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Crawford at Large

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Cites on a Plane 2: This Time it's for Keeps

Here it is, another overstuffed special issue of *Cites & Insights* designed to keep you company on long flights to and from ALA—this time, the 2007 ALA Annual Conference. It's just like the last one, only different:

- **This time it's for keeps**: It has an issue number and date—it won't disappear on June 26, 2007.
- **Oldies, but not entirely**: While *COAP* was entirely reprints from earlier issues of *Cites & Insights*, about a third of this issue is new—and some of what's old comes from *Walt at random*, *EContent* and *American Libraries*.
- **It really is a CONFERENCE issue**: This issue is entirely devoted to conferences and speaking: It's not only *for* a conference, it's *about* conferences.

My apologies in advance for the length. It is what it is.

Now, on to the show…with one note. If you don't normally read *Walt at random* and you're reading this before the 2007 ALA Annual Conference, please do read the May 21, 2007 item "Post-ALA, post-OCLC: What's next?" (walt.lishost.org/?p=553) and the followup on May 28, 2007. Thanks.

Conferences & Speaking

The issue is divided into four sections, with crossover among sections (e.g., tips on conference going and conference building appear in almost every section):

- **Coping with conferences**: Suggestions for getting the most out of conferences and behavior during conferences. Also notes on conference planning, how to make conferences better—and issues specific to ALA.
- **State conferences and others:** Notes on state library conferences and situations at other conferences beyond the Big Two (ALA Annual and the Midwinter Meeting).
- **The speaking life**: Notes on speaking at conferences and elsewhere.
- **Conference-speaker arrangements:** How conferences (and conference committees) get along with speakers—or don't. This section also discusses various forms of payment for speakers and equity issues.

But First: A Problematic Example

The situation described here is true. I have the email that proves this really happened. The names have been changed or ignored to protect everyone involved ("guilt" and "innocence" don't apply). I won't say how many years ago I got this email; I do know that now's the time to use it. I'll use the present tense.

Inside This Issue

A section within an ALA division—call it the Oblique Angles section of the Math and Geometry Librarians Association (MGLA/OA)—organizes its principal program for the ALA Annual Conference. The program is a panel on New Approaches to Geometry Librarianship. Most speakers are ALA members, including one relatively new ALA member who's a rising star among library speakers (particularly where geometry's involved). One speaker is a vendor with a product that could be useful in Geometry Librarianship—and that vendor recently began selling the product to libraries. The vendor will be talking about the product (not a sales pitch but definitely a product presentation).

The chair of MGLA/OA's program planning committee stays in contact with speakers by email, using a typical email program that picks up the text of received mail as part of a reply and will keep doing so indefinitely, with more and more greater-than signs indicating each level of previous content.

Along the way, the vendor asks for travel expenses since this vendor wouldn't normally attend ALA—the vendor doesn't yet have a big market within libraries. The chair manages to get coverage: Not lavish, but enough to cover airfare, one night's hotel and a meal or two. Naturally, registration is waived, at least for the day of the speech.

As the conference approaches, the chair sends email to all speakers and the program moderator thanking them for agreeing to appear, nailing down the place and time of the program and tying up loose ends. The chair sends a single email to all parties.

So far, so good—right?

The problem: The chair's email is based on a reply *to the vendor* and includes all the earlier back-and-forth, including the travel funding.

One of the speakers, an ALA but not an MGLA/OA member, finds this troubling: A vendor is being paid to talk about their product while librarian speakers are paying their own way to do speeches that aren't self-serving and get zilch as expense or registration coverage. The speaker uses the term "screwed" to describe the situation.

Is there a problem here?

This discussion should be in CONFERENCE-SPEAKER ARRANGEMENTS, of course, but think about it now. I know my answers (see below). I'm not sure those answers are right. I'm absolutely certain one thing was done badly (and should have been easy to avoid). I *believe* this is the only thing that went wrong, but I'm sure some of you will disagree. You may be right.

Here's what I said, paraphrased slightly but still directed to the ALA member (using third-person plural for gender neutrality):

> The only thing that went really wrong here is that you saw email that should *only* have gone to the vendor. It was wrong and stupid of the chair to not strip out the previous emails. It was also probably an innocent mistake: Some email programs only show you the full set of included previous-mail text if you ask to see it.
>
> Otherwise, I don't see anything wrong here. The vendor isn't getting paid; they're getting what amounts to partial reimbursement of travel expenses. (The payment will cover the flights, ground transportation, one night's hotel if they can get a good rate, and *maybe* a few bucks left over for food. The vendor's not going to clear anything out of this, and if they stay more than one day, they'll be paying part of it themselves.) If the vendor pitches their product, that's wrong. It is clearly inappropriate for vendors to turn speeches into product pitches—and in my experience, good ones don't.
>
> Your not being a member of MGLA/OA is irrelevant for Annual and Midwinter. You're a member of ALA. That's all that matters. As far as expenses or fees are concerned, that's the end of that discussion: An ALA unit cannot pay an ALA member for a talk given as part of an official ALA program at Annual or Midwinter. Period. On the other hand, reimbursing a non-ALA member for travel expenses is legitimate and not that unusual.
>
> It's really simple and, although this argument continues and I'm part of the discussion, I have a hard time arguing that it's wrong:
>
> I can't imagine a situation under which that particular policy would change. As soon as you open the doors to possible payments to ALA members for speeches during ALA planned by members, you have a whole set of difficult issues exacerbated by the fact that 99% of programs are planned by people who only do it for a couple of years. (The same is true for members of state library associations speaking at their own state library conferences—and ALA's a factor there, since most state library associations are also ALA chapters, but don't require ALA membership.)

Equity issues come up in CONFERENCE-SPEAKER ARRANGEMENTS. What do you think?

Coping with Conferences

How do you make the most out of conferences—and how could conferences work better? This section offers some suggestions and opinions. It also includes conference-spawned comments about ALA itself.

Hints for Making the Most of ALA Conferences

Eli Edwards offered the initial list on April 30, 2004 at her weblog *Confessions of a mad librarian*. Here are short versions of her suggestions and others provided in comments on the posting

- The ALA event planner is, to some extent, your friend. It is useful if you know exactly what you want to do at conference.
- ALA unit webpages listing programming (for a division or roundtable) are your friends: Unit programming may help you decide which units work for you.

- "Your friends, physical and virtual, within ALA are your friends." Go to programs involving people you know, respect and admire. If you don't like the program, leave.
- "The conference program book…may not be your friend." It's huge, complicated and a tough way to find and select programming. "However, the maps inside are really useful."
- There's no shame in "following the food" to public receptions.
- Prioritize. "There's a lot to do and there probably won't be enough time to do everything you ideally would like to do."
- Try to get all your planned events on one big schedule.

I added another tip in a comment, "based on my failure to do so in early years":

- Don't overschedule. If that event planner is full, you're doing too much. Leave time for exhibits (of course) but also for sightseeing, goofing off, sleep.
- **A new tip for 2007**: There's now an official ALA conference wiki on the ALA website (wikis.ala.org/annual2007/), following up on Meredith Farkas' informal wikis of the past. **Use it. Contribute to it.**

Jessamyn West, the rarin' librarian at *librarian.net*, offered 11 more suggestions "that sort of interfile with yours." In part and sometimes paraphrased:

- Prioritize—but have backups for every event
- Meals can be for networking or for resting. Know which kind you're signing up for.
- If you're on an expense account, don't assume that others are; choose restaurants accordingly.
- "The free shuttle bus is your friend"—but don't count on it always being timely.
- Mail stuff home or check bags of freebies at the coat check.
- Don't hog the email terminals—and don't count on them being available.
- "You will walk miles every day, you may go hours without eating"—wear comfy shoes, carry water and snacks.
- Figure out what you're interested in early at the conference, highlight items in the conference book's daily schedules, then rip out those pages and leave the heavy book in your room.
- Mix it up: Keynote speakers and small panels, lectures and demos.
- It's easy to move into a leadership role in some of the groups you're sitting in on; think beforehand how much involvement you want.
- If you know you'll have to leave a small talk or panel early, let the presenter or chair know in advance, so they don't assume they're boring you silly.

Regarding leadership roles: It may not true for every group and every division, but I can attest that it's *very* easy to become an officer or program planner in a LITA Interest Group if you show the slightest interest in doing so. Being a newbie or lacking credentials won't matter: Good divisions welcome newbies and ALA units operate on the basis of mutual trust.

Mary K. added five more suggestions and seconded the "mail stuff home" suggestion (she notes that Canada Post had an outlet right in the conference center at the ALA/CLA conference; so does USPS at almost every ALA conference):

- Bring a notebook to jot down interesting topics and discussion points.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions in a program. "If you didn't understand something and need it clarified, chances are that someone else feels the same way too." (I'll second that and note it's a real kindness to speakers. I gave a talk recently in which one key term wasn't clear to many of the attendees; fortunately, someone asked and I had the chance to clarify.)
- Strike up conversations with people in line or waiting for a session.
- "Business cards, business cards, business cards." If you don't have them, you can print your own…
- "Try and travel in packs," particularly in a strange city. Chances are, someone will know something about the city.

All good advice. Do remember to glance at the ads in the conference book as you page through it, before ripping out the maps (and maybe the daily schedules): Those ads help pay for ALA.

More tips from NMRT via the ALA 2007 Annual Conference Wiki:

- Cooperate with co-workers. If multiple people from your library are attending, talk with them about attending different sessions and meeting to discuss your experiences afterwards. Stay focused.
- Allocate plenty of time for the exhibits. Don't attempt to see all the exhibits in one day.

Make several short trips. Use the program guide to select and find exhibitors.

- But also, allow for the seredipity of coming across a new vendor…who just might have a product or service useful to your library.
- Don't pick up everything you see in the exhibits hall. Ask exhibitors to send you information after the conference. Take advantage of the "expocard" you get at registration—just have the exhibitor scan it! Or, if you have business cards, use them. Or, some people bring self-addressed labels. Attend the exhibits early in the conference before vendor giveaways run low.
- Check *Cognotes*, the daily conference newspaper, for last-minute additions and changes.
- Wear your badge to meetings and social events, but not on the street. This brands you as a visitor and a possible target.
- Attend vendor luncheons and receptions, talk to people in meetings, on the shuttle buses and at other events.
- Avoid listening to an MP3 player or reading books when you could be striking up a conversation with those around you.

Most text originally appeared as part of GOOD ADVICE: MAKING SOME LISTS, *Cites & Insights* 4:9 (July 2004).

Seventeen Thousand Conferences

There's not one ALA Annual Conference. Despite the "track" efforts (well-intentioned but, in my opinion, more annoying than useful), there surely aren't seven or 27 different ALA conferences. The heading says it: If there are 17,000 library people in Atlanta in June (2002), there will be 17,000 different conferences.

That's a weakness of ALA if you're an organization or control freak. To me, it's one of the association's greatest strengths. For many years, my ALA was just a wrapper around the Library and Information Technology Association's programs and discussions. If you believe in focused education as the heart of a conference, the tracks may help: they can guide you to 7 major themes or 27 specific themes. For thousands of vendors, Atlanta is a trade show, the "big show" for the library marketplace.

I find Midwinter a better place to catch up with people and sample new interest groups (LITA) and discussion groups (everybody else). But Annual is the big deal—the only place for programs (other than the ALA President's Program at Midwinter), the biggest range of exhibitors and the widest range of extracurricular activities.

Originally appeared as part of BIBS & BLATHER, *Cites & Insights* 2:8 (June 2002)

Technology and Conferences: More Suggestions

I've always traveled without technology, for a variety of reasons. That means I usually arrive at ALA with no notebook computer, no cell phone, no PDA, no MP3 player, no nothing. (Maybe a $15 portable CD player. Maybe not.) The Internet Café is almost always overloaded at ALA and Midwinter, so I rarely even bother to try checking email or blogs. In short, I'm usually offline during ALA—with most arrangements made beforehand and some made on-site in old-fashioned "F2F" mode. You've probably also guessed that I'm not enthusiastic about Twitter (*for myself*) and that I haven't done a lot of IM—although the LSW Meebo room is interesting.

With that background, here's my advice for using technology at ALA and other conferences—current brief items followed by a couple of long repeats. For starters, here's what I would probably do if I owned a reasonably lightweight notebook: **Bring it**.

I'll second Ryan Deschamps' CIL comment on April 21, 2007 at *The other librarian*:

> *Worst Decision I Made*: Not bringing my laptop. Poo on the whole "turn off during the conference" thing. With all the twittering going on, it really seemed like I was missing the "real" conference. The laptop comes with me next time.

I've advocated turning off *during presentations and conversations* in order to be fully involved in the moment. I might have advocated turning off during conferences as a whole, or suggesting that my lowtech travel style is what others should emulate. That was not my intent, and if I said it that way *I was wrong*. If you have the technology, *use it*—within reason.

Twitter: What better time?

As a rule, I don't much care what you're having for dinner and don't wish to tell a bunch of people what street I'm walking down. I'm not a multitasker and not a prime candidate for Twitter.

But if you plan to have a device with you at a conference that can handle short messages, you might give Twitter a try. Even if you think you'll never use it any other time.

If you don't know about Twitter, it's not hard to find out. You couldn't have used it at the 2006 ALA Annual: It didn't exist. Here's the beginning of *Wikipedia's* entry (yes, I do regard *Wikipedia* as an excellent resource for current techie and pop culture items, whatever its merits as a general encyclopedia):

> **Twitter** is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send "updates" (text-based posts, up to 140 characters long) via SMS, instant messaging, the Twitter website, or an application such as Twitterrific. Twitter was founded in October 2006 by San Francisco start-up company Obvious Corp.
>
> Updates are displayed on the user's profile page and also instantly delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them. The sender can restrict delivery to those in his or her circle of friends (delivery to everyone is the default). Users can receive updates via the Twitter website, instant messaging, SMS, RSS, or through an application.

I think Twitter was **made** for conferences—specifically for the social, face-to-face, informal side that may be more important than formal sessions for many of us. Letting your friends know when you're at a reception or restaurant (or bar, if you're one of those rare librarians who imbibes): Lots of good opportunities. On the other hand, an "ALA2007" Twitter group would probably be unmanageably large, it's not entirely clear that Twitter will scale or survive, there may be security concerns and you could go crazy scrolling through hundreds of tweets. None of which matters that much (except perhaps security).

This time around, I may pick up a cheap, probably pay-as-you-go, device just for conference use and mostly for text messages, particularly given my current circumstances. If I do, I'll sign up for Twitter. At least for the duration of the conference.

Blogging, email and most of the rest

If you're a blogger and you carry a notebook or PDA, chances are you'll blog about the conference. Some of you will liveblog, typing bullet points or streams of consciousness as you attend a session. Some will prepare more formal posts after meetings, creating program *reports* rather than a stream of sentences. Some will discuss exhibits and receptions and restaurants and the like—and I'll read lots of the posts.

I'm all in favor of conference blogging. I'm all in favor of collective conference blogs and wikis. I hope you contribute to them when appropriate. I *love* to hear informal reports of how people enjoyed the conference (or didn't enjoy it). I count on program reports for information on the programs I won't attend, which is automatically 95% or more of the programs.

On the other hand, after a number of unfortunate situations, I've decided not to write posts or essays based on conference reporting. It's too easy for a blogger to report something out of context. It's even easier for people who don't like my take on something to claim I'm taking the reported text out of context. This has happened more than once and there's no defense against the attacks. I wasn't there; how can I be sure?

That has the unfortunate result of making most conference blogging anecdotal rather than substantive, at least for me. I read program reports with interest, but I can't act on those reports, at least not to disagree with speakers. If you can only agree, no substantive discussion can take place. I suppose I can't even assume that speakers actually said or meant what they're reported as saying. One more reason discussion may not be as vigorous as some might like.

There's one exception: First-hand reporting and commentary—where a blogger talks about a program they presented or non-program aspects of the conference. If someone had posted after Midwinter that Seattle doesn't have a homeless problem, that you can't get Washington State wines at conference hotels or that the monorail is a great way to get around various parts of town, I would feel free to contradict them—in the third case, even if I hadn't been to Midwinter. If someone posts with detailed notes on what *they* said, I can use that as the basis for further discussion. And if someone posts speech text, I feel that's a legitimate basis for discussion. PowerPoints? Not so clear: One big "That's not what he meant!" hassle came from *directly* quoting a PowerPoint slide. I guess people can't really be held responsible for those either, unless you've attended the presentation and heard the speech as well as reading the slides.

As for email—it's a chancy thing. If you plan to use email during a conference to communicate with people, verify that they'll actually have access to email and be checking it during the conference. Most attendees don't carry notebook computers at all times. Some hotels don't have wi-fi or have it only in public areas. Conference facilities can't handle frequent email checks by all conference attendees.

Cell phones and in-program chatter

You know better than to talk on a cell phone during a program, don't you? You *should* know to set the phone to vibrate mode during a program, since that miniature rendition of *We are the champions* is just as disruptive as the call itself—maybe more so.

What about text chatter—on a cell phone using SMS, over an IRC channel, Twittering back and forth or—tada—in a Meebo room? Personally, as a sometimes-speaker, I don't see an issue with occasional texting as long as you're not disturbing your neighbors. As with liveblogging, as long as the keyboard's not noisy, what's the harm?

There are other issues, ones that bring in a long essay from *Cites & Insights* (on IRC channels during a program—but it applies equally well to Meebo rooms and the like) and a "disContent" column from *EContent*, which you can choose to regard as humorous, on a phenomenon partly associated with cell phones. Those essays follow. As for the second: If you bump into me or ignore me at ALA, I'll just assume you're One of Them—particularly if that Borg appendage is in your ear. Enjoy whatever world you're in.

New material for this issue, although a couple of paragraphs are based on a blog post.

Speaking and Attention: It All Depends?

Elizabeth Lane Lawley (henceforth Liz) posted an entry on her high-profile weblog, *mamamusings*, entitled "confessions of a backchannel queen." She was at an invitational symposium. The meeting room was "laptop-enabled, with power and Wifi to spare…so I headed straight for IRC." (Internet chat software, for those even more ignorant of this stuff than I am.). "At the last few tech conferences I've been at, there's been an IRC channel specifically to talk about what's happening in the presentations…so I set one up for today's symposium, and people started trickling in." This means that people who've chosen to go to a conference session immediately set up a real-time text conversation so they can be typing in their own commentary *while the speakers are speaking* in the same room.

You can see the whole essay and the dozens of comments that followed at mamamusings.net; it's in the March 2004 archives.

Liz says she's more comfortable expressing opinions in the text-based IRC environment than she would be face-to-face—and she "was an active participant in the ongoing backchannel as the various speakers presented their information." After lunch, she posted critical comments about a speaker's presentation and someone else called her to task. He wondered whether it was fair to criticize someone not there to defend themselves, noted that this was a scary audience, and suggested they should be more generous. Liz felt this comment "had a chilling effect, and it made me reluctant to do the kind of stream-of-consciousness chatter in the channel that I find often sparks the best responses and conversation. Context is everything, of course." She notes that people who know her know not to take her snarkier comments too seriously.

Did Liz stop backchatting and "monitor the content" (that is, give the speakers undivided attention)? Nope. She set up another channel "specifically to house the smart-ass remarks." The results, apparently, were that the original channel quieted down—and the second channel got extreme enough so "people were noticing the ripples of laughter at times when laughter seemed inappropriate." Still, she concluded that what she got from the backchannel(s) "equaled or surpassed" what she got from the speakers—and planned to be back on IRC for the rest of the conference, "maybe in more than one channel again, maybe not." She also asserted that the backchannel is intended "to help make your presentation better."

Weblog comments

There were *lots* of comments on this posting, but if it hadn't been for the very first one, I might have skipped the whole thing. Dorothea Salo (who I've never met but whose thinking and writing I also admire) said, "Knowledge that such a channel would be available and employed would nudge me pretty strongly toward not presenting at a particular conference.… There's just something that feels wrong about using the comfort you find in the textual environment to rip into the comfort of others—especially others who, at that moment, are putting a lot more of themselves on the line than any of the backchannelers."

Liz, an educator and pundit, responded that she spends most working hours "dealing with rooms full of people looking for stuff to tear down about what I'm saying" and that the backchannel "doesn't create these ideas or comments. It simply reveals them." She would rather "let this stuff out in a semi-open environment than try to pretend that it doesn't exist." She believes the backchannel lets her "understand how people are responding" and modify her presentation if need be—and to be "more realistic about the value of being up in front of a room of people, talking at (instead of with) them." She went on to suggest that people are opposed to backchannels because they haven't taken part: "Fear of the unknown is a powerful thing."

