again quickly after the busy instructional periods, 4) they met in different locations to maintain energy and motivate themselves, and perhaps mostly importantly, 5) they promoted their work to their colleagues not on the team. The key message is that simplified and centralized content can save everyone time. Indeed, using the newly reorganized portal in instruction rather than creating a new course guide ultimately means less work for librarians and a more consistent experience for students.

Eric Jennings and Hans Kishel’s session “**Information Literacy, Marshall McLuhan, and Supercomplexity: Teaching Students to Question Everything**” discussed their semester-long honors course at UW-Eau Claire. Over time the course title changed with student input to become “Question Everything: Living in the Information Age” in order to better reflect its use of the Socratic method; this method is used to examine a variety of sources of information and media, understand how it’s generated, and develop skills to be informed, responsible and engaged students, citizens and professionals.

The three-credit class has students review readings, videos and websites to explore Marshall McLuhan concept of “The medium is the message.” Investigating big questions such as “Why are you here?”, “How does the medium shape the message?” and “How does technology change us?” pushes students out of their comfort zone and prompts them to think critically. Sample assignments include daily reflections and “research your professor” in order to raise issues of data privacy and ethics, and additional reflections on how does social media change you?

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Today's students are now "liquid learners," which means they are more agile in their learning, they embrace technology, focused on developing skills and are more adaptable to change, and Jennings and Kishel had to determine how to evaluate them for their grades. Students are confused and think thoughts such as, "You just gave me five viewpoints, what am I supposed to think?" And without a singular clear answer they may give up on the supercomplexity of our modern world and its overwhelming data. Building in the opportunity to reflect on their learning helps students to draw connections in other classes. Jennings and Kishel often explain to students they don't want summaries, that for this class they want to know what students think.

Robert Detmering (University of Louisville), Samantha McClellan (California State University, Sacramento) and Amber Willenborg (University of Louisville) introduced their research on how to overcome professional roadblocks in the interactive workshop "**Do I Know Enough to Have a Voice in This?: Overcoming Professional Roadblocks on the Assessment Journey.**" Their research included semi-structured interviews with 26 instruction librarians who work at various types of institutions and are at varying stages in their careers. The questions examined their own personal experiences, within their library, across the profession and within their institution. Research questions related to professional identity, agency & status and challenges faced with assessment and professional legitimacy.

During this LOEX session, the participants were divided into six groups that each reviewed one of six prewritten statements. These statements had to do with professional identity and authority, feeling left out of the dynamic conversations, sense of lagging behind, immediacy of social media, lack of formal training, or being a new librarian. There were some guided questions to help reflect and discuss the quote and consider what could be done to reduce barriers.

Recommendations to break down the barriers were provided from an individual, institutional and professional level. On an individual level, librarians can seek out opportunities to practice on a small scale, ask questions on listservs, keep up with professional literature, and be more confident in your current professional development level as no one has it all figured out. If you're struggling on an institutional level, seek out assessment mentors on your campus from other departments or from other campuses, consider webinars and communicate to administrators that librarians' assessment is different than and

not equivalent to teaching faculty assessment. The profession and its professional organizations can also break down barriers by organizing unconferences, mini-conferences focused on accreditation, and conference planners can bring new or underrepresented voices to talk about assessment.

Alexandra Hamlett and Megan Lacy from Guttman Community College, CUNY located in Midtown Manhattan, presented on the Curriculum Enhancement Project in their session, "**The Times They Are A'Changing": Information Literacy Instruction, Faculty Ownership, and Student Success.**" Guttman Community College is a Hispanic-Serving Institution that is cohort based; it opened in August 2012 and as of 2017 enrollment of 1066 students, 96% between ages of 18-22. The college was developed in response to the low completion and retention rates that often occur at community colleges and has Information Literacy built into the curriculum.

As one-shot library instruction doesn't always make as significant an impact, they developed the Curriculum Enhancement Project—a program that would do away with one-shot library instruction and instead partner with faculty to embed information literacy lessons and assignments within the classroom. Using a model of shared ownership, information Literacy is designed and supported by the librarians but actually led and taught by the faculty and instructors.

Hamlett and Lacy recognized that they needed faculty incentives (a meaningful monetary bonus) to encourage partnerships, so they acquired additional financial resources from a grant. Additionally, a structured strategy of reviewing faculty syllabi (two months before the semester), professional development opportunities (one month before the semester) and development of the faculty toolkit for lesson plans (<https://bit.ly/2PSj9n6>) increased faculty readiness and student success. Faculty reported the syllabus review as most helpful. Assessment of this project shown students feeling more knowledgeable and confident in their research skills.

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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/2019/sessions.html>