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LOEX 2016: Learning from the past, building for the future

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LOEX 2016, *Learning from the Past, Building for the Future*, (5-7 May 2016) marked my third attendance at this excellent academic library instruction conference (<http://www.loexconference.org>). Held in downtown Pittsburgh this year, my previous two LOEX experiences took me to the south (Nashville 2013) and the west (Denver 2015).

The enthusiasm and energy of the presenters and attendees was palpable throughout the conference's duration, emanating from the plenary to the final breakout sessions, many of the latter attended by librarians toting suitcases and fond farewells to both new colleagues and the Iron City.

I spoke with Brad Sietz, LOEX Director, to learn more about the organisation's host location choice. Sietz explained:

LOEX was fortunate to be in a great location like Pittsburgh and certainly that was a big reason it was so popular this year. While perhaps not an obvious 'conference' city, it is driveable for a good percentage of academic librarians and it is relatively reasonably priced while still being a walkable, interesting city. (2016)



Sunset in Pittsburgh from atop the Duquesne Incline © Katelyn Angell, licensed under [CC BY-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/)

Just as Pittsburgh is dotted with a multitude of majestic bridges connecting the neighbourhoods of this inventive city, LOEX is an entity which consistently brings together librarians from across the country united in our commitment to innovating teaching and learning within higher education. This year's conference boasted the highest number of attendees in its 44-year history. 430 people registered for LOEX 2016, surpassing the previous high of 400 attendees at the Columbus

conference in 2012 (Sietz 2016). Explaining his decision to go to LOEX for the first time, Eric Shannon, a librarian at Franklin Pierce University, commented:

I was excited to attend a conference that received such excellent reviews from colleagues and friends. LOEX lived up to my expectations by proving to be a well-organized, informative and enjoyable event. It was great to attend a conference that was exclusively geared toward the work that I do as an instruction librarian and I am already looking forward to next year's event in Lexington! (2016)

As is the case every year, the LOEX conference programme was packed with a diverse list of 67 breakout sessions, making it difficult to narrow down which presentations to select! Luckily, LOEX attendees are often very active Twitter users, and thus librarians were able to learn about simultaneous session content via the #loex2015 hashtag. When I asked him to describe the topical content of LOEX 2016, Sietz reported:

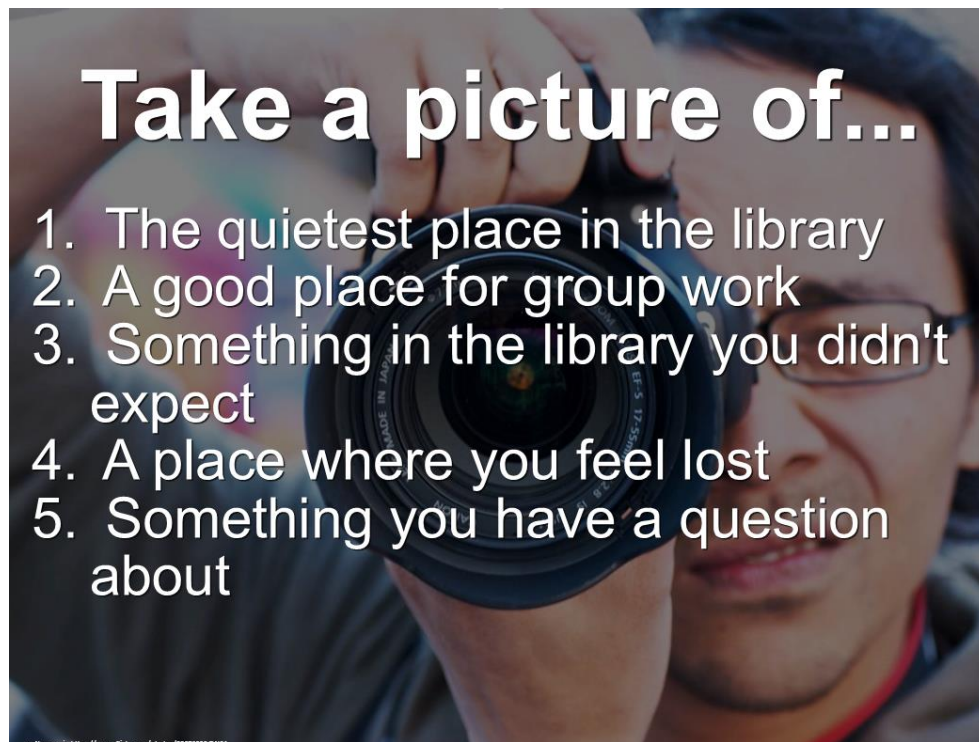
Overall, the content continued to be about basically anything and everything regarding library instruction and information literacy, though we did have more sessions on Critical Information Literacy and also Instructional Design this year. (2016)

Every event that I attended provided me with ideas and implications for both my teaching practice and scholarly agenda. I made good use of the notebook provided to me at registration (and appreciated the inclusion of multicolored and multi-sized sticky notes!). May 5, the first day on the docket, featured a pre-conference workshop led by Melissa Mallon of Vanderbilt University. This interactive and highly relevant workshop was called *Creating a culture of authentic assessment: assessing student learning with instructional technologies*, and was followed by the annual conference reception.

May 6 rang in the first full day of the conference, beginning for many with breakfast at the convention centre but for me at Peace, Love, and Little Donuts, which (rightfully) bills itself as “the grooviest donut shop this side of the Milky Way”. This year’s plenary speaker was local Library and Information Science professor Dr. Sheila Corral, who gave a well-received and insightful address titled *Crossing the threshold: reflective practice in information literacy development*.

I was impressed with the high quality of the breakout sessions, and was pleased by the skilled blending of theory and practice demonstrated by the presenters. The first session I attended at the conference was *Neighbors helping neighbors* with Elise Ferer, Beth L. Black, and Matt Upson. I chose this as my debut because of its focus on librarians collaborating with undergraduate research departments to present scholarship as a conversation. I’m First Year Success Librarian at my university, and was confident that I could learn some new ideas for partnering with campus departments. For example, Ferer described an interesting project in which she partnered with the undergraduate research office at her institution to teach students visual literacy and communication skills by group infographic poster creations and critiques.

Later in the day I attended a presentation titled *Helping outliers become college ready* with Savannah Kelly. Kelly offered clever technological strategies for assisting students enrolled in remedial courses, employing sections of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) framework to bolster her initiatives. An activity she used to better engage these students with the library is included below:



Slide from Savannah L. Kelly's LOEX presentation, *Helping outliers become college ready*
© Savannah L. Kelly (used with direct permission)

Another session which greatly engaged me was Eamon Tewell's *The practice and promise of critical information literacy in library instruction*. Tewell shared findings from a study he conducted in which he interviewed academic librarians to determine the incorporation of critical information literacy into their teaching practice. One of his slides said critical information literacy "aims to understand how librarians participate in systems of oppression and find ways for librarians and students to act upon these systems". Critlib is becoming increasingly recognised within the field, and I was happy to see LOEX acknowledge this development.

Despite my inability as a mere human to attend all 67 panels, I am confident that the many I was unable to go to were similarly creative, engaging, and beneficial to our collective knowledge and work as instruction librarians. LOEX 2017 will take place in Lexington, Kentucky - famous for horses, bluegrass music, and soon to be for hosting a spectacular library instruction conference.

References

Shannon, E. 2016. Email to K. Angell 16 May 2016.

Sietz, B. 2016. Email to K. Angell 16 May 2016.