Salo responded that feedback is good but negative feedback has a tendency to snowball—then said, "We can agree to disagree. The impression I still get, though, is that yes, these channels can create negativity where it didn't exist before and no, they don't improve the presentation for everybody." She also noted that a speaker will typically not be part of the backchannel, at least not if they're doing a planned presentation! She noted the difference between a challenging room (where "energy flows openly between speaker and challengers") and a negative room, with people snarking and laughing for no apparent reason.

That was the beginning. To cite some of many other comments:

- One person who has never used chat software during a conference presentation noted, "It strikes me as being a way to keep distance from what's going on."
- Scott A. Golder thought that the backchannel looked like "rudeness, however cloaked in 'technology' it may have been." He considered it disrespectful to go to someone's talk and not pay attention—as though you opened up a newspaper while the speaker was speaking. He thought a speaker should be given time to say what they have to say before dialogue takes over—and would hate to see wireless access make it socially acceptable to be disrespectful to a speaker.
- Liz didn't buy that. She called the backchannel "an opportunity for people to raise valid questions and criticisms, and have a dialog about them" and "an occasional outlet for shifting focus from the speaker." She didn't think that was always rude—an assertion followed by noting that lecture mode "is an awful way to convey most kinds of information" and that you don't learn well while sitting on uncomfortable chairs for hours on end, listening and not participating. She didn't consider it disrespectful to comment on a talk while it's going on—and wondered whether a whispered conversation with tablemates was better than a text backchannel. Finally, Liz noted that you can't dictate attention and that the burden is on the speaker "to make what you're saying relevant and accessible." And that some people's presentation skills don't improve because they don't learn from the responses of the audience."
- Golder responded: most of the time it was rude not to pay attention, critique and dialog should take place after the presentation and when you've committed to attending a talk, you should go to the whole thing.
- I stepped in (after more pro-backchannel comments) to side with Salo.

> I'd be reluctant to present at a conference where I knew participants considered it reasonable and not impolite to carry on their own e-discussions (or actual discussions) during my presentation, commenting on that presentation. Particularly if they somehow believed that those discussions, which I wouldn't see (at least not in real time, not without disrupting the presentation), were supposed to be for my own good."

Fortunately, as I noted, I'm not part of the technorati and unlikely to be invited to events like this.

> I guess social norms are different for different situations. Where I am speaking—always by invitation, pretty much always to librarians, never more than a few times a year—I expect that people who bother to show up will at least be listening for the first few minutes, not splitting their attention between me and backchatter. If I don't keep them interested, that's my problem, to be sure. I'd look for signs of obvious boredom, too many people walking out or significant snoring as indications that things had gone awry. (Incidentally, I do *not* regard it as impolite to quietly exit a presentation if it doesn't interest you—I regard it as realistic.)

- Shane Curcuru also saw differences of social groups and norms. At conferences like JavaOne and ApacheCon, "I'd say that speakers should expect that there will be backchannels." At library conferences, maybe not, "although I know a number of librarian bloggers that would create one… The social appropriateness will vary widely depending on the kind of conference it is." Curcuru noted that ubiquitous laptops, Wifi, chat software "means that online behavior during large group gatherings is probably here to stay no matter what."
- Ralph Poole objected to inattention: "If one is not interested in the topic or the speaker, leave the room!"
- Eirik Newth, a professional lecturer, discussed the practical problems of split attention for the lecturer and the extent to which the speaker loses visual feedback from an audience typing away on wireless devices.
- Joi Ito objected to the notion that people should pay attention. "Isn't 'stiff competition' generally good? I think lecturing as a form of transmission of information has had too little

competition and maybe a little back channel will help get rid of the boring drills and ugly power points."

- Adam (no last name) disagreed. If the speaker's taken the trouble to work out a line of argument, the whole thread may break down if they're not allowed to develop their point. "If you as listener are gracious enough to let me have enough space to express what I'm getting at, then you can have an informed place from which to disagree with me if you are still so inclined." Adam finds himself increasingly in situations "where there's what I regard as an intolerable disrespect for the basic (twentieth century) conventions of discourse."

After that, things got strange (and I do mean *strange*). One person noted cases where *panelists* appear to be checking email or backchatting, *on the podium*, while another panelist is speaking! The discussion continued with Liz differentiating between "engaged" speakers who work with their audiences and those who just run through their PowerPoints reading a canned presentation. She suggested that backchat happens primarily with the latter: When the speaker's involved, so is the audience.

Finally (for now), Salo added a posting at *Caveat lector*. Excerpts:

> I know what it is that bugs me about the backchannel. I think. Let me write it down and see if I've got it right.
>
> Individual people tune out of presentations individually, and do individual things to cope with their boredom (or their two-track nature, whichever). This is inevitable—and what's more, it's okay. It doesn't threaten a presenter's status as The Important Thing Going On In The Room.
>
> …But a backchannel? Could *well* be more absorbing than a presentation, for reasons that have little to do with the nature or quality of the presentation. [We humans] prefer running our mouths to running our ears. Can even *good* presentations stand up to that? Should we really ask them to?

A few unpersuasive arguments

I didn't intersperse my comments above for the same reason I no longer intersperse responses to letters in FEEDBACK. While I left out quite a few postings, I wanted to retain the flow of the discussion.

First, cases where I find arguments unpersuasive:

- Unless the backchannel is visible to the speaker during a presentation (with the agreement of the speaker), I don't see how it can "make your presentation better." If the speaker does the same presentation repeatedly and the backchannel is archived, maybe there's a case. I can imagine an audience member handing me a transcript and telling me to "study it for your own good," or pointing me to an online archive to do so—but I can't imagine my reaction!
- There's no contradiction between talking *at* people and talking *with* them. Good conference presentations include time for discussion, questions, even challenges—but good presentations also have narrative flow.
- I don't buy the idea that speakers (and listeners) who dislike the idea of a backchannel just haven't tried it.
- "Hours on end of sitting on uncomfortable chairs listening and not participating" is terrible. I agree. No conference should be set up that way. I also agree that lectures aren't a great way to convey information—one reason I never set out to arrange speeches and don't attend many lectures. Neither point has much to do with whether, once you've decided to attend a speech, it's polite or reasonable to start chattering away with others while the lecture is going on.
- Joi Ito may hate lectures. That doesn't mean that lectures have no place or that all presentations are ways of enforcing rote learning. "Boring drills" haven't been part of any presentation I've been to; I wish I could say the same for ugly PowerPoint presentations.

I originally called these straw men. That's too harsh. This list is also a distraction from the points I'm clumsily trying to make. Let's get on to that before *all* of you out there fall asleep.

My own take as a speaker

I speak occasionally—four to six events most years [fewer since 2004], never more than eight trips per year. I'm not on the "speaking circuit," rarely repeat the same presentation and almost always speak by invitation. Maybe this discussion hit me harder because of timing. As I read it (and wrote the first draft of this essay), I'd just returned from a freestanding speaking engagement. A couple of days later, I left to keynote a conference. And a couple of weeks later, just before revising this piece, I attended—but did not speak at—a conference dominated by the technological elite. I was looking for things at the third event I would never have thought of before this discussion. (I didn't find them, which may or may not be meaningful. It's worth noting that no more than 5-10% of participants in any session used notebooks during the session, although many more had them handy.)

If your group has invited me to speak, that imposes no obligation on you *personally* to attend the speech. Don't show up if you're already pretty sure you don't want to hear me.

If you *do* decide to attend, I appreciate the courtesy of, say, five minutes of full attention—*listening* to me long enough to get some sense of whether I'm worth listening to. I find it hard to believe that you're really listening to me if you're simultaneously monitoring a backchannel, much less participating.

I do *not* expect you to sit raptly (or feign attention) through my entire speech if I'm boring you, telling you things you already know or otherwise not deserving your attention. If you leave quietly (and I notice), I'll assume I wasn't meeting your needs or you had other demands on your time. If it's clear that many people are fading away, I'll wrap it up or change directions. Unless a presentation requires PowerPoint, I keep the lights up so I can see you and you can see me. I'll use PowerPoint later this spring [2004] for a presentation that *absolutely* requires visuals—and it will be the first time in five years or so.

Feel free to leave if you're bored. If you disagree with me, stick around and speak up during the discussion period. I *always* try to leave room for discussion and I welcome challenges.

Carrying on noticeable or audible conversations during my talk (or anyone else's talk) is simply rude. Go out in the hallway. If you're more involved with your electronics than with what I'm saying, I regard that as a little rude as well, and if you later raise a question that suggests you weren't really listening, I won't be surprised.

If you're backchatting without being obvious, I won't know about it. It won't improve my presentation—I won't have a notebook running while I speak and my speeches change direction often enough already without adding real-time chat to the mix. All I'll know is that you're not paying attention. But hey, as long as it's not widespread, I'll just tune you out as you're tuning me out.

If you leave after giving me a fair chance (five minutes minimum, ten minutes maximum), feel free to give me a bad rating on the conference survey form. If you stick around and hate it, *make that clear*. Maybe I'm a bad fit for the conference. Maybe, if you have specific comments, you *will* help me improve later presentations. Or maybe you just don't learn from me in "lecture" form. That's fine with me. I do a lot more writing than speaking and plan to keep it that way. You're welcome to make snarky comments about my speeches during hallway discussions and over drinks. Some of you (too few!) will make them to me. Don't be surprised if I agree with your criticism.

…and as a listener

I do *not* feel I'm obliged to stay throughout a presentation, at least not in most cases. If I'm not getting anything from a speaker and there's a way to leave unobtrusively, I'll leave. I don't think that's rude. Life is too short. (Sometimes, particularly after I've spoken, it's just fatigue and the loss of adrenaline setting in: I'd rather leave than fall asleep.) If I conclude that the speaker is an idiot, that I know a lot more about the topic than they do (and they're not providing new perspectives) or that the topic just doesn't interest me—well, I'm out of there. Usually.

I *do* feel I should give a speaker a chance. That means giving the speaker my undivided attention for five or ten minutes. I take notes—in longhand, because I found early on that even as a touch typist, typing distracts me from listening and writing doesn't.

I may take snarky notes. I rarely challenge a speaker in a hostile manner and in most cases I won't challenge a speaker unless I respect what they've said. Again, life is too short. I have no compunctions about discussing a session's shortcomings in casual conversation after the speech.

It's my job as an attendee to make intelligent choices on which sessions to attend. It's my job to give you a chance. It's your job to tell me and the other listeners something new, fresh, different, interesting. Much of the time, what you have to say is worthwhile but isn't relevant to my needs. In which case, I'll leave…as quietly as possible. It may not be a reflection on you at all. (If you're *horrendously* bad, I'll probably stick around to see how it all turns out.)

Type of conference, type of presentation

Maybe the norms are different for different types of conferences and for different types of sessions within a conference. I could be snarky and suggest that some of today's technorati have decided politeness is old-fashioned and nobody deserves their full attention, but I'm sure that's not true. A few possibilities:

- A single-track conference where the presenters fill their time slots from beginning to end with canned presentations, leaving no time for discussion or challenges. This is the worst possible situation from an attendee's view. If you've paid big bucks to attend, you probably feel the need to sit through all the speeches. You have my pity—and if you open a backchannel, I can understand why.
- A humane single-track conference with lots of time between sessions and for discussion within sessions. Here I think there's less excuse for listeners dividing attention between speaker and backchannel. Maybe some people have mutated so they're able to listen attentively to a speaker and carry on a textual conversation simultaneously—but I'm skeptical.
- Multi-track conferences where speakers are expected to leave time for discussion. If you don't care about what's being said, *leave*. You're using a chair that could be used by someone else, someone who might benefit from the speaker.

These are all traditional events. As a speaker, I'm frequently in the oddball situation—at a multitrack conference as a keynote or plenary speaker without competing program sessions. There are *always* other things to do—exhibits, hallway conversations, sleeping in late, taking a long walk, chatting with friends in the lobby bar. I don't expect everyone at a conference to attend a keynote. I *do* expect that when I'm part of one of several simultaneous sessions, people will be there because they want to be.

What about other kinds of presentations and other kinds of conferences?

- If the technorati gather with the expectation that text feedback will go on during a presentation, visible to the speaker, more power to all involved. I imagine it could be quite effective or quite disruptive. I don't see how an effective linear argument can be mounted in an atmosphere of continuous interruption, but maybe that's because I haven't been to these conferences.
- I agree that lectures are a lousy way to learn for many people, myself included. (That's one of several reasons I stopped at a BA.) You can have sessions where an invited speaker is really a discussion leader—tasked to offer introductory remarks, then lead discussion for the rest of the session. Last year [2003] at the Alaska Library Association conference, after hearing feedback on my keynote, I transformed my other two programs into introduction-and-discussion sessions. It was great. If anyone wants to invite me to do a session in that manner, I'd probably love it—but are you going to pay expenses and an honorarium for a few minutes of prepared remarks? (I've seen one keynote where the big-name speaker, paid far more than I'll ever see for a keynote, read a previously published essay for five minutes, then said he wanted to discuss whatever topics interested us for the rest of the hour. As a discussion section, it might have been great; as a keynote, "ripoff" was my immediate response and that of some other audience members.)
- Then there are panel discussions. There's a big difference between a multispeaker session, which can work out so the last speaker has little or no time because other speakers hogged their slots, and a true discussion (brief remarks from each speaker and lots of back-and-forth). I'm not sure what the social norms should be in either case.

Wimpy conclusion: It depends

As a speaker, I'd appreciate your full attention for a few minutes and I'd rather have you leave than sit there pretending to listen or chatting with others.

As a listener, I believe the speaker and listener both have obligations. If the speaker isn't meeting my needs, my obligations shouldn't require staying the course but do require minimizing disruption.

As a conference attendee, I want discussion. I also want to be inspired and intrigued by speakers, in ways that open discussions rarely manage.

I *don't* want to hear you read that published article aloud, when I could read it myself in one-fifth the time. I *do* want to hear what you have to say, have the chance to probe further—and, ideally, have informal chances later to discuss things.

Is text backchat rude? That depends. If it's done *as a matter of course*, I think it is.

Is audible backchat within the meeting room rude? Pretty much always.

Can you *really* get the most out of a speech while participating in a backchannel? I'm doubtful.

Originally a PERSPECTIVE in *Cites & Insights* 4:6 (May 2004)

The Coming of the Borgs

You've seen them—in airports and on airplanes, on commute trains, in the supermarket, walking down the street, in their cars, wandering around outside office buildings. You may even be one.

The borgs have landed. Millions of them are among us. Maybe they're not as scary as on *Star Trek*, but they can be pretty unnerving nonetheless. For those who aren't fans, "borg" is short for cyborg, a combination of person (or, in *Star Trek*, any sentient species) and machine. I was struck by the number of borgs on my last trip from San Jose to Boston. Returning, I found an article identifying a different variety of borg—and there may be more to come.

The borgs I saw were those with people being worn by cell phones in the form of earpieces that appear to be permanently attached. Maybe they're not surgically implanted (yet), but some borgs didn't remove the earpieces even when the phones themselves had to be disabled during flight. Maybe the people were wearing the earpieces—but it sure did look the other way around.

It's as though the borgs are obliged to report their location and what they're doing at regular intervals, with only a brief reprieve while the plane's actually in the air. "Now we're pulling back from the gate. Now we're taxiing. I'll be back as soon as we touch down." People on parole only need to touch base once a week; today's borgs appear to be on much tighter leashes.

The problem with borgs and with the pseudo-borgs who have one hand up to their ear as soon as the plane touches down is that they're *not really there*—as you see when they bonk you in the head with the bag they pulled down while checking in with whoever. Their minds, such as they are, are on the phone, with just enough left over to grab. Paying attention to your surroundings—that's so 20th century.

According to Leander Kahney's January 28 *Wired News* story, Markus Giesler at York University has identified a different kind of borg: iPod users who use the device to achieve "technotranscendence," becoming "cyborg consumers." These man-machines use several different technologies and are "highly connected, technically and socially." Giesler calls them "the future." They give their iPods names and consider them "body extensions."

Giesler's description of iPod cyborgs matches my sense of some cell phone addicts, although what he sees as favorable I find disturbing. These people have "transcended the here and now" through technology. You see it on the street and when driving. These folks aren't paying attention to what's around them—they're in their own world.

It could be worse. It *can* be worse. Those eyeglasses with virtual video screens in one eyepiece are getting cheaper. Combine them with earpieces in the frames (already available in borg-like MP3/sunglass combos) and a high-capacity iPod competitor with MPEG4 video storage, and you've got the Full Cyborg. When this person is sitting at the table next to you in a restaurant or walking toward you on the street, or—worst of all—heading your way in their Volvo, they're not there at all. They're transcendent cyborgs, grooving to their tunes, watching those random video clips, or yapping away about what they just did to someone (something?) at the end of another "body extension." Giesler says that the natural order of the transcendent world is randomness—shuffle mode is "the most viable strategy to access information that would otherwise be lost."

What's the connection to econtent? These people crave rich media—in little (maybe random) chunks that fit their scattered attention. They want it portable. They want it relatively low-rez so the mediocre Apple headphones, the little screen on the portable video brick and the marginal-resolution eyepiece are good enough. They want interactivity or at least the illusion of interactivity. Many borgs are affluent. I suspect many are happy to spend lots of money on gadgets and the content to keep those gadgets interesting. Target your econtent to their technological solipsism and "connected" disconnectedness and you have a customer ready to add your rich media chunks to their random "consumption strategy" (again quoting Giesler).

I find Giesler's thesis alarming, but you may find borgs a great new marketing opportunity. Just don't expect a universal market. Tens of millions of people like to work within the real world, enjoy looking around when they walk, can shop for groceries without disembodied assistance, and don't feel obliged to report that they've just touched down in another city. These people may even appreciate *being* in another city or country, since they haven't yet sprouted the technological extensions to free them from time and place. These remaining traditionalists include travelers and explorers, people who *want* to be in the here and now.

The borgs are among us. I doubt that they're going away. If your offerings suit them and you have a stomach for it, they can be a great econtent market. Just count me out.

Originally appeared in slightly different form as the "disContent" column in *EContent* 28:5, May 2005

ALA-Specific Issues

Shortly after the ALA 2004 Annual Conference in Orlando, various threads started on both LITA-L and PUBLIB related to Orlando, ALA Annual in general and ALA as an organization. The threads included a fair amount of heat but also more light than I've seen in some similar discussions, particularly when ALA's Mary Ghikas (who is also, full disclosure, a long-time friend) put together a detailed "Response to post-Orlando questions."

I'm not going to go through the posts comment by comment; you can do that yourself if you sign up for LITA-L or PUBLIB. Instead, I'm going to make this a point-counterpoint perspective, with points gleaned from some of the posts and counterpoints reflecting my own thoughts, those of others within the lists, or the ALA "Response" document.

> Counterpoints appear in these smaller-type indented paragraphs normally used for extended quotations. In other words, for a change, the small-type text is *my* commentary.

ALA expense and complexity

ALA's dues are too high, particularly if you join all the appropriate divisions and round tables.

> ALA's basic dues are lower than those of most other professional societies—a *lot* lower than many. Indeed, for people making decent money, ALA's dues are lower than several *state* library associations. It's true that ALA divisional dues are higher than typical state association division and section dues; most members choose the one or two divisions that will yield benefits that outweigh the costs.

Conference registration costs too much.

> ALA Annual costs less than many professional conferences, *much* less than most other conferences, and a number of other conferences charge extra for programs within the general conference. ALA is unquestionably one of the cheaper conferences of its size.

ALA is too big and complex. Maybe it should be an umbrella organization.

> Without ALA's size, it's unlikely that the ALA Washington Office could be as effective as it is. Smaller organizations would be less effective at lobbying and marketing. I'm not sure most divisions (other than ACRL and PLA) could survive as independent organizations without huge dues increases.

Why doesn't ALA have more local activities?

> The state library associations *are* the "local chapters" of ALA. State associations elect councillors to the ALA council. As was explained in the July 7 memo, ALA tries to avoid competing with state associations when locating its conferences. If ALA had its own local activities, that could (and almost certainly would) be seen as undercutting state associations. Some divisions also have state chapters, some (but not all) of which are also divisions or sections within their state associations, and ALA has student chapters at some library schools.

