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LILAC 2017: Interviews with bursary winners

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1. Introduction

This year's Librarians' Information Literacy Annual Conference (LILAC) was held at Swansea University's Bay Campus from Monday 10th to Wednesday 12th April. This new campus, armed with a beautiful view of its very own beach, played host to hundreds of enthusiastic information literacy (IL) librarians and an action-packed agenda of keynotes, interactive sessions and networking.



The beach at Swansea University Bay Campus [CC-BY-SA](#): Leanne Workman

As one of the two winners of the student award funded by the Information Literacy Group (ILG), I was lucky enough to both attend LILAC and interview this year's bursary winners. Four bursaries are available for those sectors – public, health, school and further education (FE) – where lack of funding means they are typically under-represented at LILAC. It was a real pleasure to chat about all things IL with colleagues in different sectors from my own.

I first caught up with Becky Scott, the librarian from St Aubyn's School in Essex, an independent school of over 500 students. Becky highlighted that the higher education (HE) focus of LILAC can prove a difficult barrier to attendance for other sectors, especially when budgets are tight. However, this bursary will allow her to take ideas back to her school as well as the School Library Association (SLA) conferences and thus illustrate the tangible value of attending LILAC. Myfanwy Jones, Library Manager at Conwy County Borough Council, concurred and said that for her, the ability to come to LILAC to gather ideas and then report back was her way of advocating the importance of LILAC.

Rebecca Chetwood, a school curriculum librarian at Leeds City College with over 40,000 students, added that despite an encouraging manager who wants their further education library 'to have a higher education approach to things', the money just isn't there. Aurelie Gandour, an information skills trainer for the Tavistock & Portman NHS Foundation Trust, stressed that she could only justify her attendance at LILAC last year by presenting a session on how to teach e-

resources to students with computer anxiety. Proving the worth and justifying the value of attending LILAC is something that all bursary winners seemed to face.

2. Similarities and differences between the sectors

Becky and Myfanwy's IL teaching is aimed at school-age children, while Aurelie's health students are more akin to HE students and the sessions she provides are similar to ones provided by both myself in HE and those Rebecca runs with her FE students. Aurelie and Rebecca also have similarities, in that their students are not always full-time and there are many that have little familiarity or confidence with the technology required to access information. From those who have been expelled from schools, to those studying at different levels (BTEC, A-level and BA degree), Rebecca teaches a wide range of students, which she acknowledges provides 'a really challenging' but 'really exciting' environment.

The bursary winners expressed a difference of opinion about of the value of gaming or crafting in teaching IL. Aurelie wholeheartedly admits that she loves to 'get crazy' using puzzles and gaming in her IL practice, and simply asserts 'LILAC is the best' when it comes to seeing all the possibilities in this field. Both Myfanwy and Becky, however, said they were moving away from the 'crafting' aspect of their IL teaching. Unless they could clearly connect the learning outcome to the activity then they both saw little benefit in doing it and preferred to acquaint their students with the library resources.

Another interesting contrast emerged concerning the matter of reflective practice. Becky, an ardent advocate of reflective practice, said she has learnt far more from sessions that have gone wrong than gone right and proactively reflects on her IL practice to adapt her teaching methods on the outcome of her reflection. Myfanwy, on the other hand, said that there didn't seem to be a culture of reflective IL practice in public libraries, as it 'just isn't done', though this is something Myfanwy said she'd like to consider further in the future.

3. 'Take-aways' from LILAC 2017

On asking the bursary delegates what they found useful about LILAC, there was no shortage of examples and ideas of how they can implement these in their own situations. School librarian Becky found the session *Discovering the reality from the myth: How PGRs "really" find and use information* very informative and found translatable tips to take away with her. Becky acknowledges that it may seem odd for a school librarian to find a session on university post-doctoral students useful, but the resilience shown by students when searching for information, even if it is a more convoluted route, is fascinating. Becky is keen to see how her students fare in finding information by themselves as homework, and build in some peer-to-peer learning by asking classmates to assess the information that has been found.

One of Myfanwy's take-away ideas from LILAC is the 'human book', taken from the talk *The human library as a means of addressing prejudice and intolerance* by Nancy Goebel, Yvonne Becker and Kara Blizzard. Myfanwy can see the value of having human books to help tell local history and engage the users of her library in their shared local history. For Rebecca, Angela Pashia's *Discussing #BlackLivesMatter in information literacy* was her stand-out talk from LILAC. As an IL teacher in a college located in a city high on the deprivation index and a member of her college's Equality and Diversity Committee, this talk truly resonated with Rebecca and sparked ideas of how to deal with social exclusion, promote inclusion and provide IL skills to all at her college.

Aurelie found practical inspiration and ideas in the talk on critical reading, a topic she plans to start teaching herself next year. On talking to the presenter Pip Divall afterwards, Aurelie was given leads to other books and ideas to help her construct her own teaching session. The joy of

LILAC, Aurelie asserts, is the willingness to share ideas and materials, which is ‘definitely a library thing’ and is not something that is always seen at other conferences.

Barbara Allen’s keynote, *Making an impact beyond the library and information service*, struck a chord with all our bursary winners, who have experience of what a supportive (or otherwise) senior management can enable (or disable) when it comes to library services and promoting IL. As Rebecca remarked: ‘it was a bit of a lightbulb moment’ to see how influencing management and engaging them with the services we offer is so important. Financial cuts, Rebecca asserted, ‘can compromise what we can do, but we do not let it compromise what we do do.’ Reflecting on this keynote and her situation at an independent school, Becky identified her institution’s priorities as value for money and reputation, whereas for her, quality was more important. This brought home to her the importance of the library portfolios she helps students create to take home in aligning her own and her institution’s priorities. These illustrate value for money, whilst also showing the quality of her IL teaching. This keynote talk held a goldmine of nuggets for librarians in all sectors, but the message of ‘don’t be shy about getting our agenda on management’s agenda’ was overwhelmingly encouraging.

4. To future bursary applicants

On asking all bursary winners whether they would recommend this conference to others in their sector, the resounding answer was YES! Aurelie exclaimed: ‘Fill in the form! This places you above 95% of the general population. Just put the pen to paper and ta-dah!’ You could be at LILAC 2018 before you know it!

As the interviews have shown, there are many parallels in what we do when it comes to IL practice no matter what sector you are in, which I saw with perfect clarity when Becky (the *school* librarian) found the session on how postgraduates find information really enlightening! The bursary winners agreed that to see more attendees from sectors other than HE would only enrich the LILAC experience and broaden our views. We discussed ideas on how to take LILAC beyond Swansea – for example, encouraging LILAC presenters to attend other sectors’ conferences to demonstrate what LILAC can offer to non-HE librarians.

In short, the goals of IL are often the same, even if the context is different, and the experiences can resonate throughout the information profession.

5. Concluding remarks from a LILAC newbie

This was my first LILAC conference and a friendlier, more welcoming bunch of librarians could not have been found! From the minute my face was plastered on the wall prior to the first keynote, there was never a moment when there was not someone to chat to, exchange notes with or share ideas with over a glass of wine or a mouthful of sandwich. I have come away inspired, like LILAC’s bursary winners, with a plethora of ideas and enthused to go and spread the good word of information literacy!

Interviewing the bursary winners has deepened my appreciation of LILAC: its ability to inspire its attendees with ideas and practical tips freely shared; to reignite a librarian’s passion for their work; and to know that we are all in it together, no matter what sector we are in. I leave the final words to Rebecca: ‘It may sound a bit poetic, but if we can just touch the lives of some of those students who are going off to wherever, our job is done.’