Conference complexity and virtual participation

ALA Annual has way too many meetings. Why can't it be simpler?

> This theme keeps coming up. There have been ALA committees on conference planning and simplification, and various moves to simplify. They've never really worked. Unquestionably, ALA Annual and Midwinter both have a lot of meetings; that's one reason there are relatively few good conference sites.
>
> The problem with "simplification" is that it ignores the reality of ALA and its divisions and round tables. I could name hundreds of groups that are irrelevant *for me*. Those for whom those groups are vital might say that *my* core groups are irrelevant. Yes, there's the often-stated assertion that ALA has so many committees because people want committee appointments to put on their vitas (and to get funding for ALA), but that oversimplifies the situation.
>
> LITA (uniquely) took a major step to reduce possibly needless organizational overhead when it abolished sections and all of the committees that went with them. LITA went further, basing most of the division's activities and organization on *self-organizing* units (LITA Interest Groups)—and adding sunset provisions so that such groups disappear when they're no longer vital. Quite a few LITA Interest Groups have disappeared thanks to the sunset provisions (with two or three asking to be dissolved before the three-year sunset interval was up).
>
> No other division has followed LITA's lead. It's not clear that doing so would meet the needs of their members. If you look at LITA, it still has a fairly large set of subunits. At Orlando, one LITA committee heard concerns that LITA lacked focus in some areas and suggested that converting some Interest Groups to sections might stabilize the situation.
>
> One tongue-in-cheek comment was perfect: "All of the meetings that I don't go to should be cancelled."

Maybe the conference would be simpler if "less important" business was conducted virtually.

> ALA groups are trying to find ways to support virtual participation, at least as a way of allowing those who can't come to conferences to have more role in the organization. But there are two problems with converting committees to virtual operation.

First: ALA's open meeting rule. Unless personnel matters or awards are being discussed, ALA meetings cannot be closed. It's important to ALA's organizational ethics that nearly all committee and other meetings are open to observers. It's not clear how that can happen when meetings take place via email.

Second: virtual committee meetings might reduce attendance at ALA and *particularly* at Midwinter. It might not; that's just not clear. But if it did—if converting (say) 500 of the roughly 2,000 meetings and discussions at Midwinter and Annual to virtual meetings resulted in (say) 20% of attendees staying home from Annual and 25% staying home from Midwinter—how would exhibitors react?

As the July 7 memo points out, ALA units have already tried to make things simpler by combining functions. Nine of 11 divisions and 5 of 17 round tables hold "all committee" meetings, where many committees meet simultaneously at tables within a ballroom or other large space. As a result the number of meetings has *declined* in recent years even as ALA membership continues to grow.

Assuming that the problems noted above can be taken care of, who decides what's important? Which committees aren't worth providing rooms for but can't be killed off? Are there discussion groups that should only be allowed to carry on discussions over the internet because they're not important enough for room space? Anyone care to make a list—and defend it in front of those involved in the committees and discussion groups?

Even if meetings take place at the conferences, there needs to be more "outside" participation.

As one person commented, that's a case where people need to act instead of suggesting action. "How about volunteering your time and institution to host an electronic discussion group for an ALA subunit that needs an electronic home?" This year, LITA-L saw more reports from LITA sessions than in recent memory—but there could have been more program reports, the sort of thing the *LITA Newsletter* used to specialize in. There still could be: the list isn't reserved for official reports.

Could conference sessions be made available to those who can't attend? Sure, for a price—but who pays that price? Webcasting is complicated and far from free. People could be "congrunting" or blogging from ALA already, and a few did so. Once again, such actions (unlike formal webcasting) depend on individual action.

ALA contracts to have recordings made of many formal conference programs—formerly audiocassette, now audio CD. The CDs were available on site, but they can also be ordered through ALA. It's not the same as being there, but the one conference program I've heard on audio CD (because I was on the panel and got a free copy) was crystal-clear. Each CD costs $14; 79 programs were recorded (some using two or three CDs). If you're a true enthusiast, for $885 you get the full 109-CD set!

Yes, greater electronic participation would be good—but it's not easy, and the tradeoffs are difficult. (And, as others have said, there's really no substitute for being there. The programs and other formal sessions I attend at an Annual make up much less than half of Annual's value for me; at Midwinter, the informal values rank even higher.)

How does ALA choose conference sites?

The July 7, 2004 paper is, as I write, available on ALA's website (click on Events & Conferences, then go to ALA Annual 2004). It's fascinating and offers much more information on what's involved than I can remember ever seeing in the past—even when I was a division president. What follows is excerpted and paraphrased from that document. Personal interjections are in square brackets and italics.

The key factors for annual are 400,000 gross square feet of exhibit space, 8,500 hotel rooms for peak nights (Friday-Sunday), and 350 *concurrent* meeting rooms within a "workable area."

The first two are fairly straightforward; as one person grumping about ALA's secrecy put it, there are a dozen or more cities with reasonably large conference centers and thousands of hotel rooms. On the other hand, 350 concurrent meeting rooms is "significantly beyond the norm."

Additionally, ALA tries to stay out of the way of "host" state chapters—so, for example, conferences can only be held in Chicago or San Francisco in odd-numbered years because the state conferences are in the same part of the state in even-numbered years.

Other factors considered in selecting sites include accessibility by air and rail, local transportation (in addition to conference shuttles), the number of potential "regional" participants (those within driving range), availability of hotels with varied prices, hotels with enough "double/double" rooms (that is, rooms that can sleep four, which ALA uses more than most conferences), overall meeting costs, convention center technology, and a layout that will handle other needs in addition to exhibits (the ALA store, Placement Center, registration, etc.). "It is important to note that *no* site is all positive or all negative."

The current schedule—subject to change—includes Chicago (2005, 2009), New Orleans (2006, 2011), Washington, DC (2007, 2013), Anaheim (2008, 2012), Orlando (2010), Las Vegas (2014), and San Francisco (2015). New York City may turn up again in the future, and Boston and Philadelphia could become summer sites if hotels and convention centers expand.

Why so many different sites? Because 25% of an average conference's attendance is regional—more than that when you add exhibits-only attendance. There are also regional exhibitors. Midwinter helps bring ALA to even more areas. Midwinter sites include Boston (2005, 2010), San Antonio (2006, 2012), Seattle (2007, 2013), Philadelphia (2008, 2014), Denver (2009) and Chicago (2011, 2015)—and San Diego's being considered for a later date.

ALA can't schedule all 350 rooms in the [Orlando] convention center without paying a fairly large fortune. Convention centers give meeting rooms to conventions abased on the amount of paid exhibit floor space. If more rooms *are* available, they cost much more than they would in hotels. And in places like Washington, DC and San Francisco, "all the convention center meeting rooms" is still only 60 to 80. The rest of the rooms need to be in hotels; the trick is keeping the size of the meeting "campus" reasonable.

The conference includes 250 to 300 "tracked" programs and a bunch of other programs, plus 180 or so discussion group/interest group sessions, hundreds of catered events and close to 1,400 other business meetings. Unfortunately, those many meetings tend to get shoved into smaller portions of the conference calendar over time because attendees want to come in late and leave early. So in Orlando, there were 654 sessions Saturday, 717 Sunday, 437 Monday, and 90 Tuesday.

Annual is expected to contribute around $1.5 million net revenue to ALA, in addition to $1 million in overhead. Exhibits provide roughly half of Annual revenues, registration roughly 25%. The paper also provides some specific expense categories—including $200,000 to $250,000 for shuttle buses.

Major portions of a PERSPECTIVE in *Cites & Insights* 4:10 (August 2004)

Various Conference Notes

A few random notes on conferences and conference planning—the first mine, originally a *Walt at Random* post, the others from a variety of blogs and new to *C&I*.

Resolved, that debates are a terrible way to run programs

I didn't attend the ACRL debate on information literacy during ALA Annual 2006. Several of those who did had snarky things to say about it, apparently well deserved. I did go to the LITA debate on the future of search. And left after 15 minutes…

And then recalled that I've turned down more than one speaking invitation for a debate format, after accepting one such invitation (one of only three speeches I've done that I regard as failures).

I'm less hard-nosed than some. I'll be on a panel, as long as it's not a cry-and-response panel. I've been the speaker being responded to by a panel (and didn't much care for it, not because I don't like disagreement but because I don't like being required to write a speech in advance and stick with what I wrote…and that requirement is almost essential for responders to work effectively). [More recently, I was on a back-and-forth program that worked beautifully—but it wasn't a debate by any means.]

The more I think about it, the more I think I just don't care for debates as content programs. As carnivals/sideshows, sure; bring on the powdered wigs and gongs to cut off the speakers at the 3-minute mark. Cheer, boo, throw vegetables: Just don't think you're communicating meaning or changing anyone's mind.

Actually, for me, this should come as no surprise. I was never a football player (as anyone who's seen me could guess), but I spent four years in the NFL–the National Forensic League, that is. That's the high school public speaking association, a good place for geeks like me to spend weekends. I "topped out" point eligibility in debate, impromptu and extemp, which means I did a lot of debating. And what struck me as the years went on was that NFL debate is a great way to train value-neutral lawyers: You're required to be equally effective in arguing for and against a set proposition. Crucial to doing that is not believing either side. (One year, I used the same very effective anecdote on both sides of the same issue. That was the year I realized that treating debate as anything other than a stunt was demeaning my personal ethical sense.)

Maybe it's just me, but maybe not. Disagreement can be good. Serious discussion can, rarely, change minds: I've changed my mind thanks to informed discussion. But debates? I think they're artificial, tend to force extreme positions, and are valuable only as entertainment, not when there's something serious to be said. At least that's been my recent experience.

Most of this appeared in *Walt at random*, July 5, 2006

Five things I experienced at the 2007 Computers in Libraries conference

David Lee King posted this on April 23, 2007 at his eponymous blog (www.davidleeking.com). I've left out the fifth item as too CIL-specific; although the third item (included in part) is CIL-specific, it's relevant to other hotel-based conferences. Large portions of the post:

> 1. **Web 2.0 tools are popular topics!** Many of this year's sessions and tracks focused on some aspect of web 2.0…sessions on web tools and web 2.0 sessions attracted standing room only crowds. This is a hot topic, and it's not going away any time soon.
>
> 2. **Half the value of this conference are the sessions.** The other half is the networking that takes place…
>
> 3. **Conference hotels.** This year's conference was held in the Crystal City Hyatt. The hotel is beautiful. And much too small for this conference… [Describes some of the problems involved with overflow sessions and lines, lines, lines.]
>
> 4 **Twitter rocks**. Sure, it might be a fad. Sure, it might end up being a waste of time (I ultimately don't think so). But with a mostly reliable wifi connection in the conference rooms, there was a constant undercurrent of short one-liner discussions that were fun, and in some cases, really added to the conference. For those participating, it allowed you to see what others were thinking while the speaker was still talking. And make dinner plans… and pass a bunch of insider jokes…
>
> Finally, make sure to say hello to people! If you recognize a blogger, a dynamic speaker you've heard before, or someone who wrote a fabulous article—make sure to introduce yourself and tell that person about it! It will definitely make his/her day, and hey--you'll make an instant friend and future contact, to boot.

The general relevance of the first point: Fashions in topics do change, sometimes unpredictably. That makes space planning more difficult—and it can make balance more difficult as well. Otherwise, I think all but #3 apply to any conference and #3 applies to quite a few, and in part to conference headquarters hotels at ALA and Midwinter.

Most of Ryan Deschamps' "My CIL impressions" (*The other librarian*, April 21, 2007) is specific to CIL—but portions of his last numbered points, "my suggestions," make sense for most any conference:

> Allow for fewer longer presentations and more time during the day to network etc. Have real mingling opportunities, like some kind of gala or something… Arrange for some wireless love for the conference if possible.

Blogging about conference blogging

Iris Jastram offered this on April 23, 2007 at *Pegasus librarian*—and it's an interesting first-person perspective on liveblogging and attention.

Jastram was "sitting there at Steven Cohen's presentation (or rather, on the stairs outside of the overflowing overflow room)" taking notes and using wireless to show people what Steven was showing. After the session, a woman came over to ask how Jastram manages to blog sessions. "She said she'd seen me typing away at an earlier session, and she sounded more than a little skeptical that anyone could possibly type and listen at the same time." Jastram showed her raw notes and the rest of her methods.

> "But you're still typing," she protested, "which seems like it'd make it harder for you to listen to what's being said." Thinking back, I only gave her one third of the whole answer to that issue. I explained that I can type a lot faster than I can write long-hand, so I actually hear more of the session than I would if I were writing on paper. But I didn't explain that typing with an eye to synthesizing for a blog post helps me stay on task when I'm listening to presentations… It forces me to look for the themes and primary points in the presentations. I don't end up blogging every session, but I do end up taking blog-ready notes for almost every session.
>
> And of course there's the final third of the puzzle. When presenters end up explaining something I already understand, I can compose the actual blog posts while I keep an ear out for when the presentation moves on to topics or perspectives that are newer to me. The fact that I only posted a couple of times a day during this conference speaks to the general lack of such down-times for me, which is a good thing. But it did happen occasionally.
>
> In the end, the skeptical woman walked away looking relieved that I wasn't wasting my conference registration fee (or hotel costs, which was significantly more expensive). Maybe next year she'll have a blogger banner on her name tag.

I believe it works for some people—that Jastram and others can manage this form of split attention. I can't. For some reason, even though I've been a fast touch typist since junior high school (and am terrible at longhand), I find a keyboard distracts me from the speaker—while taking (generally poor) handwritten notes does not. This shouldn't be surprising: Different people have different skills.

Good conference ideas from the IA summit

Finally (for this section!), Amanda Etches-Johnson posted a "photo essay" based on her experiences at the IA (Information Architecture) Summit in March 2007. She says the planners did "a lot of things that I would categorize as Good Conference Ideas" and discusses eight of them, excerpted here (and without the photos). I suspect some of these aren't workable for very large conferences but might be ideal for smaller ones—and others may be broadly applicable. Some are already used at some conferences, to be sure. **Go**

read the whole post (on *blogwithoutalibrary.net*, posted April 23, 2007). Extended excerpts:

> **Idea #1: Useful icebreakers.** The idea here is simple: all conference attendees get a pack of trading cards (all the same) and if you collect the complete set by the end of the conference, you get entered into a draw to win a prize (no conference swag prizes either—the first prize they gave out was a free trip to next year's Summit! But, that's beside the point…)… Also, conference newbies got certain sets of cards and the old-timers got different sets, which means (you guessed it), newbies & old-timers actually had to talk! It was one of the best conference ice-breakers I've been a part of… [The cards had conference-specific content, i.e. IA principles in this case]
>
> **Idea #2: Fun icebreakers.** A conference can never have too many icebreakers, that's what I always say. Other than the trading cards, there was some informal "name-tagging" going on. Nametagging is simple: you jot down tags on your badge to describe yourself. A number of great conversations were started as a result of the name-tagging…
>
> **Idea #3: "At-a-Glance" beats fumbling through the programme**. When I was handed the EXTRA-LARGE badge holder at the registration desk on the first day, I was a bit baffled by the size. Then I flipped it over and it made all the sense in the world. Tucked into the back of our name cards was a tri-fold conference at-a-glance flyer, complete with times, session titles, and location.
>
> **Idea #4: A mentor table.** …They had a Mentoring Booth set up near the registration desk throughout the duration of the conference. When there was no mentor at the booth, there was a sign-up sheet where you could leave your name and email address for one of the mentors to get in touch with you (or you could just stop by later when someone was there).
>
> **Idea #5: Democracy!** It was the neatest thing, as soon as the preliminary programme was posted to the IA Summit website, this blurb appeared on the page: "Help us to manage the demand—vote for your can't-miss sessions." The top-five most voted-for sessions appeared twice in the programme. Awesome!
>
> **Idea #6: Flex tracks**. … The Flex Track was a barcamp-style, "unconference"-ish track where the organizers set aside a room, left a blank column on the programme, blew up said programme, and mounted it outside the flex track room. A couple of the most-popular sessions (see "Democracy" above) were added to the flex track, and other ad-hoc sessions were penciled in by participants. The flex track ended up being a mixture of vendor demos, updates on projects & interesting stuff people were working on, and some navel-gazing about professional issues….
>
> **Idea #7: Podcasting**. …The organizers indicated the sessions that were podcasted with a big, red "P" beside the name of the session on the programmes mounted outside the conference rooms. Such a simple idea, but one that really helped me make up my mind when I was torn between sessions!
>
> **Idea #8: Madness**. …Apparently a Summit tradition, 5 Minute Madness follows the closing keynote (for about 45 minutes) and the idea is that anyone can come up, grab the microphone for 5 minutes, and say, well, anything. Some mentioned that they were hiring and encouraged attendees to track them down for details, others recounted something they learned at the conference; one of the participants thanked her staff for their hard work, and others thanked the conference organizers. There was laughter, tears (seriously) and celebration, the candid words from the participants really made me feel like I was part of a tight community and I couldn't think of a better way to close out an already excellent conference experience.

How are things at your conference? (Anyone else remember Ken Nordine's *Word Jazz*?)

State Conferences and Others

Each conference has its own vibe, its own strengths and problems. I've been fortunate enough to attend a fairly wide range of conferences over the years, although rarely the best-known "commercial" conferences (although I was at Online conferences in 1989, 1991 and 1994); the list is in my vita.

Just looking at that list reminds me of some of the diversity in library conferences—and I can say I thoroughly enjoyed all but three of the conferences I've spoken at (I always try to attend the whole conference). Some of that variety:

- **Single-campus and cluster conferences** (usually small and single-track) such as the Clinic on Library Applications of Data Processing at Urbana-Champaign, LAUNCCH, the Librarians' Association at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Texas Conference on Library Automation, North Carolina Center for Independent Higher Education, North Suburban Library System Reference Librarians and Simmons College GSLIS Alumni Day.
- **Specialized library association national conferences** (usually medium-sized and multitrack) such as the Music Library Association, American Association of Law Libraries, Medical Library Association, Military Librarians Workshop, Army Library Institute and IAM-

SLIC (the International Association of Marine and Aquatic Science Libraries and Information Centers).

- **User group national and regional conferences** (some small, some fairly large) such as VTLS Library Directors, CLSI Eastern Region Users Group, WLN Library Directors, SOLINET Annual Membership Meeting and DRA Users Group.
- **Regional and national conferences outside the U.S**. (usually medium to large and multi-track) such as the Victorian Association for Library Automation, Australian National Library and Information Association and British Columbia Library Association.
- **Others** such as the Charleston Conference, Access, one-shot conferences at libraries and groups of libraries, various New York regional library councils and state ACRL chapters.
- So far, I haven't been to unconferences or other truly innovative forms. Some day…

And, of course, **state library conferences.** Lots of state library conferences. To me, state library conferences combine the diversity of a national conference with the informality and more intense socialization of a specialized conference. The notes that follow, largely unedited, originally appeared here or in *American Libraries* and give a flavor of what I've liked about state library conferences. I've added a few notes by Jessamyn West on one of the state conferences I haven't attended. So far.

What I Learned in La Crosse—and Owensboro, Cromwell and Jekyll Island

How many of you know the name of the third largest annual library conference in the United States? You can guess that the ALA Annual Conference is first, and the Midwinter Meeting is second. After that comes the Texas Library Association annual conference—and when I spoke there in April 1998, in San Antonio, it sure felt about the same size as Midwinter in San Antonio.

TLA may be as outsized as Texas itself, but every state library conference I've attended has its own charms. I was chatting with folks at last year's Illinois ACRL spring conference about the wonders of state library conferences. They noted that most people don't get to experience a range of state conferences and said, "You should really write a Crawford Files about them." So I did.

Not just programs

When I'm invited to speak at any library conference, I try to attend the whole thing. I make a special effort for state library conferences, attending exhibits and as many programs and social events as make sense to me.

Back in October 1992, in Phoenix, Arizona and La Crosse, Wisconsin, I thought those might be my first and last state conferences, so I wanted to enjoy them as much as possible. What I found, then and since, was that these conferences are *events*—not just programs, exhibits, and social occasions, but synergistic wholes. Participants seem to leave state library conferences re-energized as well as better informed.

Good state library conferences cover more territory and involve a wider range of librarians than most specialized conferences. They're also frequently bigger and more ambitious, not to mention raucous at times. (Those Wisconsin librarians *get down* at all-conference parties!)

Real librarians, real situations

I attend a lot more program sessions at state library conferences than I do at ALA. That's partly because I'm not on any committees in some other state, but there's also something about state-level programs. These are real librarians (some of whom don't get funding for ALA Annual) talking about real situations, with shorter lead times than ALA programs and generally more down-to-earth approaches. I've never been to a library conference where I didn't learn something worthwhile about who we are and what we do, and that seems to happen more and more unpredictably at state association conferences than at other conferences. Unpredictably: I learn about aspects of librarianship that I wouldn't have thought about. (I'm not trying to put down other conferences. I could tell you stories about VALA, IAMSLIC and others.)

Sure, some programs boil down to "How we did it good"—but most of the time, there are explicit lessons for how others can do it better. Yes, I've been in audiences with fewer members than there were speakers. Sure, there have been typed transparencies, botched Internet connections, and cases where speakers were so visibly uncomfortable that they couldn't give coherent presentations. But those have been rare cases. More often, I'm impressed with the thought and clarity exhibited in panels and programs—and I probably miss the best ones since I leave heavily attended programs, feeling that those who pay the registration fees should have priority.

Getting us all together

One great joy of state library conferences—and most other library conferences, for that matter—is the chance to talk with practicing librarians of all types. Which brings up a point about Texas Library Association and why the third most populous state has the biggest conference. TLA gets *everyone* together (with the possible exception of special librarians)—school librarians never did split off as a separate association, as they did in most states.

That's a lesson other states are learning. Georgia's COMO combines several library associations into one wonderful conference. Minnesota has overlapping conferences for the two major associations. Kentucky is holding joint conferences. Colorado's gone one step further: At the conference in Snowmass (September 2000), CLA announced reunification with the school librarians.

Getting us all together. That's what makes state library conferences great. I've been to 16 different state and provincial conferences (returning to Florida and Wisconsin). I look forward to Alaska Library Association next March and hope to enjoy some other state conferences in years to come.

Enjoy your own state conference. From Dearborn to Elko, Memphis to Bloomington, Saratoga Springs to Orlando, Whistler to Hagerstown, and Owensboro to Green Bay, state library conferences bring out the best in this field.

Originally appeared (in slightly different form) as "Crawford Files" in *American Libraries*, January 2003

Northwest Passages: From Juneau to Yakima

Juneau, March 6-9 [2003], Yakima, April 9-12: Two outstanding reminders of why I love speaking at state library conferences. I won't repeat the whole set of reasons…

These two conferences weren't big, but they were ambitious, and I found both enjoyable and instructive. It's worth noting some similarities and differences—with a few personal comments along the way.

Demographics

Alaska has some 634,000 people spread out over 571,951 square miles: 1.1 people per square mile, as compared to the national average of 79.6. Education is better than the country as a whole, and average household income ($52K) is significantly higher than the national average. The Alaska Library Association has around 250 members, of which 225 were at this conference. On a per capita basis, AkLA is bigger than ALA—and can you imagine if 90% of ALA's 64,000 members showed up for an Annual Conference?

Washington has more than nine times as many people (5.988 million) in less than one-eighth the territory (66,544 square miles), leading to a much higher population density: 88.6 people per square mile. That means a few big cities and some lightly populated areas, but that's also true in California (217 people per square mile but with huge empty spaces) and Florida (296 people per square mile). Education's comparable to Alaska. Average household income, at around $45K, is just over the national average. Washington Library Association has roughly 800 members. Although some "westside" conferences get up to 600 attendees, this "eastside" gathering had 350 or so. It's worth noting that Alaska Library Association *does* include school librarians, while Washington does not.

The conferences seemed roughly the same size—both lively, busy, and well managed. Both had similar arrangements: A conference hotel next to the city or county conference center, with most meetings in the conference center and a few in the hotel.

One reason for Alaska's level of involvement may be remoteness, as noted by my hosts. The land is so vast and distant from the "lower 48," and travel costs tend to be so high, that many Alaska librarians find AkLA to be their only chance to get together for learning, problem solving and conviviality.

I was astonished at the depth and breadth of the AkLA schedule—and if there was a problem with WLA, it was that full involvement barely left time to breathe. I'll offer some detail on the schedules to show just how rich these conferences were.

Notes on Alaska Library Association

AkLA began with six preconferences on Thursday, a few afternoon tours, and an opening reception with entertainment by the Juneau Tlingit Dancers. (There were also board and executive council meetings and a late-night "movie night"—naturally, the movie involved a librarian.)

Friday: 7 to 8:50 a.m., continental breakfast and seven roundtables, meetings, and orientations (with exhibits opening at 8 a.m.!). 9-10: Opening session and my keynote, then half an hour in the exhibits. 10:30-11:50: Six program sessions. 12-1:45: "State of the state" luncheon and lobbyist update. Six more programs 2-3:30 and five 4-5:20 (with another exhibits break), followed by a 5:30-7 exhibitors' reception and 7-9 dessert reception and book signing.

Saturday: 7-8:50, continental breakfast and five roundtables. Six programs 9-10:30, six more 11-12:20, then an "Authors to Alaska" luncheon, the general meeting and president's program, four more programs 4-5:20, and the awards banquet 6-9:30 with a local big band, results of a massive silent auction, and a "call-out auction."

Tired yet? Sunday 7-8:20 had continental breakfast and six roundtables and meetings. Six programs 8:30-9:30, seven between 10 and 12:50 (no more than five at once), then an endnote luncheon and two post-conference events.

Add it up: Four plenary sessions, 41 programs, 20-odd roundtables and business meetings, six preconferences, three receptions and a banquet. The exhibits were substantial and lively (29 exhibitors), made livelier by putting the silent auction tables in the exhibit hall and providing plenty of free time throughout the day. I skipped the Friday dessert and Saturday luncheon (and headed for the airport before the endnote); the other social events were well attended and worthwhile. Let me tell you about the $860 bid for a really ugly t-shirt… (No, I'm not kidding. Yes, I contributed a tiny piece of that $860. If you're interested, it will be up for bid again next year: all for scholarships.)

The program lists 56 presenters in addition to fourteen *feature* presenters, at least eight of us flown in from out of state. AkLA makes good use of visitors—I did two program sessions in addition to the keynote and found them energizing.

I tried to characterize the program, thinking it would help define my keynote—but it was so broad-ranging that it defied categorization. Support staff are well represented and had a marked track. This was a conference that did what state library conferences should do: Addressed local concerns along with general library issues, leavened with lots of hallway conversation and good social events.

I was particularly impressed with the Dragonfly Project, an IMLS-funded project in which the Haines Borough Public Library and Chilkoot Indian Association Tribal Government cooperated to bring youth into the library as technology mentors to other users. That's an oversimplified statement of a remarkable project. You can find more at haineslibrary.org. I'm hoping the project leaders will write an article for *American Libraries*, given the innovation and success of this project. Getting impatient youth to learn the patience to work with 80-year-olds on computing tasks in the library: What an idea!

What about Juneau itself? I've been there twice before—but always during high season, when the road along the waterfront is vibrant with activity. It's different in March, even with the legislature in session. The waterfront road is basically shut down—the Red Dog Saloon, library, Hangar restaurant and its mall, and a few other places open, but most tourist-oriented shops closed—and Juneau's a small town of 20,000-odd people. With mostly clear skies, the mountains, snow, glaciers and water are nothing short of breathtaking. If you haven't been…well, I love cruising, and that's just about the only way to see southeast Alaska. I know we'll be back.

Notes on Washington Library Association

Five preconferences on Wednesday plus a board meeting and tour, a new-member reception in the evening followed by several interest group meetings—and, beginning at 9 p.m., the Society Gaius Julius Solinas V. Washingtonius. Think LITA's Fuzzy Match Interest Group or ASIST's SIG CON (if neither rings a bell, ask).

Thursday: Keynote during a 7:30-9:30 a.m. breakfast; six programs 10-noon; business meeting over lunch; five programs 2-3:15; another five 4-6; drinks with exhibitors 6-7—and then the president's banquet (with speech), followed by a dessert reception and silent auction. 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Friday: Two different 7:30-9:30 breakfasts, one with a speech, one with ALA and Pacific Northwest Library Association updates. Six more programs 10-noon; the WLA awards luncheon; five programs 2:30-4; five more 4:15-5:45. Then an evening at the Yakima Cultural Center, combining dinner, tour, and reception, ending at 9:45.

Saturday? A lengthy, late breakfast and speech; a morning canyon walk; an afternoon winery tour.

More exhibitors (48); a tighter schedule (with earlier and later events) crammed into fewer days (essentially two full days plus precons rather than 2.5 days plus precons). Fewer plenary sessions (two full, one partial). Fewer programs than at AkLA. Explicit tracks in the program, largely based on sponsorship. Fewer speakers from out of state.

I found the schedule a little exhausting. Fortunately, I hadn't signed up for the big breakfasts or some other big events. This conference also had plenty of hallway conversation and explicit breaks for exhibits. For a state that also participates in regional conferences (PNLA), this is an active, busy, interesting conference. My own program (two hours on copyright) was well attended and, I believe, productive for all involved.

I attended more programs here than at AkLA, partly because I wasn't giving as many. One was a bit astonishing, as it began with a quote from Walt Crawford followed by the claim that Walt Crawford is a Luddite (which the presenters meant as a compliment). They didn't know I was there, and I didn't choose to do an *Annie Hall* moment, jumping up and telling them this was nonsense, given the definition of Luddite they were using.

Reference-related programs were generally strong. One started with the claim that "the desk is dead" and discussed the future of reference when reference desks become irrelevant. Joe Janes, who regularly speaks at WLA, turned a late-conference session into a seminar and kept me and 40 other people active and enthralled throughout. And "Flavors of Washington Territory" included fascinating examples of the work being done to expose early records through digitization, given the sesquicentennial this year. How do you get a sesquicentennial in 2003 after celebrating a centennial in 1989? The difference between territory and state.

What's next?

I've rarely done two state conferences in one year. This year's extraordinary, with North Carolina's biennial conference coming up in September. I continue to say that state conferences are my favorite speaking events (probably regional as well, but I haven't done those). Almost every state conference is remarkable in its own way; in that sense, these were not exceptions.

Original: PERSPECTIVE in *Cites & Insights* 3:6, May 2003

In Your Jets I'm Going to Carolina

Sorry about that and apologies to James Taylor. It was an odd coincidence that my only travel this fall was to Winston-Salem, NC in September and Charleston, SC in November: the North Carolina Library Association and the Charleston Conference. These two Carolinian conferences have two things in common besides geography: They involve lots of librarians and they're both worthwhile. I did a plenary session (the Ogilvie Lecture) and a "table talk" at NCLA; I was at the Charleston Conference to listen and learn.

Impressions of NCLA

"Libraries—A North Carolina Value: Enriching – Inclusive – Essential." That was the theme for NCLA's 55th *biennial* conference, September 23-26 in Winston-Salem. Biennial? Yep: This is that rare state conference held every other year.

I was the only plenary speaker from out of state—and, for that matter, the only one who wasn't a North Carolina author. NCLA doesn't have a big awards banquet or for that matter *any* dinner events. There were two group luncheon events on Wednesday, three breakfasts and *five* topical lunches on Thursday, three more lunches on Friday. All-conference events included an opening general session Wednesday morning and a vendor reception that day; my speech Thursday afternoon; a Thursday evening all-conference reception at the Forsyth County Public Library; and two unusual Friday events: an all-conference *breakfast* (8 to 10 a.m.) featuring North Carolina poets and a dessert reception featuring Doug Marlette, creator of the comic strip "Kudzu" and a long-time editorial cartoonist. Every state conference (that I've attended!) leaves lots of open slots for exhibits; this was no exception, with a total of eight dedicated time slots for exhibits.

I wasn't able to attend many concurrent sessions. One on enhancing library catalogs offered interesting descriptions of various enhancement systems (adding tables of contents, etc.) but also some talks that came off as sales pitches. A session on the future of the book included a substantial overestimate of the market share of ebooks but also offered a good range of thoughtful perspectives, including publishers and booksellers as well as librarians. A bookseller noted that "kids these days" are buying *plenty* of books and that there's no letup in demand for print. A publisher discussed a specialized ebook created three years ago—that has sold all of *three copies* since then. The panel and active audience questions raised a number of issues, but (as usual) nothing was resolved. John Budd did a formal lecture on "how we know what we know," an interesting presentation that felt a little out of place given the 25 to 30 people that attended. Knowledge is a tricky thing—can you actually *know* anything you didn't personally test?

I was fascinated by Timothy Gotti's presentation, "Rise of the young turks: Generation X as managers in libraries," where this 31-year-old head of cataloging discussed his experience with 18 employees, most of them Baby Boomers. Bright, interesting, and informal, he was also thought provoking, if a little enthusiastic about technology for my taste.

Tim Bucknall of the University of North Carolina, Greensboro led a fine session on OpenURL—one that opened my eyes to the problems of OpenURL sources. I won't comment on specifics, but it's fair to say that I learned more about OpenURL issues from the resolver-builder's side than at any other session I've attended. (I've *used* dozens of resolvers, but always with Eureka OpenURLs; Bucknall gave startling examples of how OpenURLs arrive from some other sources.)

Interesting programs, but so many conflicts that some programs probably didn't get the audience they deserved. Great people and good events, a good conference facility attached to a pretty good hotel. They brought in several out-of-state speakers. North Carolina produces some excellent wines and many thoughtful librarians. I enjoyed the experience thoroughly.

Incidentally, if you're in Winston-Salem, Old Salem is worth half a day. It's where the Salem half of Winston-Salem began, as a Moravian settlement, and it's still mostly residences, but with a good sprinkling of authentic crafts and displays for a reasonable fee. That's also the site of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, definitely worth a visit, and the first museum I've been to that you can only see as part of a guided tour. My only negative comment: one-person "groups" should expect to be treated badly by the Old Salem Tavern restaurant.

Sketches of Charleston

Bring together 700 librarians, publishers, database providers, intermediaries, and consultants, all on the general theme of book and serial acquisitions and use. That's the Charleston Conference, a topical conference with scores of speakers and a crowded schedule. It's a truly unusual conference: Always in the same place, always more-or-less at the same time (the first week of November, give or take), now in its 23rd year, and bringing together sometimes-"enemies" for frank, open discussion.

This conference has two advantages in trying to present an enormous range of content. First, the "exhibits" are confined to a six-hour session with one table for each exhibitor on Wednesday, ending in a wine-and-cheese reception. Second, Charleston starts early each day, ends late and works on the basis that you're expected to get up and walk around (or leave) whenever you need to.

Thursday's first set of plenaries began at 7:55 a.m. and ran to 11 a.m. (with a 20-minute break at 10 a.m.); the final set of concurrent sessions ended at 5:15 but was followed by publisher/vendor forums until 6:30, before the 7 p.m. conference reception. Friday: 8 a.m. start, 6 p.m. finish, followed by an evening program. Saturday began with concurrent breakfast sessions from 8 to 8:55, and although the conference finale ended at 1:30 p.m., there was a rump session Saturday from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

"Oh, but there are lots of long breaks in those days, right?" Sure: One twenty-minute break each morning and afternoon (two Thursday morning). Otherwise, you had to skip sessions to have free time. I skipped one plenary session and the "lively lunches" Thursday and Friday, but that meant missing one of ten concurrent Thursday sessions and nine Friday sessions. I still went to five plenaries (of six with a total of 35 speakers) and, including the Beastly Breakfasts (included in the registration price), six of seven concurrent slots with a total of 42 sessions and—well, I'm not willing to count up all the speakers.

David Levy opened with a keynote on "holding on to reality," talking about the need to be more real and take time to contemplate. Yet another "future of the book" panel followed, including yours truly. There were sessions on open access, ebooks, deep log analysis, user statistics and usage levels, collection development, license negotiation, government publishing, resource integration and OpenURL, the next generation of learning (a classic KTD speech, but others loved it), digital archiving, the integrity of full-text databases, the "Faxon fiasco," pricing models, censorship, copyright, database evaluation…

Tired yet? I'll stop. I tend to take very few notes at most conferences. I have 28 pages of hand-written notes for this one. If I'm offering less detail here than I did for NCLA, that's because there's so much it's a little overwhelming. The breaks are deep in discussion; I wound up having two business lunches by accident; the all-conference reception (at Charleston's aquarium) was great; and Heidi Hoerman from the University of South Carolina's School of Library and Information Science put out a fine single-page "News from Yesterday" that offered fascinating tidbits from the sessions. There will be a proceedings volume, probably right around the time of the 2004 conference. I won't say all the speakers were great (two plenary speeches left me completely cold, and others ranged from brilliant to boring), but I will say that—

as with last year—I found this a lot more thought-provoking than most conferences.

Originally appeared as a Perspective in *Cites & Insights* 3:14 (December 2003)

I'd been to quite a few state library conferences before 2001. I've only been to one since 2003—this year's Washington Library Association. I always enjoy speaking (within reason and with appropriate arrangements), but there's something special about state library conferences.

I ran into an odd comment on one blog post, repeated elsewhere—the suggestion that state library associations and their conferences have outlived their usefulness. Based on those that I've been to—and there are a fair number not mentioned here—I disagree. In most states, I believe state library conferences draw people from a variety of libraries together to learn, exchange ideas and grow. There's a process that happens face-to-face that virtual conferences can't replace, great as they may be. There's a synergy to bringing many kinds of libraries together that speaks to the heart of librarianship. And there's a *locality* to good state conferences that makes them special.

I won't claim every state library conference is wonderful. I will claim most of them are worthwhile. I hope to attend more over the years, including those in some states I've never been to.

We close this section with brief excerpts from Jessamyn West's long and interesting May 5, 2007 post about her experiences at this year's Massachusetts Library Association (omitting, among other things, **notes well worth reading** about privacy and children):

> My goal when I speak at library conferences is always to see some programs as well as give mine, but I only sometimes manage that. This conference was fun, accessible and enjoyable both to present at and to attend. Here are a few thoughts, my apologies for lack of thoroughness.
>
> …We went to the banquet with Tom Ashbrook (the NPR guy) and I was a little underwhelmed. Ashbrook seemd to have a stump speech and didn't seem to have prepared too seriously. Compared to seeing Pete Hamill last week it was night and day. Good food and company, including getting to talk to a woman who runs the Suicide Prevention Resource Library and has what seemed to me to be a very interesting job…
>
> The next day I got up and went to a session called Privacy Rights of Minors - A training session for policy and beyond. It was run by Ruth LaFrance, the chair of the MA Intellectual Freedom Committee who attended ALA's Law for Librarians program. I found the program good, but somewhat frustrating. The upshot was that the Massachusetts law is fairly clear about the privacy status of library user records and does not in any way state that these rights do not extend to minors. So, librarians try hard to help minors' library records stay private. However, there are many wrinkles in this situation which make this difficult to deal with….
>
> I got back too late to be on a team for the trivia evening, but it was in full swing by the time I got back. I sat with Jenna and Eric in the back of the room and said hi to Keith Michael Fiels and Steve Abram and other folks. Nora Blake, who was my capable and gracious host, was the one running the trivia night and her advice for other trivia-planning librarians is "always cite your sources" since the librarians got ornery with small errors of fact. It was a great idea for a library conference evening because the drinkers could drink, the non-drinkers could socialize, it got people into a room for an auction and a silent auction fundraiser, and it was right in the hotel. I had a great time. Stayed up late drinking with radical librarians.
>
> Got up the next day and went to two sessions, Jenna and Eric's RadRef session…. I caught up on email while other people went to the luncheon and came back in time to see Jenny and Michael and Jessa Crispin of Bookslut fame do their blogging panel discussion. I have to say, it was strange.
>
> If you don't know Bookslut, it's another early blog, more book-oriented than library-oriented but it has a lot of librarian readers. Jessa is a well-spoken writer and reader who now does the site full-time (I think) as her job. Michael and Jenny are Michael and Jenny and do their blogs as sort of side projects within their regular jobs. As a result, the two "sides" of this program had vastly different approaches to blogging which sort of made for lively conversation but sort of just made me feel that it would have been nice to have one or the other. Jessa blogs for work, then she turns off her computer and goes outside (her words). Her blog doesn't have comments. She says she doesn't read blogs. She tells new bloggers often to not bother. She's not a techie, and not even tech curious. She says MySpace "scares her" as does the idea of having comments on her blog. She reads books and seemed to have some level of disdain for people who couldn't find time for reading. I may be misreading this, but I just got a weird vibe off of her, that despite her making a job out of her blog, she maybe felt that bloggers were nerdish and dorky and self-absorbed and … lame.
>
> I think part of this may be the general vibe I get from these conferences where pretty much everyone is approachable and personable and while there are a lot of introverts there are rarely any "too cool for school" people who you couldn't just walk up to and/or have a drink with. I thought Jenny and Michael did a good job of explaining why blogging could be useful — and not in that "everyone needs a blog" way that I think has mischaracterized their position for a while now — but I felt that they and Jessa were talking across each other. Jessa was discussing blogging as a job and Michael and

> Jenny were discussing it as a tool. In any case, it was my last session of the conference and then I headed home to think and type and bring some of my free books back to my tiny libraries. Thanks for having me, MLA!

"Pretty much everyone is approachable and personable and while there are a lot of introverts there are rarely any 'too cool for school' people who you couldn't just walk up to and/or have a drink with."

I couldn't have said it better myself—as one of those introverts who's always been delighted at the ease of being involved in state library social events and hallway chatter. I like ALA and Midwinter. I *love* good state library conferences. You might find that you do too.

The Speaking Life

There's no good way to separate the issues in this section and the next, particularly since I want to keep quotes from other blogs together. This section is *primarily* about speaking itself, including tips for speakers and some reasons you might or might not choose to get involved. It also includes some discussion of fees—but most of that discussion appears in the next section.

I have more to say about speaking in *First Have Something to Say: Writing for the Library Profession*. Chapter 17, "Speaking of Speaking," would fit naturally in this chapter. *C&I* readers already get three free chapters from the book, including the one here. For the rest of the story, **go buy the book**. It's in print; there should be copies at the ALA Store at Annual.

Speaking, Prestige and Money

Why do you speak to library groups?

For some people, it's part of their jobs. Such speakers are usually free.

For some, it's a living or part of a living—that is, *payments* for speeches represent needed or desired income. I'd be surprised if many librarians made a living through speeches *except* as a central part of their "day job," but there are certainly celebrities who manage nicely.

For *many* library speakers, the reputation is the thing: They're giving submitted papers as part of the tenure process, they're speaking to make a name for themselves, they're speaking to ingratiate themselves with some group.

There are other reasons. Speaking can be a thrill, but it's also work. While money issues make up a big chunk of the next section, it's worth noting some elements here.

Notes from December 2005

What follows is excerpted from two *Walt at random* posts on December 14 and December 22, 2005. The portions of these posts that deal with motivations and fees for speaking (when that can be separated) appear below. I've deliberately left out comments, partly because things got a little heated, partly because situations have changed for some of the key players.

> If it says "[Invited]" and it wasn't in San Jose, Palo Alto, San Francisco, or somewhere else within about 45 miles of Mountain View (or during ALA, Midwinter, or the Charleston Conference), you can bet that whoever I was speaking to paid full expenses: travel (flights and ground transportation), hotel and meals (usually for the full conference, if it's a conference), registration. Most of the time, there was also an honorarium: not enough to get rich on, but maybe enough to cover a little of the vacation time and preparation time. After various extended negotiations due to misunderstanding, I've even put together a page laying out expectations for speeches.
>
> That's apparently peculiar for those who want to be known as speakers these days. Apparently, if you're to be established as an Expert or as the Go-To Guru on a topic, you need to go for it–spend your own money and your own time so you can speak ten, fifteen, twenty times a year.
>
> Maybe I was lucky. I never particularly thought of myself as an Expert on any topic, at least not enough of an Expert that you'd automatically invite me to speak on it. And I've never been in a position where tenure was a possibility or where professional speaking and writing had a direct impact on my job performance ratings or salary. So I had no particular motivation to beat the bushes for speaking invitations.
>
> I can only think of one or two cases where I turned down an invitation because of the size of honorarium or lack thereof…
>
> In any case, I clearly don't understand the dynamics of today's frequent speakers, which means I don't understand the dynamics of the whole speaker/conference situation these days. I don't plan to change my own patterns; although I love state library conferences and the like, I don't love them enough to subsidize them.

Portions of a *Walt at random* post, December 14, 2005.

> Some library people need speaking engagements for promotion or their vita. These are the ones most likely to submit speaking proposals, or get involved in program arrangements and see to it that they are on panels. In general, I don't believe such speakers expect reimbursement or freebies; their reward is being able to list the presentation.

Similarly, some library people want speaking engagements to establish themselves as experts in a field, or because they have something to say that they desperately feel needs to be heard, or just for egoboo. Nothing necessarily wrong with any of these motives, but here again, these people have strong motivations to speak. If they're proposing speeches at professional conferences, I wouldn't be inclined to believe they deserve payment or reimbursement. Once they've *achieved* guru status and are being invited, they may (or may not) fall into another category. (This one's really tricky…)

Then there are the cases where a speaker's invited. In general, I think it's hard to justify inviting someone and then not at least covering their expenses, and almost impossible to justify inviting someone and charging them for the privilege. But even within this second category, people fall into various groups:

Some have solid travel and paid-leave support from their employers as a matter of professional support. Great for them, and great for conference organizers: They can get speakers on the cheap. I would hope that this status never influences organizers' decisions as to who gets invited, but I'm not quite naive enough to believe that as a general principle.

Some have travel and time support because their employers want them to be out there; see remarks in previous paragraphs.

As for others… some do get time off to speak but feel (properly, I believe) that they should be paid for their efforts. Some get limited or no time off and no travel support; for them, unless they're independently wealthy or otherwise unusual, expense reimbursement and speaking fees are likely to make or break the situation.

I don't believe anybody's getting rich off library conference speaking–at least not from state, regional, and national association conferences. I continue to be stunned by the frequency with which some people speak, although I assume they don't actually write a new speech for each occasion–but still, travel is wearing and time for yourself can be precious. I've never been in the "speaking circuit" category and am happy with that fact. I don't envy those who are. And I certainly don't begrudge them the fame–or the payments.

All of which is more than enough about "should speakers get paid?" There are lots of ways to "give back." Speaking actually isn't the most efficient way to reach lots of people, although it may reach them in a different manner than writing–but, you know, one of these blog entries probably reaches as many people as any single one of my speeches, and each issue of *C&I* reaches at least three to five times as many people. Expecting people to speak on their own dime Because They're Professionals is, well, self-defeating. And if it comes from one of the librarians who does make a six-figure income (yes, there are some of those), it's perhaps just a little hypocritical as well.

Portions of a *Walt at random post*, December 22, 2005

Dorothea Salo's comments

Salo uses "whuffie" where I use "egoboo." Whuffie is "reputation-based currency"—the term was coined by Cory Doctorow. It is, in essence, reputation as personal capital. (See *Wikipedia* for a whole lot more.) She was recently invited to join LITA's Top Tech Trends panel. She declined. Here's more on why, from an April 26, 2007 post—reformatting and leaving out the reasons she thinks she's the wrong person for the job (reasons I could have talked her out of, most likely) and reasons related to ALA itself:

> Well, let's cost this out, shall we? TTT is purely whuffie-driven; there is no compensation involved. Given that I am not an ALA or LITA member, and would have to be to participate, the costs to attend one TTT panel run like so:
>
> ALA plus LITA membership: $115. Airfare to Philadelphia for 2008 Midwinter: $241 (per Orbitz). Conference registration: $125 (based on rates from last Midwinter). One night's cheap (non-conference) hotel: $90 (estimated). Travel incidentals (taxis and meals): $100 (roughly, give or take $25).
>
> Total? $671, *minimum*. That is some expensive damn whuffie, I tell you what. Worse if I go to Anaheim for Annual instead of Philadelphia for Midwinter… And note that this assumes I get basically nothing out of the conference—in, sleep, panel, out.
>
> Now, I can without question get some of that covered by MPOW, but that would likely mean staying for the rest of the conference, so honestly, out-of-pocket costs would probably be about the same either way. *Still* expensive damn whuffie, and an added opportunity cost—I couldn't then get coverage for a different conference from MPOW. As CavLec readers know, I don't like megaconferences in general and have found minimal professional value in the ones I've been to, *and* the specialized ones directly relevant to what I do tend to be smallish and not cheap (I can say with authority, having self-funded OR '07 due to being in-between jobs), so the opportunity cost here is fairly major.
>
> TTT is a lot of whuffie. I get that. But it's not nearly enough to cover the costs, given my limited appetite for whuffie—I'm in the job I want already, I'm not tenure-track, and I don't have anybody much to impress just at present. Besides, given what I do and what I *like* to do, TTT is whuffie in the wrong areas of the profession…

You could shorten this to: Speaking on your own dime is expensive, sometimes *very* expensive. And yet people do it all the time. Why is that? Salo's next two related posts mention some of the reasons. I'm combining portions of an April 29, 2007 post and a May 3, 2007 post, not necessarily in order. She talks about writing as well. Unless you're getting paid for it (rare for professional writing), what goes for speaking also goes for writing. I'm paraphrasing and editing here and there; Salo was not writing for publication (although her writing is always clear and livelier than most of mine). This is one of the best statements I've seen on *why* some people do (and almost must) speak or write "for free"—and why those reasons don't apply to other, equally professional, people but other reasons might encourage them to speak. (I hope I have done minimal violence to Salo's thoughts by combining two posts like this.)

> Academic libraryland has a flavor called "tenure-track" in which the acquisition of whuffie by means of publications, conference presentations, and the like is *not optional* if you like your job and want to keep it. The exact rigor of the tenure process varies; it can be absolutely as rigorous as the process for teaching and research faculty, or it can be watered-down, a bit or a lot.
>
> Academic libraryland has another flavor that I call "wannabe tenure-track," where whuffie-acquisition is not strictly required but upper management leans on librarians to acquire whuffie anyway.
>
> When you're a brand-new librarian, uncomfortably aware that you're going to be up for contract renewal in eighteen months…and publications count, no whuffie is bad whuffie, because you can't really know where the next shot of whuffie is going to come from.
>
> A librarian in one of these academic libraries, as well as a librarian who wants to protect her ability to get a job in such a library, has little choice but to set herself a yearly whuffie quota. New librarians particularly may find…that they accept work they wouldn't otherwise have done just because there's whuffie at the end of it. I know folks hate the phrase "paying dues," but this is the clearest example of it I can think of.
>
> Other librarians may want to amass whuffie in order to make themselves competitive in the larger library job market, supplement their incomes, feed their egos, whatever. Although these librarians may also accept whuffieful work that they aren't otherwise interested in, they're slightly different from the paying-dues group in that the motivations are basically internal rather than external.
>
> None of these librarians is me. I'm not in a situation with any kind of tenure, I'm happy with my job, my income is adequate to my needs, and I have to starve my ego or it'll stomp Neo-Tokyo. I'm in a job now with very low whuffie requirements. Approaching zero. Seriously. If I come in and *do my flippin' job*, that's all anybody cares about. Oh, they don't *mind* if I attract whuffie, as long as I don't spend work time on it (seriously! this has been said to me! out loud! more than once!), but 'tain't needful, except insofar as whuffie-ish sorts of things are in fact part of my job. (And they are. If you're outreach for an initiative, you present. Part of the game.)
>
> Add a few personality factors to that—professional writing is painfully hard for me (though I'm getting better at this book-reviewing wheeze), I don't like travel anywhere near enough to do a lot of it, and I'm a bluntly poison-tongued peasant instead of graceful politic nobility—and the sum adds up to pretty limited whuffie-chasing.
>
> Suits me fine.
>
> …I don't mind whuffie. I just don't need a lot of it; the trickles I get are *perfectly adequate* for my modest purposes, and I don't need to chase it, neither for job advancement nor for a sense of achievement, the way some librarians do.
>
> But I don't plan to stop speaking, writing (much though I have to flog myself to do it), and finding ways to contribute. One reason is that every now and again, I get to do something cool, like go to London and San Antonio. Both those trips were blessings; I won't pretend otherwise, and I won't pretend that subsidized travel (within my travel limits, which are somewhat straiter than most people's) isn't an attraction.
>
> That aside, though, speaking and writing can be tools to advance other goals I have, goals that live wholly outside the "fun" and "personal advancement" segments of my brain. If you're a long-time reader, you can probably recite the litany as well as I can by now: open access, academic libraries as publishers, more and better digital text, digital preservation, a better (or at least more honest) labor market for librarians, female enfranchisement in technology and systems librarianship, and so on. I care about all these, and when speaking and writing will further them, I'll get in gear to speak and write. Achievement. Now *that* is something I'm still chasing. Just not on the personal-whuffie level, is all.
>
> I would do Five Weeks again in a heartbeat. It made work-life measurably better for forty librarians, and if you look at the aggregator page, you see that even more librarians are still finding value in it. I'm spearheading the ASIST Five Weeks poster because I want to see other people pick up that ball and run with it… There's no need for disenfranchised librarians; we *proved* that. That was and is an achievement, worth a lot more than personal whuffie.
>
> I'll talk about open access and scholarly communication whenever I have half a chance (in fact, I have to make myself stop doing it in social situations!). I want to see open access in its many forms take over the scholarly-communication world for reasons that have nothing whatever to do with me having my wagon hitched to it. It's just the right thing, for academia and for the world outside it. In fact, if there's one thing about my career so far that I'm mildly disappointed in, it's that I haven't been talking *enough* about OA, especially to librarians, who aren't as clueful en masse as one could wish.
>
> (If I could make OA as sexy a bandwagon as Library 2.0, I'd die a happy woman. I just have no idea how to even *start* doing that.)

> Given the opportunity, which is admittedly fairly unlikely, I'll also speak at tech or tech-librarian conferences. Female visibility in tech is a political-achievement issue for me; nobody's surprised at that, right? I did turn down Top Tech Trends, but I knew when I did so that LITA had been clueful enough to invite other women (for which, bravo LITA!), and I also knew that those other women had picked up the ball. If they hadn't… it would have been a much harder decision than it was.
>
> There's whuffie-less achievement, and achievement-less whuffie, as well as the ideal of whuffie and achievement going hand-in-hand. I think we can all come up with examples of all three in librarianship; I needn't elaborate. The good thing about where I am and what I'm doing is that I have no reason whatever to chase whuffie that doesn't also represent real achievement in my mind.
>
> I like that. It suits me well.
>
> Unfortunately—and this is a personal hangup, not anybody else's problem—if I'm not careful, I fall back into old habits of mind, competitive and compulsively perfectionistic habits that don't do me or anyone else any good. So I do push back pretty hard when people start talking whuffie at me. I don't *want* to turn into a compulsive whuffie-chaser, now that I have the luxury of not having to chase whuffie at all (and it is indeed a luxury).
>
> Here is where the whole thing gets difficult—and from email I get and blog posts I see, I'm not the only person with this dilemma. Sometimes you need more whuffie than you've got in order to reach your real-world, non-personal-advancement goals. I, for instance, have zero formal whuffie in open-access circles. None. No, really, *none*, not a biscuit. Maybe the book review and book chapter I've got coming out this year will change that a bit, but there are no guarantees in this world.
>
> This means I don't get speaking invitations that I could do good with. For every one I *have* gotten (and that's all of, um, two), I've gotten a nibble for one that's eventually fallen through. Truth. And of course there are all the invitations I don't get because nobody knows who I am because for all the fire in my belly and my mad public-speaking skillz, I don't have the formal whuffie in my sub-field.
>
> So otherwise-uninteresting whuffie opportunities directly relevant to OA would get more attention from me than my anti-whuffie intransigence would suggest. I can't think of a better way to play it. Wish I could.
>
> I'm lucky in a way, though, because OA doesn't have any formal organization that I have to stay on the right side of. When I see opportunities, I can jump. When I don't, I can *make* opportunities without having to get anyone's imprimatur. And the sub-field is small enough that worthwhile opportunities exist for individual action.

There's more on speaking motivations in the next section. Now let's move on to the actual mechanics: Tips for speaking, some serious and some less so.

18. Hiding Behind PowerPoint

Note: this is a free chapter from *First Have Something to Say: Writing for the Library Profession*, ALA Editions, 160 p., $29, ISBN 0-8389-0851-9. Go to the ALA store (www.alastore.ala.org) or order from the usual sources.

When I first outlined this book, I had five chapters on speaking. The second outline had three chapters—and in the writing, one of those disappeared. It's hardly surprising that, as Danelle Hall notes in "A View from the Back Wall" (*American Libraries* 33 (May 2002): 64–65), a three-year search of Library Literature "turned up only a handful of articles on the subject of public speaking." Why?

Many comments I could make about public speaking have already been made about library writing, since the most common forms of library-related speaking you're likely to do—contributed papers and topical speeches—are analogous to articles both in length and form.

Hall's article provides a well-stated set of rules for presentations. I'll note some of those rules later, but also note when I believe you can break the rules.

First, a few notes on discussions, keynotes, and originality vs. repetition—the remnants of that third chapter.

Discussions

Leading a focused discussion may have nothing to do with public speaking—or, in some cases, you might be asked to kick off a discussion with a brief commentary on the issues. In either case, your primary goals should be fivefold:

- 1. Introduce the topic and, as needed, gently guide the discussion back on topic when it strays.
- 2. Encourage participants to take part without resorting to artificial methods such as explicitly asking someone to speak up because they've stayed silent.
- 3. Discourage one or two participants from dominating the discussion—particularly difficult when you have big-mouth, self-important people in the discussion—without alienating the know-it-alls or destroying the flow of conversation.
- 4. Listen more than you talk. When you begin a discussion, and particularly when you're listed as a key participant, it's all too easy to

be the dominant voice, turning an open discussion into a question-and-answer session.

- 5. Avoid personal attacks and incendiary remarks, both your own and those of others.

These aren't always simple goals to achieve. Experienced discussion-session people may note a sixth goal for many such sessions, one I deliberately omitted:

- 6. Take good notes so that you can prepare a summary of the discussion for distribution among the group, posting on appropriate websites, or inclusion in a newsletter.

I don't believe that a discussion leader should also attempt to take notes. Instead, someone else should agree to serve as note-taker, unless someone's willing to record the session and attempt to produce notes from the recording. That's a chancy process at best.

Keynotes and plenary speeches

You can have a long, worthwhile career as a library public speaker without ever doing a keynote. What you usually can't do is give a keynote because you've always wanted to. Keynotes are almost always invited speeches, although I suppose you could organize your own conference if you're sufficiently intent on doing a keynote.

Keynotes and plenary speeches differ from typical speeches in several ways, in addition to the implausibility of proposing that you do a keynote:

- Keynotes and plenaries tend to be longer than other speeches, running 40 to 60 minutes (sometimes longer) instead of the typical 20 to 30 minutes.
- Keynotes are almost always more personal in tone than topical speeches and contributed papers. You're speaking to people, not simply delivering a speech, and they asked you to speak, not "some person who knows something about topic x."
- Keynotes can cover more ground than typical speeches, although some of us may overdo it. I'm probably one of the worst offenders in the field, with keynotes that sometimes include four or five major themes, but I've heard better keynote speakers cover two or three distinct themes in a single magnificent hour.
- Good keynotes can and should dispense with PowerPoint and other audiovisual aids in most cases. A keynote should be you and the audience, with technology assisting only to make you audible and visible to everyone there.

Originality and repetition

Should you prepare each new speech from scratch, or should you give the same speech repeatedly? As with so many choices, the best answer is "Yes."

Yes, you can and should repeat the same speech when you have a carefully prepared presentation that people want to hear in many different cities on many different occasions. There is a limit, though, one that I've heard exceeded more than once. Canned speeches eventually go stale, because the world changes and because you tire of delivering the same speech. In both cases, the audience will recognize the problem—but you should spot it first and either take a break from the topic or update the speech.

Yes, you should prepare each new speech from scratch when you're being asked to do a keynote or something specific to a particular conference. I don't really mean that, of course. If you speak more than once or twice a year on similar topics, you're unlikely to write an entirely original speech on each occasion. Realistically, you should ensure that each new keynote and plenary speech is distinctive and has some new material. I try to assure that each new keynote is at least 30 percent new material or material I haven't used in two or three years, although the circumstances of the speech can increase that percentage.

There's nothing wrong with using your published articles in your speeches. Some of the people who invite you may explicitly ask you to do so. It is a little tawdry, I believe, to simply read a previously published article and call it a speech, unless the inviting parties know that's what you plan to do. I attended one conference where a very well-paid keynote speaker began by presenting a ten-minute commentary that the person next to me recognized (word for word) from its published form. The speaker then said, "Let's hear your ideas," and that was it for an hour-long slot. Several thousand dollars plus expenses for absolutely no effort: where can I get gigs like that? If you have the ethics and creativity of most librarians, you wouldn't do that if you could, and I certainly don't suggest it.

The Web makes the situation a little more complicated. When you speak at a conference, you may be asked to provide your notes (or your PowerPoint slides or your full-text draft) for the conference website. It may even be a requirement. I've agreed when asked, always with the caveat that the written draft of my keynote-style speeches doesn't necessarily have much in common with what I say.

The tricky part here is that once it's on the Web, your carefully prepared speech is out there. People going to the next conference you speak at may Google you (or Teoma you, if you prefer) and come upon the web version. When you deliver the same speech they've just finished reading, they're likely to be a little disappointed.

I'm not sure there's much you can do about that. You can be honest, and that helps—for example, your handout might note that the speech was originally prepared for another conference. Partial overlap is another issue. Some listener disappointment can't be avoided.

The PowerPoint problem

The first time I spoke outside the United States was as the first of five keynote speakers (two each day, with the group as a closing panel) for a major Australian library conference. We all received the instructions for speakers, which included two mandatory elements:

- 1. We were expected to provide a written text in advance (formatted to specific guidelines) to appear as part of the conference proceedings that each attendee would receive at registration.
- 2. All presenters were expected to use PowerPoint. Each speaking venue was guaranteed to have both a Windows and a Macintosh computer hooked up to a professional-grade data projector.

I managed to acquire A4 paper (a slightly different size than American letter paper) to satisfy the first requirement. No problem. Then I sent a message to the conference managers regarding the second requirement. "I don't use PowerPoint, particularly for a keynote." They responded that the requirement could, of course, be waived for keynotes. I wasn't the only prima donna. Two other keynote speakers wanted to speak directly to the audience without the aid of presentation software.

I still don't use PowerPoint or other visual aids in speeches, keynote or otherwise, unless it's clearly necessary (for example, if I'm talking about web pages or typefaces, I have visuals of them). That's probably a mistake for non-keynote speeches, and it's not a practice I suggest you follow. Most of the time, for most regular speeches, your audience will expect PowerPoint or an equivalent and you'll want to use it.

I have two problems with PowerPoint and equivalents, one personal and one that I regard as legitimate. The second appears as the title for this chapter.

The first is a combination of laziness, disorganization, and flexibility. I'm too lazy to carry a notebook computer to conferences and don't own such a device. I could bring along a diskette or CD-R with PowerPoint slides, but I wouldn't be able to change them on the spot. Disorganization and flexibility are two sides of the same coin. More than half the time, I substantially rebuild my speech both on the morning of the speech and during the speech itself. The first is tough when you're using PowerPoint, and I've seen hilarious results when people do revisions half an hour before a speech. The second is nearly impossible. You wind up disrupting the flow of the speech while you attend to the mechanics of finding the right slides.

The second problem with PowerPoint applies to any visual assistance that you use throughout the speech. Too many speakers hide behind PowerPoint, "speaking to the screen" to minimize the nervousness of speaking to an audience. Too many others spell out the entire speech in an endless series of slides, reading the PowerPoint slides and providing little to interest the audience.

I understand the temptation to "speak to the screen" and the soothing knowledge that with the lights down, you don't know who's falling asleep or has decided to walk out. But in avoiding nerves you've also avoided contact. Sitting in a dark room staring at a set of bullets on the screen, I wonder why I'm not just reading an article or—better yet—watching television.

This disconnect is not a necessary consequence of using PowerPoint. Quite a few speakers use PowerPoint to anchor their speeches but maintain an audience connection, communicating brilliantly. I have seen more good speakers using PowerPoint than speakers evading their audiences, but I've also seen good speakers who I thought would have been more effective if the projector was off and the lights were up.

Doing it right

If you're going to use PowerPoint, do it right, as summarized in Danelle Hall's article. Start with a title slide (your name, title, and affiliation and the title of the speech); keep the slides simple, with big type in high-contrast color combinations; don't overload any slide; and have a backup strategy in case the technology crashes.

You can use transparencies instead of PowerPoint, and you may want them as backup, but you must pay attention to type size (probably 30 point minimum on a regular transparency) and simplicity (lots of space, few lines, few words per line) as well as clarity (a simple serif or sans serif typeface, always upper and lowercase). Twelve-point type (typewriter-size) on a transparency is the kiss of death, although it's just fine for handouts. Better you should turn off the overhead projector and just talk.

If you're part of a multispeaker program, work with the moderator or the other speakers so that all of your PowerPoint presentations are on a single computer—maybe even as sections of a single file. While it can be amusing to watch the intermittent chaos as each speaker in a program tries to find the right notebook computer among the four littering the podium and figure out how to move the projector connection to that notebook, it disrupts the flow of the program and takes time that could be better used for speaking or questions.

Hall also provides useful comments on checking out your speaking location, ones every speaker should heed. Read the article: it's short, very well written, and followed by an equally short and well-written Janet Swan Hill piece on what hosts should do to make guest speakers happy.

Visit the room in advance, checking out the lighting, podium, and other arrangements. You can't always do this more than ten or fifteen minutes before your speech, as conference room arrangements may change several times a day, but you don't want to be surprised by the set-up.

Did I mention timing your speech? Do a complete run-through at least once, including PowerPoint. If you use a preview audience, make sure that you're speaking at a reasonable pace (ask them!) and that you've left a little slack time. If you don't use a preview audience, add at least 20 percent to the time you think you're taking.

Coping with surprises

Expect surprises and know how to handle them. If you're the fourth 15-minute speaker in a 75-minute slot (with 15 minutes reserved for questions), don't be surprised when you're left with five minutes of time. You're allowed to curse the self-important blockheads ahead of you who took 20 or 25 minutes each, but only under your breath. Know where you can cut at the last minute—and if the situation's completely hopeless, say so up front.

What will you do when there's no podium to rest your detailed notes on? In one case I still remember with horror, I should have refused to give the speech, but that's rarely an option. If you're there early, you can make your needs known—and point out that these are needs you communicated quite clearly to your host both when you agreed to speak and in a follow-up message shortly before the conference.

How do you present a fully written speech so that it doesn't look or sound like you're reading it? Memorization is good if you're up to it; otherwise, you need a combination of large type with loads of spacing, style, and luck.

What do you do when none of the technology works and your handouts didn't arrive? You deliver a brilliant speech that leads to happy listeners and lively discussion. In my experience as a listener, quite a few speakers surprise themselves when they're forced to do without props—almost always for the better. I've seen very few meltdowns in such cases, except when the speaker is so intent on restoring the technology that the aim of the speech is forgotten.

You're speaking because you have something to say. If you care about what you're saying, you'll survive the surprises—and probably do a better speech as a result.

This reprint of a book chapter originally appeared in *Cites & Insights* 3:12 (October 2003)

Suggestions for Presenters at Library Conferences

Credit Michael Stephens for this; he speaks frequently and posted this on April 23, 2004 at his *Tame the web: Technology and libraries* weblog. I'm excerpting or paraphrasing. My own snarky comments are in square brackets.

- **Always be prepared.** Have multiple digital versions of your presentations and a plan if nothing works. "Could you do the material cold from your notes and handout?"
- **If it's a track, try to hear the other speakers.** Not only is it respectful but it can improve your talk if you're able to change it on the fly—and it makes the whole track more cohesive.
- **Share!** When there's more than one speaker in a program, keep to your time limits, both so there's time for questions and so later speakers don't get shafted. [I've "done" a 20-minute presentation in a five-minute slot because I was preceded by academics who

should know better…and it gets tiresome. In my experience, those who can't keep to time limits are usually inferior speakers as well.]

- **Have fun!** Librarians aren't that formidable and you shouldn't hide behind your notes.
- **Know your stuff, but there's nothing wrong with "I don't know."** If you're really provoking thought, someone's going to ask a question you can't answer. That's good.
- **Be mindful of acronyms.** See my comment on Mary K's second point in the previous section. "Define, even if you think everyone in the place knows what you are talking about." [Stephens used "At ILF, I off-handedly mentioned RFID…" as an example of this point. One perceptive comment said: "What's ILF?"]
- **There are no stupid questions.** [Well, that's not entirely true, but close enough.]
- **Deliver a clear message.** Try to put technological explanations in everyone's terms.
- **Humor works**, but not at anyone's expense except your own.
- **Don't rule out certain conferences.** Why can't you speak at ALA? "If you have something good to say, look for ways to say it."
- **It's not ME ME ME**…it's "what can we talk about and learn that will help our library users get to information better, faster and in a way they will recognize the great value of libraries."

Later that day, Karen Schneider added a dozen more items on her non-work weblog, *Free range librarian*. Many relate directly to use of technology within the speech: Try to talk directly to the "technology people" beforehand, mention them during the talk, and thank them afterwards. Label your own equipment (cords, etc.). Ask for a lavalier mike. Use their computer rather than your own, given a choice—but bring yours anyway. And "never, ever assume the technology is 'taken care of.'" Check the setup and nudge if necessary. Then there are the following:

- Ask someone to be your timeclock and to give several warnings.
- If you're on a panel with someone going way overtime, "hand them a very large note." [Good advice. Unfortunately, the worst offenders will ignore every note, even someone standing directly in front of them with a TIME'S UP card. Yes, I've seen it happen.]
- There's nothing wrong with appropriate self-promotion, within reason.
- "Wear something nice. However, wear something you've worn before, so you're comfortable in it."
- "Praise your audience." They did have the good taste to choose your session.
- "Consider going post-PowerPoint"—that is, using PowerPoint for visual information and moving beyond it instead of having bullet points for every sentence in your speech. "By all means, do not show up and read from your slides." [Would that every speaker would read and pay attention!] She goes on to note that one good use of PowerPoint is for screen shots as backup if you're using web examples—and the only time I've used PowerPoint since 1989, except for work occasions, was primarily for screenshots.

Thanks, Michael and Karen.

Originally appeared as part of GOOD ADVICE: MAKING SOME LISTS, *Cites & Insights* 4:9 (July 2004)

HOWTO: Give a presentation

- Imagine your audience in their underwear. Nothing's more soothing than a bunch of half-naked librarians. You can also open with an off-color joke to relax the audience.

It might help to proactively imagine yourself in your underwear—you'll appreciate your clothes when you're actually presenting.

- If you're presenting a paper, it's best just to read it straight through. Eye contact's overrated, anyway.
- Be consistent: speak in a monotone voice and pause only long enough to breathe. If people can't stay awake, that's their problem.
- Stay behind the podium. Walking around as you talk will only strain people's necks. Gesturing is okay, but only if you do it like Donald Rumsfeld.
- If you're in a large room and someone whispers a question, don't bother repeating it when you answer. You're going to launch into a prepared remark that only vaguely addresses the question anyway.
- Don't explain technical terms or cryptic abbreviations. These are librarians, after all; they can look them up.
- Dress in the most relaxing attire possible.
- Don't worry about having enough handouts. People will be happy to share.

- If you're presenting as part of a group panel, make sure you take up more than your fair share of time. This way people are more likely to remember you. Indeed, just take your time. The other speakers aren't as interesting as you anyway.
- Be a PowerPresenter with PowerPoint!

If you need to back up a slide, make sure you fumble around with the mouse, right-click and choose "previous" from the fly-out menu. Don't just hit "Page Up" or one of the other keyboard shortcuts. This will show the audience how tech-savvy you are.

If something won't fit on a slide, just decrease the font size. Tiny print will encourage people to sit closer to you. Since you'll be reading every word on each slide anyway, those in back will be okay too.

There's really no need for illustrations, but do employ multiple fonts and sound effects to make things exciting. Another way to show your skills: have those funky slide transitions on every slide. They're cool!

- Don't be in such a rush to check out the room beforehand (let alone work the room by mingling with your audience). There's no need bring backups or have other failsafe plans, since technology never fails.
- "Can you hear me in the back?" The time to test the microphone is a few sentences into your presentation. Checking it beforehand is for losers.

Original: LISWiki, http://liswiki.org. Verified May 22, 2007.

The authorship of this gem is unknown. This additional tip appears on the discussion page:

- Wait at least a month before posting your presentation online—it makes the audience that much more grateful when they can finally download a copy of it.

While I'm certain of the spirit in which this was contributed, I've seen a few too many speeches where it appears that the presenter used something similar as a guide. It seems as good a way as any to end this section. Now, on to something a little more controversial.

Conference-Speaker Arrangements

That heading covers two topic areas:

- How speakers and conference people should work together to make speaking experiences as smooth and pleasant as possible. That part's interesting and fun. I begin with notes from a five-year-old article pair giving some rules for the "care and feeding" of speakers and listeners. Other comments on speaking arrangements appear within the long PERSPECTIVE that forms the core of this section.
- **Money**: What to expect, why some people are paid differently than others (or not at all), whether it's fair and what to do about it. That part is interesting—but not exactly fun. I begin with a fairly long *Cites & Insights* PERSPECTIVE from February 2007 and add a few commentaries that have appeared since that issue.

The Care and Feeding of Speakers and the Spoken To

Hall, Danielle, and Janet Swan Hill, "The care and feeding of speakers and the spoken-to," *American Libraries* 33:5 (May 2002), pp. 64-7.

These two brief articles offer interesting perspectives on conference speaking. Hall offers "four simple rules" for good presentations from her perspective as a listener. Hill offers a long set of suggestions for conference organizers to make out-of-town guest speakers happier and more effective.

Hall's rules (briefly paraphrased):

- Have a slide or handout with your name, title, institutional affiliation, presentation title and contact information.
- For all visual aids, KISS: Keep it simple, stupid. One idea per slide. Use visual aids as *aids*.
- Always visit the space where you will be speaking ahead of time (to check the arrangements).
- Have a backup strategy in place—or more than one.

I'm not the right one to judge Hall's rules since I almost never use visual aids while speaking (thus violating three of her four rules). I do try to "visit the space where you will be speaking ahead of time" and agree this is a basic way to uncover problems before they arrive. In two of three cases where I've been unhappy about a speech I gave, visits beforehand—with someone who could give straight answers to hard questions—would have helped. In general, and excluding maverick speakers, I think her suggestions are excellent.

Janet Swan Hill (who is far too humble in calling herself a "lesser light" among librarians) has excellent suggestions. "**Always put your speaker up in a hotel with a restaurant.**" Can I get that engraved on a plaque? Her long paragraph about meal events (other than the speaker's own event) is also first-rate, leaving the choice to the speaker and making it clear that "if speakers do not wish to attend the ticketed event, they will be reimbursed for the cost of their private meal." Sometimes, an out-of-town speaker just isn't up for a banquet. If I would quibble with any point, it would be this one:

> Issue invitations to meals, and say who will call to see if the speaker is interested in going out; remember that the speaker may know no one at the conference and will probably have no idea where to eat. If the speakers have arrived the night before their paper is to be delivered, they may prefer to stay in to rest or work on the paper, but they might rather have at least some human contact. If there is no conference organizer available to play host, apologize profusely, and make some suggestions about where they might dine.

Excellent advice, but I'd add this qualifier: "If possible, find out whether the speaker prefers company, would just as soon dine alone, or is neutral—and, if you're inviting the speaker to a meal, try to provide some idea of how many people will be there and the nature of the group." There have been cases where I've been the odd man out in a huge party of locals intently exchanging gossip or, in one ghastly case, where I wound up dining near midnight because no plans were made—and was informed at the last minute that I hadn't really been invited *to* dinner but to *join* people—and was expected to pay for a dinner that I would never have chosen on my own. That's rare, and I'll almost always take the chance: Informal meals and banquets can be great ways to find out more about the people to whom you're speaking and to get more out of the occasion.

A few other tips (the article includes more than a dozen, some of which also appear from other sources in the following essay):

- Keep the speaker informed—let them know the time slot, length and location as soon as that's available and distribute contact information to all involved.
- Send speakers hardcopies of useful conference information, along with URLs for websites.
- Make hotel reservations and provide the confirmation number if available.
- Preregister the speaker if you can—and consider a welcoming gesture at the hotel.

If all conference organizers kept copies of Janet Swan Hill's article on hand, I could get rid of most of the "speaking page" on my Web site. As it is, I may adapt some of these tips (with credit): she's done a fine job.

Portions appeared in THE GOOD STUFF in *Cites & Insights* 2:9, July 2002; some copy added.

Money, Equity and Transparency: Introduction

In reviewing materials for this section, it strikes me that the rules have changed in a fundamental way, thanks to some of those named in the essay that follows—and that there will be considerable discomfort in learning to live with those changing rules, especially since many conference groups won't be aware of the changes. The biggest change: Greater transparency.

I do not believe associations or conference committees deliberately treat some speakers worse than others. I *know* some conference organizing groups approach speaking fees in an opaque manner, either not mentioning honoraria or asking speaker what their "normal fee" is, rather than making a straightforward starting offer. And I know most membership organizations have rules that make perfectly good sense but inherently lead to apparent inequities.

In the past, most of us who speak now and then didn't know what "going rates" were—and most of us aren't quite certain even now. Of course, there is no standard going rate that applies across the board, but there seem to be typical ranges and we're a little more aware of those ranges than we used to be.

This increases transparency. That's a good thing.

Or is it? Transparency increases the visibility of inequity—and there are a number of ways inequity occurs, not all of them iniquitous. "Big names" may get better offers than lesser lights with more to say; that's unfortunate (but may fall into the "life isn't fair" category). People who speak regularly at certain conferences may get better treatment—or they may get *lower* fees (treatment and fees aren't the same thing). Some people may be good at cutting special deals, and that's unfortunate but also in the "life isn't fair" category.

Other forms of inequity may disturb people when they're obvious but might go by unnoticed and without harming anyone if transparency isn't heightened. ALA, most state chapters and many similar membership organizations *cannot* pay honoraria or, typically, expenses to their members for speaking at their regular conferences. There are good reasons for that rule. Some state organizations go further, saying that nobody from within the state who *could* be a member of the association can be or will be reimbursed or paid. You can't justify that inequity on the basis of preventing corruption or special deals.

Are we better off knowing that Speaker X, doing a single-speaker workshop requiring weeks of preparation, will pay her own way and receive no fee because she lives in state, while Speaker Y, doing part of a panel presentation and probably spending only an hour or two in preparation, receives full expenses and an honorarium because he lives elsewhere? I honestly can't say.

I don't know how much the situation will change over the next few years. I believe some speakers will ask for higher fees. I believe some speakers will turn down invitations they might previously have accepted. I suspect most situations will stay unchanged.

New material for this issue.

Conference Speaking: I Have a Little List

Thanks to Rachel Singer Gordon, Jessamyn West, Dorothea Salo and 90 people who've spoken in the library field, we're gaining a little transparency and a lot of good advice—stuff I wish I'd known two decades ago (when I started getting speaking invitations).

In the spirit of what Tom Lehrer would call research ("Lobachevsky") I'm combining material from five posts and my thoughts on reading those posts. The posts: "Ten do's and don'ts for conference, workshop, and program organizers" (September 11, 2006, *The liminal librarian*), "Speaking survey: Results" and "Speaking survey: Comments from respondents" (November 17, 2006, *The liminal librarian),* "Ten tips for presenters" (September 25, 2006, *librarian.net*.), and—much earlier—"Conference economics" (May 29, 2006, *Caveat Lector*). I **heartily recommend** that you read all five posts in full. (OK, I don't meet Lobachevsky's definition—I'm naming my sources, which falls short of proper ~~plagiarism~~ research.) I'm omitting some material in those posts (e.g., Jessamyn West's section on permissions).

A little personal background first, so you'll see where these comments do and maybe don't apply:

- I never set out to be a speaker, but I did do four years of high school (NFL) debate, impromptu and extemporaneous speaking.
- I've never been a particularly active speaker…
- I rarely *apply* to speak although I was part of a few arranged programs and did a generally-unsuccessful LITA workshop on desktop publishing three times over a couple of years. My experience and opinions don't necessarily track well for people who are speaking to present research results or gain tenure, or those proposing paid workshops: I believe the ground rules are a lot different in those cases.
- Almost half my speeches have been keynotes and nearly all of my speeches have been written for a particular occasion. When I've been asked "what's your fee?" I've never had a good answer…[but I do now.]
- Nearly all my speeches have been to library groups, either at professional association conferences (states, types of libraries, types of librarians, etc.) or at libraries or groups of libraries. I haven't had much experience with for-profit conferences and I'd probably adjust my demands upward for such conferences.

With that full disclosure related to my own biases, here's what I make of the five posts—or those portions of the posts related to being an invited speaker at a conference.

Yes, I know *there are always exceptions*—some well known, some very much dependent on your own situation. I don't ask about money (honorarium or expenses) if I'm invited to speak at an official ALA function during ALA Annual or Midwinter, because I know it violates ALA policy to pay members to present at either conference and I'd be going to both in any case. That exception would *not* apply if, say, PLA invited me to speak at their national conference (I'm not a PLA member) and probably wouldn't apply if LITA invited me to speak at their annual forum (I wouldn't be going to the forum under normal circumstances). I spoke for a nominal sum (covering driving, parking and lunch) at a California Library Association conference in San Jose, but would expect full expenses and an honorarium if the conference was in, say, San Diego—because I'm *not* a CLA member and wouldn't be attending otherwise.

I'm going to combine advice from the posts into phases of a conference speaking situation. I'll mark quoted material with the initials of the writer: RSG, JW or DS.

Before Any Specific Conference

If you plan to do any speaking in your career, whether invited or arranged, it makes sense to do some work in advance.

> **Identity**. Keep a current headshot (300 dpi, reproducible in B&W, looks OK at tiny sizes) and a few versions of your bio [short, medium, long] ready to be emailed off as needed. I keep a version of the "this is the pertinent information you'll need from me" email on hand including name, mailing address, contact phone/email, SSN (if they need it for W-2s) and affiliation, and forward it as needed. Depending on the conference, you may be introduced using only the information you provide, so make it as detailed as you want it to be. You may want to have a short author bio for copy/pasting into a brochure, and a longer "information about me" paragraph to be given to the person doing your introduction. [JW]

I maintain most of this information on a website because I had a free website back in dialup days, I wanted to make some miscellaneous papers available, and it turned out to be convenient to store the information there and point people to it when they need it. I maintain a brief biographical statement (suitable for brochures and introductions), a headshot (in color but it works in black and white), a selective vita and a full vita. Email info is included there but I'd rather not post my USMail address and *certainly* not my Social Security number on the web site. The latter is only needed if you're getting an honorarium. Expenses do not require a W-2 and you should make sure that expenses don't get paid as fees if you can avoid it. I also have a "speaking page" that spells out some of the information suggested elsewhere in this essay for what I need to know and what I anticipate.

If you have a blog but not a website, you can probably provide similar information in separate pages on the blog—or, as West suggests, have them on your own machine and email as appropriate. In any case, have this stuff available up front—and check your brief bio at least once a year to make sure it's still current and correct.

Initial Negotiations

I'm going to focus on invited presentations—keynotes and other cases where a library or conference organizing committee approaches a speaker. Much of the advice also applies to proposals (where the speaker has entered a paper or proposed a panel or speech or workshop). Initial negotiations also include money, but that's worth its own heading.

Speaker's side

> **Timeline**. When you are initially asked to give a talk for a conference or event, often it's a very exploratory discussion. An initial conversation should include the conference date…location, the expected audience, what the organizers would like you to do… and… honorarium/ fees/ reimbursement. Usually once you've had this discussion, they'll need to get back to you with specifics…and the final word on honorarium/ expenses/ arrangements. Sometimes there can be a long lag between the first discussion and the second… Don't purchase tickets or reserve a hotel room until you are sure that you're confirmed to be at the conference. Once you've started making purchases for a conference, make sure you save all your receipts. Feel free to follow-up if you haven't heard from the planning people in a timely manner…
>
> Some conference planners may want you to deliver a talk you've given before, others will have a topic in mind they'd like you to speak on. Use the preliminary discussions to help agree on a topic. [JW]

As a potential speaker, you may elect to give the same speech over and over again. As long as those inviting you know what they're getting, that's not only acceptable but also sometimes preferable, although some of us aren't good at repeating speeches. If you're The Expert on X, you should be clear about how much you'll customize your XSpiel for this group—and whether you're willing to speak on Y. Based on my own experience, I'll suggest being open to requests somewhat outside your comfort zone: Some of my most enjoyable experiences have involved topics or audiences that I wouldn't have considered to be in my area.

If you're asked to speak on a topic wholly outside your scope *or* one that poses a conflict of interest, make that clear—and if it's a group you'd like to speak to, see if they'd consider an alternative topic.

Conference side

> DO be specific as to what you're looking for. If you have a particular topic or focus in mind, say so. If you have a specific time slot to fill, let your speaker know…. DO keep your speaker updated as your knowledge about an event progresses.... DON'T leave a potential presenter hanging. Be sure to get back to every potential presenter you contact, even if the answer is no. If you bring a program proposal to a committee and it doesn't make the cut, or you find you can't afford a speaker's quoted fees, or your budget has been cut, tell her as soon as you find out…[RSG]

Don't play games with speakers. In the end you'll both lose. I was once *approached* to do an overseas keynote under difficult circumstances; it would have required two very long plane rides, I'd already been to the general area twice before and the group wasn't the best fit for me. I proposed slightly tougher than usual terms, although by no means extraordinary. Instead of returning with a compromise suggestion or saying they weren't willing to spend that much, the conference committee eventually sent me a note thanking me for *applying* to speak but saying they couldn't use me. If they ever invite me again (unlikely), I'll have an easy two-letter answer.

Money

Up until last year, I always cringed when someone asking me to speak said, "What's your standard fee?" As with most of us (I believe), I didn't have one and wasn't quite sure what was appropriate. Thanks to Dorothea Salo, I've thought about where I want to be in the universe of speakers—and thanks to Rachel Singer Gordon and 90 of us who responded to her survey, I'm now willing to offer an answer. (If you're wondering, that answer, for an out-of-state keynote or plenary speech not part of my job and where the group doesn't make an initial offer, is "full expenses for the entire conference plus $1,500 honorarium," with room to negotiate on the honorarium for a group I'd really like to speak to.)

How did I get there? Partly by talking to other speakers who were in demand when I was a hot item. Partly by observing the offers I got from state library associations and others, particularly once I knew they'd be going out to find sponsors. That answer was *confirmed* by Gordon's survey.

Dorothea Salo's take: A taxonomy of fees

> Suppliers of speaking labor—and let's not be coy, here; speaking is work—come in two basic stripes: gratis and paid. Of the paid variety, there's the expenses-only kind, and the honorarium kind—and even the honorarium kind divides into those who make their living from speaking (quite the rara avis in libraryland, though I know of one or two) and those who treat it as a nice sideline.
>
> The gratis speaker divides into two stripes also: the altruist and the whuffie-ist. The whuffie-ist tends to be an academic librarian…under the gun as regards retention and/or tenure. Solo vendors drumming up business, librarians on the job trail, and folks hoping to move into the paid-speaker ranks are also whuffie-ists. [DS]

There's a third type: Speakers speaking on behalf of or sponsored by their organization. That's neither altruism nor "whuffie" (think reputation): it's paid speaking, but the pay doesn't come from the conference.

> A final type of speaker is the clueless altruist, who has more than enough whuffie to move into paid-speaker ranks but doesn't realize it. These speakers can be taken advantage of by the savvy conference organizer; they exist because the economics of speaking is treated a lot like the economics of journal-bundle pricing—kept under wraps as much as possible, and for much the same reasons. (So that those getting shafted don't find out, of course. What, you didn't realize that?) [DS]

Those wraps have come off, at least to some extent!

> This taxonomy crosses with another: the invited-speaker model versus the academic-speaker model… The academic-speaker model tends a bit less toward the star system because of its obvious substitutability factor, and it's obviously toward the whuffie end of the scale of rewards. There's crossover, though…
>
> All of this, mind you, presumes a conference model in which lots of people come to a place to listen to a (relatively) few people. It presumes a hierarchy of speaking desirability, and it presumes at least on the "paid" level that one speaker can't easily be substituted for another.
>
> Indeed, insofar as clueless altruists create a substitute good for paid speakers, paid speakers resent them. But they don't, interestingly, resent the conference organizers who recruit them—not openly, at least… In fact, conference organizers don't have much to fear from clueless altruists who wise up, either. Two possibilities: either the formerly-clueless altruist moves into the paid-speaker ranks…or the formerly-clueless altruist was primarily valuable by virtue of low cost, at which point the conference organizer simply moves on to the next clueless altruist. [DS]

There's a *lot* more to Salo's post, much of it related to online conferences and the fact that you don't need to speak at conferences these days to gain a reputation (I don't care for "whuffie"), what with blogs and other expanded publishing opportunities. I'm only citing the portion directly related to speaking fees.

In commenting on Rachel Singer Gordon's survey post, Salo suggests another set of distinctions:

> I want to see conference-payment practice be fair and aboveboard, and as uniform as is reasonable. Sure, some people are hot tickets and deserve to be paid more for it, but that doesn't mean everybody else gets screwed!
>
> One thing I think we need is a conference taxonomy. Rules are different for academic conferences, association conferences, and "pro" conferences, not so? [DS]

My experience is almost entirely with association conferences and in-house speaking events (staff days etc.). I would expect payment to be rare for a true academic conference—but I'm not an academic. I would *personally* expect considerably higher payment for a "pro" conference, which may be one reason I haven't spoken at them (with one early exception).

Survey results

Ninety people responded to Rachel Singer Gordon's survey. Selected results that I find particularly interesting [RSG for all of these, but paraphrased]:

- Most respondents were "occasional" speakers—78% did fewer than seven presentations a year.
- Two-thirds of those participating on a panel didn't charge a fee; among those who did, excluding outlying cases, the average was $240.
- Almost 60% of those doing 45-90 minute presentations *do* charge, and the average (again excluding outliers) was about $340, a surprisingly low figure.
- More than 70% of those putting on half-day workshops charge, and the average among those who charge (excluding outliers) was just over $580.
- Astonishingly, almost a third of those doing *full-day* workshops do it for nothing—and the non-outlier average for the rest was just over $1,100.
- Then there are keynotes—and here, *more* than a third give it away! Of the 25 respondents who do charge for keynotes, dropping the outliers, the average was just under $1,050.

Most people who charge also expect to have registration and expenses covered, presumably, since most of those fees wouldn't even cover the costs of a typical out-of-state conference. (Fifty people explicitly charge actual expenses; 18 are covered by their institutions.)

The most popular exceptions—cases where people will speak for free—are for LIS classes, local workshops, conferences people are attending anyway, groups they're members of, and as a personal favor to an organizer. Ten respondents always give it away; one never speaks for free. (One respondent charges $2,750 per day for an out-of-state event; I wonder whether that's the person who never speaks for free?)

Comments include interesting variations—one who charges for rest time after an international event, one who charges less if it's an existing presentation, one who charges $1,500 per day but will do multiple activities, one who—calling themself no longer a newbie—won't even speak at ALA conferences because of the no-fee policy. One person noted that speaking can be energizing, which is true for some of us—but that probably means the conference is getting its money's worth. I *love* state library conferences and try to attend the whole conference—but that doesn't mean I'd speak at them without expenses and, typically, an honorarium. There's love and then there's fiscal suicide. One statement in particular is worth repeating in full:

> This is my first year speaking at conferences. I started off the year saying yes to anything I was asked to speak at (within reason) regardless of whether it paid or not, unless it required serious travel. I'm realizing that it costs me a great deal of time and anxiety to speak, and that my effort should be worth something. I plan to ask for more money from now on and will be perfectly happy if that leads to fewer speaking gigs. However, there are certain gigs I'm willing to speak at for free just to be able to put it on my resume or because the connections I make there could help my career. Some may not pay now, but will pay off later in terms of career opportunities. [Unsigned, quoted by RSG]

Others argue that association conferences represent professional sharing and they shouldn't charge for that. I'll argue that's only true for contributed papers and other proposals and for conferences you would be attending whether or not you were speaking. As for association conferences—well, if they *really* have no sources of funding, it's worth talking over. I would be a little surprised if I was negotiated out of any honorarium, then found various companies listed as sponsors on the conference program. I would be a lot more surprised and upset if I later discovered that other speakers held firm and received some of that sponsorship money. (There's a difference between altruism and being played for a sucker.)

What if you're affluent enough that you really don't have any use for the honorarium or feel the money could be put to better use? If you're a keynoter and choose to speak for free, you should at least be aware that you're making life more difficult for those who *do* need compensation for the vacation time they had to take at work, the effort of preparation, and the lost time at home. You could consider taking the honorarium and donating it directly to the association's scholarship fund; that would appear to yield good results for everyone involved.

The conference perspective

> DON'T be afraid to talk money. If you want to know what someone charges, ask. If you have a specific amount allocated for an honorarium, offer. If you have a policy of not compensating speakers, say so. If a presenter comes back with a number that is out of your budget, make a counteroffer. If you require a presenter to pay her own conference registration, make this clear up-front. [RSG]

If you have a policy of not compensating, don't be surprised if some speakers you want simply say no. If you require a (non-member) *invited* presenter to pay registration, *why*? That would be a deal-breaker for me, and I believe it's the most unreasonable expense issue around. Again, that's for invited speakers.

Expenses

In my opinion and practice, expenses are separate from honoraria and should be handled separately. Ideally, there should be two checks: One for expenses (which need not be reported to the IRS), one for honorarium (which *must* be reported if it's $600 or more and which I always report as income in any case). The second goes on your Schedule C; the first is just reimbursement, so shouldn't.

As for the money side of expenses, that should be straightforward: Unless a speaker proposed a paper or is a member of your association and attending a regular association conference, or is being underwritten by their place of work, *their expenses and registration should be covered*. Period. And "expenses" may need to be spelled out in some detail. It's hard to separate expenses from arrangements, so we'll cover those together in the next section.

Expenses, Travel Arrangements and Contracts

The speaker's perspective

> **Checklists**. Make sure you know who is paying for and who is arranging: transportation to/from the conference city; transportation to/from the airport/train/bus station on both ends; parking and/or car rental; lodging (how many nights?); meals (which meals? are some covered meals at the conference?); conference registration (many conferences make you register even if they don't make you pay, make sure this is clear); internet access, if not included; handout/notes reproduction
>
> Sometimes you will get reimbursed before the conference (esp for things like plane tickets), but often you will be reimbursed afterwards, sometimes weeks afterwards.
>
> Do you have specific needs or preferences? Make sure to let them know if you need special meals/dietary restrictions, hotel/airline preferences, time preferences for travel and/or giving your talk, and local information. You may need to repeat these instructions on your contract as well. [JW]

Make sure expense agreements are clear. Surprises can be expensive and unpleasant. What *sort* of lodging (there's a reason I say "business class [or better] hotel" if there's no conference hotel)? Does the lodging have a full-service restaurant if you need full breakfasts or a late meal when you arrive? How about parking or ground transportation at *your* airport?

The conference perspective

> DO get it in writing. If your association/ conference/ organization has a formal contract/letter of agreement, use it. If not, make your own. If this gives you pause, ask the presenter to send you a letter of agreement. Mail this out as soon as you and the speaker agree on the details.
>
> In your contract or letter, include all pertinent information, such as: Day, Time, Location, Length, Topic, Title, Honorarium, Reimbursement policy, Transportation and lodging arrangements, Conference registration requirements, Equipment needs
>
> DON'T change your mind at the last minute. If you have contracted for a given workshop or presentation, refrain from asking your presenter to change topics or format; she's probably already prepared as per your original agreement.
>
> DO respond to e-mail or phone calls in a timely fashion. Answer questions honestly. If you don't have an answer, give an estimate as to when you can get details from your boss/committee chair/program organizers. [RSG]

There are few things more frustrating than being left hanging as a conference approaches, particularly when you've already purchased nonrefundable tickets that won't be reimbursed until after the conference.

Gordon offers another tip that I have some trouble with, at least for invited speakers:

> DON'T be afraid to ask for references. If you know a potential speaker only by her writing or a listing or a resumé or a program description, but think you might be interested, ask for references from recent events. By the same token, be willing to be a reference for someone who's done a good job for you.

I've never been asked to provide references. For workshops, on the other hand, it's a reasonable suggestion.

Clarity and sharing knowledge

Speakers going somewhere for the first time should ask more questions—and people *inviting* speakers should share the local knowledge they have. The idea is to minimize the number of unhappy surprises when speakers come to the conference or other non-local speaking situation. For example:

- Some speakers prefer to use rental cars for non-local events. Some of us don't. If you're dealing with one of the latter and you're not in a position to have someone pick them up at the airport, let them know the good and bad points about other arrangements. If you're a speaker who doesn't wish to rent a car, *ask* about appropriate means of transportation. As one example, shuttles can be convenient, inexpensive, and reasonably effective ways to get from airport to hotel—but in some cities, shared-ride shuttles can be a horrendous mistake… If you're on the local arrangements side, you're a lot more likely to know about potential problems of this sort—and if you don't know, *ask*.

- If you're inviting a speaker to a hotel-based conference, chances are the hotel offers reasonably full service and will satisfy most speaker requirements. In other cases, make sure the speaker understands what they're getting into. A hotel that only has a sports bar with hot dogs and fries is *not* a full-service hotel. A hotel where the only dinner restaurant is reservation-only, very expensive or very fancy, and where it's not plausible to walk to a nearby restaurant may pose problems for a speaker—particularly when they get to the hotel at 9 p.m. and discover that the restaurant's closed and there's no room service. Need I mention that, if you're suggesting a five-story hotel with no elevator as one alternative, you *really* need to let the speaker know up front? If I seem to be harping on meals, that's because non-local speakers are likely to want to relax, and reasonable dining arrangements are part of relaxation.
- It should go without saying that the speaker and the inviting group should both make sure they understand time issues—how long it takes to get from the airport to the hotel (and vice-versa), what that means in terms of other arrangements, and so on.

Making the Speaker Happy During the Event

You've arrived at an agreement on topic, length, date, time, expenses, honorarium and travel arrangements. If the speaker's just going to fly in, talk and leave, that may be all you need to worry about other than presentation issues (next section). In most cases, though, a non-local speaker will be there at least overnight and frequently for two or more nights. There are some things speakers and conference groups can do to make sure the speaker's reasonably happy during the event—and those things will differ (to some extent) for each speaker.

The speaker's perspective

> Some people are social and some are not. Some people are exhausted by travel and others are not. When you arrive on-site, especially if you get a ride from the airport from your host, you may need to let them know whether you're a) ready to go out to dinner with a bunch of people, or b) ready to go back to your room and do your own thing until the next day. Either option is fine, but they may not be able to read your mind and know which you would prefer. The people arranging your ground transportation may not know your other schedule information, so make sure you have a copy handy. They also may not be as acutely aware of time differences between your home and your current location, so if you are tired early due to jet lag or the fact that it's way past your bedtime, just let people know….
>
> It's up to you, usually, whether you want to attend any of the rest of the conference or not... I'm often pleasantly surprised by how much I've learned by dropping in on other talks at conferences that were outside of my specialty. Some of my favorite times at conferences have been having meals with local librarians and talking to them about their jobs and their regions. If you haven't made plans otherwise though, your time is your own. [JW]

Some of us are social some of the time but not all of the time—and some of us are flexible, but may not deal well with being "on" too often. There are many gradations. For example, I might pass on going out to dinner with "a bunch of people," particularly if that means ten or more, but might be delighted to have dinner with three, four, or five people. (When asked, I usually emphasize "a restaurant that's not too noisy and a group small enough so I can actually chat with you"—and that people shouldn't feel obliged to entertain me, although I've thoroughly enjoyed most group dinners during conferences.)

I'm a great believer in attending the rest of the conference and I'll certainly second what West has to say about learning outside my specialty. If I'm at a conference for two or more nights, I'm usually delighted to spend at least one of those nights at dinner with others—but I'll also usually try to spend at least one evening "down," probably having a light dinner in the hotel bar (a survival tip for portion size and "dining alone" I learned long ago), reading, and making an early night of it. This presupposes that there *is* a hotel bar with decent food and enough light to read by—or a known equivalent in close walking distance.

> Make sure you've said thank you and goodbye to everyone. Make sure you've gotten your receipts in, or know whatever follow-up will be required for reimbursement. Sometimes organizers like you to fill out paperwork for reimbursement at the conference, often there is a form

to fill out and return once you get home. Sometimes you will get paid an honorarium at the conference, and other times it's mailed to you along with or in addition to your reimbursement. Make sure your contact person knows that you're on your way out when you prepare to leave. If you have a late flight but an early hotel checkout, you can almost always leave your bags at the hotel desk which can free you up to attend more of the conference or sightsee. [JW]

Good advice in general (advice I don't always follow). I would note that it's sometimes difficult to fill out reimbursement paperwork at the conference, particularly if receipts are required, since some of those receipts (e.g., hotel bill, transportation back to the airport, airport parking or transportation back home) won't be available yet.

The conference perspective

> DO sweat the small stuff. If your presenter is coming from out of state, who will pick her up at the airport? Or, should she take a cab? Will your organization reimburse her for cabs? Who will make and pay for the travel and lodging arrangements? Is there a luncheon/dinner/reception to which you can wrangle her an invitation? If not, do you have some time free to join her for dinner/lunch/breakfast? (This is a nice touch, especially when dealing with an out-of-state speaker who may not know anyone at your event.) Does your organization/association require a formal invoice or reimbursement form? [RSG]

You may notice that this is pretty much the flip side of the speaker's perspective. With regard to the parenthetical comment, may I suggest *asking* the speaker "Would you care to join people for X?" (where X is dinner, lunch, breakfast)—and if some grouch like me says "Maybe some of the time, but not for every meal," don't be offended.

One commenter noted her experience as a non-local speaker:

> Too often, I am left to my own devices with no contact with the inviter(s) until 10 minutes before the event… **I don't always desire company for dinner or breakfast, but it's nice to be given the option**. The most pleasant events are those where the inviter remains in contact, asks if you want to be met at the airport, sends a picture so you know who to look for, arranges a meeting time, and offers companionship. [Emphasis added.]

Another commenter noted that you should "Ask your speaker about dietary restrictions or preferences." Some of us are omnivores (or nearly so); some of us have strong preferences; some of us simply *can't* deal with some items. If you expect me to dine at a banquet and the menu choices are salmon and eggplant, I will not be a happy camper.

Consider that you may like a speaker enough to invite them back some later year. You're more likely to get an enthusiastic "Yes" (and maybe a compromise fee arrangement) if the speaker has enjoyed the event.

The Presentation Proper—and Aftermath

In this case, I'm mostly quoting Jessamyn West's advice—noting that, for all of the setup points, it's up to the conference, workshop or program organizers to *make* these arrangements.

> Make sure that you know that you will have the necessary set-up for your talk. Be sure to discuss whether there will be: internet access, a laptop/projector, a white board/flipchart, a screen, a microphone (wireless?), audience microphones for Q&A, a podium, a tech person on-hand.

You don't need all of these for every speech, to be sure, but you need to make sure *your* needs are accommodated. I'm easy, since I don't normally use PowerPoint (or equivalent): I just say, "I need a podium for my notes and a microphone if there will be more than a hundred people." Surprisingly, that hasn't always worked. One of very few bad speaking experiences I've had came when I arrived to find no podium and no way to get one, with the suggestion "Oh, put your notes on a chair next to the mike." Since I had mentioned the podium in writing at least twice, an appropriate response might have been to walk out—and, frankly, I wish I had.

> **Preparedness**. It's always a good idea to have a plan B. If the Internet connection doesn't work, have screenshots ready. If your USB drive isn't recognized, have a copy of your talk on CD. While you don't necessarily have to be able to give your talk during a power failure, be prepared for some divergences from the set plan. Arrive at your talk's location at least 15 minutes early to make sure all the technology works correctly. Plan to stick around after your talk both to pack up your things, but also to talk to people who may not have spoken up during the Q&A. Be mindful of the fact that there may be another talk happening right after yours, so if people want to schmooze, suggest another venue for further chitchat.

Even if you don't use technology, arrive at the location at least 15 minutes early to see how the room is set up, discuss lighting (I like good lighting, so I can see the audience), make sure water is readily available, see whether there's a timer on the podium, and so on. And, to be sure, so the local arrangements person doesn't go nuts wondering whether you'll show up!

> **You're On.** Occasionally you may not be introduced. Be prepared to introduce yourself. The less you read directly from your slides, the better. Try to stick within

> your time limit… [M]ake sure you keep a timepiece with you: on your wrist, your laptop or someplace else… If you are going over your time, try to find a way to graciously wrap it up, don't just speed through the remainder of your presentation. [JW]

As one commenter said: Don't *try* to stick within your time limit, *do* stick to your time limit—and *wrap it up* if you're about to go over. "Not to do so is rude and unprofessional." If something happens, be flexible—shorten your speech or find a way to gain some time. You will *always* mess up the conference if you go significantly overtime, even if you're the only speaker in one program. If you're on a panel, you will earn unpleasant thoughts (at the least) from the speakers whose time you've used up. I've been on one panel where each of four speakers was allotted 20 minutes—and, as the fourth speaker, I wound up with five minutes. I was *not* a happy camper.

> Try to keep your eyes moving around to various members of the audience and pick up their cues as to whether you are keeping them interested… No matter how interesting and engaging you are, some people will drift off or leave early. Some may even sleep. Do not take this personally. Sometimes people don't ask questions and sometimes they do. Try to keep answers brief and informative, and channel people who seem to require longer or in-depth answers to talk to you afterwards if their question isn't of general interest. [JW]

Too many speakers put all of their speech into bullet points on PowerPoint slides, then "speak to the screen," avoiding eye contact at all costs. Frankly, if everything you have to say is in your PowerPoint slides, wouldn't we all be better off if you just posted the slides? I can read a lot faster than you can speak…

Commenters had some good additional points:

> Make sure that you are provided with more water than you need. Sip it when necessary, and sometimes when not, to provide a break or pause in what you're saying. Particularly useful if you're asked a difficult question and you need a few moments to think.
>
> If possible, have a version of your talk available electronically so that people can download it after the event.
>
> *[B]e enthusiastic*. This will overcome any manner of other difficulties. You must want to be there, want to speak, want people to listen to what you have to say, and want their lives to be a tiny bit different after you've finished talking.

People commenting on Rachel Singer Gordon's post also had some tips for local arrangements in making the speech work well: Make sure the room's at a comfortable temperature. Ask what kind of lighting the speaker prefers. Once again, *make sure* there's water readily available.

Finally, Rachel Singer Gordon offers some good advice for *after* the event, particularly since very few library speakers work through speakers' bureaus:

> DO talk up a good speaker. Presenters get new gigs through word-of-mouth—if someone does a great job for you, recommend her to others. [RSG]

Speaking is Fun. Speaking is Work

I know the first statement isn't true for some of you. Many people fear public speaking slightly more than they fear dying. Some people who aren't quite that bad still shudder at the idea of getting up on a stage in front of a dozen, a hundred, several hundred people.

But if you know your stuff, if you've worked out the arrangements, if you *care* about your topic—you should be able to have fun speaking, at least in the aftermath. I was slightly agog at the start of my first international keynote, which was also the first time I'd faced a crowd of 600 in a sloped-theater setting. But between pre-speech activities, direct response to the speech, and the rest of the conference, it was a great experience, one I'd describe as fun.

I've been invited back to five state library associations outside California. Given the kind of speech I tend to give, any repeat invitation is a thrill!

But speaking is also work. For me, it would be *hard* work to do the same speech or workshop over and over. For anyone, it's work to flesh out a topic, determine an approach that will work, time it out, and put it all together appropriately.

It's also time out of the rest of your life. I think that's more fun for younger people…There's never been a state library conference I didn't enjoy [except because of family illness], and I hope to speak at a few more in years to come—but the process still takes time and effort. Understanding and preparation on both sides can smooth out the rough spots and minimize the already-small number of problems in speaking situations.

PERSPECTIVE in Cites & Insights 7:2 (February 2007)

More on Speakers, Conferences and Fees

The PERSPECTIVE above didn't end the conversation (and wasn't intended to). Consider some of the posts since then, in more-or-less chronological order.

On speaking

That's Meredith Farkas on February 4, 2007 at *Information wants to be free* (meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/). It's a long post beginning with some kind words about the essay above. Farkas appreciates having advice like this out in the open and offers notes on her own experience (excerpted and reformatted, leaving out a *lot*):

> When people first started asking me to speak at things, I was so flattered to be asked that it didn't even occur to me to get paid to do it. I remember when I was asked for the first time to suggest an honorarium, I said $20. I remember when I got free registration for Computers in Libraries just for doing a CyberTour, I thought I'd hit the jackpot! Soon, I was getting asked to speak at lots of conferences and was at the point where I had to start saying no because I do have a day job that expects me to come in and do my work. I still say yes to more than I should and it has caused me some anxiety since I work on my presentations on nights and weekends and have largely given my free time up to "my other job". So I'm learning to be more selective; and part of that is deciding what my criteria are for saying yes or no to a presentation. Part of that decision-making process has to come down to money. If one group is offers a four figure honorarium to speak and another offers nothing, realistically, most people would take the former of the two.
>
> I really do love speaking, but it takes a significant amount of work to create and give a talk, especially certain talks. And for me, it can be an anxiety-inducing experience... Then there's the travel aspect; dealing with the airport, flying, missing work, going to a strange hotel (which can range from lovely to sketchy), leaving my husband or paying to bring him, etc. There is significant cost involved in speaking at conferences, though once I'm on stage, I end up having a great time. And it is so gratifying to hear from people weeks and months later who say that your talk inspired them to implement a wiki (or some other technology) at their library. But (wo)man cannot live on gratification alone.
>
> Obviously, people who are working towards tenure have different requirements. At a lot of institutions, you get more points for speaking at an ASIS&T than you would for speaking at a Computers in Libraries. So your expectations for compensation may be different and your compensation likely comes in the form of a higher salary and higher rank. Here, there is no moving up. Whether I speak at conferences, write articles and books or do none of it is going to have no effect on what I get paid and what my rank is. I do this for the pleasure of helping others, but it is work, and I've come to the realization that it isn't crass to ask to be paid for one's hard work…. If people are paying an organization to hear someone speak, shouldn't the speaker get compensated?
>
> For me, how much definitely fluctuates given a number of factors: If I am a member of the organization; if the talk is in-state or very local; how far I have to travel, how many connections I have to make, if time-zones and involved, and weather issues…; if the organization is one whose mission is all about freeing information [or one I feel connected to]; if the talk is at a conference I would like to attend...; if the talk would help me make important connections or would be really good for my career (this is obviously very subjective); if it's a student organization asking me to speak; if the conference is in a location I would kill to visit.
>
> A mentor of mine told me that I should always specify a fee that would make me happy if they agreed and not unhappy if they didn't. He also told me that I should probably add $500 to whatever I think I'm worth, because usually people undervalue themselves. It is a lesson I have tried to pass on to friends of mine whose stars in the speaking world are rapidly rising and who like me started off greatly undervaluing their worth.
>
> There is so much taboo in the profession regarding speaking about money. I actually had someone laugh at me when I asked if I would get paid for writing an article that she asked me to write for an organization that had nothing to do with me. It made me feel ashamed. I have often said yes to things that didn't pay because I felt like a bad person for saying no or for asking for money. And then I feel like an idiot when I hear that a friend, speaking at the same thing, is getting paid…
>
> The moral of the story is, don't do something unless you feel that you are being justly compensated. That compensation may come in the form of tenure, promotion, making important connections, seeing friends, satisfaction from doing good or making money. Just make sure that, after all the work, you won't think to yourself "why did I do all this for so little?" It's less about a specific dollar amount than about how you feel.

The library-association conference paradox

Dorothea Salo posted this on March 28, 2007 at *Caveat lector* (cavlec.yarinareth.net). I'm paraphrasing and excerpting; she's talking about equity between "imported speakers" and members. She recounts a situation in which she's being well compensated for a one-hour session at a state library conference (her first)—and a colleague *in* that state (but not an association member), doing a full-day tutorial, isn't getting any compensation at all. And she notes that we've "just outed you"—you being the conference organizers who continue inequitable compensation.

> Methinks there are dozens of ways to be reasonably fair about this. There are categories of conference speakers: keynoter versus featured speaker versus invited speaker versus accepted speaker. (No fair making the distinction if everybody in a given segment is in the same category, though; calling preconference-tutorial presenters "accepted speakers" and paying them less than regular-conference speakers just because standard operating

procedure is that all preconferences are submitted for approval is mean.) Length of presentation is another issue to address; seven hours of material ought to be worth more than 45 minutes. And if you're making a specific pool of money off a given set of events (like preconferences), it's insane not to set aside some of that money for the presenters.

Should there be any difference between compensation for your insiders and outsiders? Maybe there should. For a state conference, your outsiders may well be traveling further. But, honestly? I'd rather discard the entire insider/outsider criterion. If some speaker's getting in free, every speaker gets in free. If some speaker's getting an honorarium for a presentation of a given length, every speaker gets paid. The accounting can't get that much more complicated for most conferences, I shouldn't think, because speakers are such a small percentage of attendees.

So you make the table or the spreadsheet and you twiddle it until you've got the compensation that works and seems fair given your resources. Then you make that information public. Transparency—what a concept. Okay, maybe you have to hide some honoraria, especially on the top end, because everybody knows those are negotiated. But aside from that, everybody ought to know what everybody's getting, and for heaven's sake, everybody ought to know that no speakers were financially harmed in the making of a given conference!

Call it keeping yourselves honest. If you publish your table and hear vivid outrage in return, it had better not be from your insiders. They don't just come to your conference. They don't just present at it. They are your conference. As for us outsiders, what are the odds that we're going to pitch a fit because we're not being treated better than insiders? That's absurd.

I'm hearing an objection already. Won't this system mean that the conference is flooded with craptastic talk proposals from insiders wanting to get comped? Sure, could be. What the hell is your program committee for, anyway? It's their damn job to weed through that stuff, and to keep records of who phoned it in at a given conference so that the guilty parties don't waste folks' time in future. This is a self-limiting problem, honestly. There are easier ways to freeload!

What's more, comping (or at least rebating) your insiders will bring excellent speakers out of the woodwork that you'd never have known to invite, in all likelihood cutting way down on the number of outsiders you have to (expensively) invite. It will add to the socioeconomic diversity of your conference in general and your speaker list in particular, as people come who couldn't otherwise have afforded to…These are wins. Take them!

But the bottom line is, if you can't run a conference without screwing over some of your talent, then you've got no business running a conference. Go be a librarian or something.

My question to library associations is this: Who's going to be the first to step up and do the right thing, the transparent thing? I'll celebrate you here. Heck, we'll all celebrate you. Because the current system, he is broken.

Personally, I think it's reasonable to distinguish between members and non-members—but I *do* question the equity of treating "potential members" worse than out-of-staters, which is what happened here and clearly happens elsewhere. Otherwise—well, I think Salo makes an interesting case. What about you?

It's clear that different state library associations work differently. In a same-day post, Meredith Farkas notes that she spoke at her own state library conference and was simply told that she'd get a small honorarium, mileage, and comped registration for the day—without asking.

In a followup post on April 3, 2007 titled "Consequences," Dorothea Salo honors Arizona Library Association for a transparent speaker agreement that still treats Arizona librarians (whether members or not) badly as compared to out-of-state speakers and non-librarians. What follows is greatly excerpted:

This leads me to a Modest Proposal, a minor alteration of the current conference system that strikes me as reasonably fair to everyone while being *cheaper overall* than the current system for many conference planners: Invited speakers get comped and expensed, no matter what their origin. Out-of-state speakers get an honorarium on top. Speakers who go through the CFP process and are accepted have to register at normal rates. Conference-planning committees are directed to invite insiders, only going outside as a last resort.

(A slight modification of the above Modest Proposal that would *still* be an improvement on the current system would be that invited insider speakers get comped but not expensed, whereas invited outsiders get the red carpet. To me, this is the *minimum acceptable arrangement*; if you can't provide it, your conference deserves to fail, frankly…)

My Modest Proposal respects that associations expect free labor from their members and those non-members they serve. It means that whuffie-ist speakers pay for their whuffie, which is rather mean, but not disastrously so (whereas the current system is indeed a disaster). It also tilts the playing field in favor of insider speakers, which to me *only makes sense*, since I go to an insider conference largely to meet fellow-insider colleagues. It does not, however, insult members by forcing them out-of-pocket when they have already been *asked* to offer free labor.

My Modest Proposal also saves conferences money. For every insider they find to speak on a hot topic, they save the difference between insider comp(-plus-expenses) and outsider expenses-plus-honorarium. Conference budgeting needs to account for this.

Extremely small associations may not see savings from this proposal if they don't have sufficient depth of insider talent to cover the topics they want covered. I still think it's the right thing to do, but we've already seen how far *that* argument goes. So let me add some other potential benefits that might tip the scales:

Insiders bring insiders. Speakers like cheering squads, and people like to go to conferences where they'll see people they know behind the podium…

Non-member insiders become members. I would feel guilty if an association whose demographic I fit but of which I am not a member invited me to their conference and paid my way. Would I sign up and pay dues? Sure I would, without the least prodding or poking or marketing, because I don't *like* guilt…

A good conference experience means return attendance by an insider speaker. This is the loss-leader theory of comping insider speakers: if they like the conference, or if they're flattered by the invitation, they'll come back next time, even if they have to pay to do it.

As the current system gains a bad odor, highly desirable insider and outsider speakers will avoid conferences and associations that employ it. To save your conference's marketability among *speakers*, never mind the people who want to listen to hot speakers and hot topics, the current system had better go.

There are other ways out of or around this dilemma, most of which involve "thinking out of the box" about conferences. But that's for another post, I think. My central point: associations that treat insider speakers badly are being penny-wise and pound-foolish. We're librarians; we're in a field constantly besieged by budget cuts. We're supposed to be smarter than that.

Not everyone agrees

Dan Chudnov posted "Sound, fury, and speakers' fees" at *One big library* (onebiglibrary.net) on April 3, 2007. It's relatively short and offers a very different perspective, so here it is in full:

> I don't understand all this fuss over speaking fees. A lot of people who've been "on the circuit" gave themselves away and even paid for the right for years before getting their heads above water—I know I sure did. Still do, really.
>
> It is the nature of a capitalist society for businesses to enter into contracts seeking the most advantageous terms available. If you signed up for something but didn't nail down all the details up front and don't like how it turns out, it's your fault. If you don't get offered what you want, don't take the deal. If you need the gig to get ahead, suck it up and pay your dues (so to speak). The rest of us have, it's just a rite of passage. Just try to be better later on when you're the one in charge.
>
> One of my mentors says quite eloquently that you need to approach each job with a clear idea of what you need out of it and what you're willing to put into it, and be clear about where you have to draw the line for each individual gig—and then not cross that line. You might draw the line at one end of the spectrum for a particular event because of special circumstances, whatever they might be, and then draw it at the other end for other events. But you draw the line, each time, and stick to it, period, or you've got nobody to blame but yourself.
>
> There might be something wrong with your regional library association, but this isn't it.

I would argue that many of us had no idea what we *should* be asking for, although I believe that's changing. Otherwise, I'll let this stand as another opinion. (Some commenters agreed with him; one anonymous commenter raised the "service to the field" issue—which just doesn't fly with a number of those objecting to the current situation, who famously give back loads of time and effort.)

Jessamyn West is close to Dan in this regard. As she says in an April 4, 2007, post at *librarian.net*:

> My take on the speaker thing is more along the lines of Dan's in that I don't feel the need to speak anywhere, but I often enjoy it, get to travel a bit on my otherwise low income, and get to talk to people who haven't heard it all before. I have fees that I consider "hassle expense" which is more compensation for travelling, getting up early, not sleeping in my own bed, and getting someone else to fill my birdfeeders. I like giving talks so much they could pay me in sand and I'd still do it, but getting on a plane to do it, that's what I like some compensation for. This year I'm doing much more local speaking which is lower-cost from my end and less-compensated from a strictly money angle and it's just fine with me.
>
> I realize this doesn't address the larger issue of people who get invited and are then asked to pay (a bad practice imo) or the weird in-state/out of state divide (also a problematic minefield) or the "we are going to invite you to give two talks in two days for us and will offer two nights hotel but we're five hours away from your home" almost-right offers because I'm not sure what to think, honestly. It's a diffcult issue to discuss because for every nitpicky issue I have about having to pay for my own wifi, there is someone else who is saying "hey I'd be happy to come talk and I promise to be lower maintenance and lower cost and just as interesting" and you know what, they probably can be. Until we decide what roles speakers are playing at these conferences—paid high profile talent, experience for newer professionals, skillsharing with experts, honors for esteemed colleagues—we're going to have a hard time figuring out what people are "worth" to us.

Steve Lawson provided a perspective from the "other side" in "It's only a school play," an April 4, 2007 post at *See also…* (stevelawson.name/seealso/). He was on the program planning committee for Colorado Association of Libraries' 2004 and 2005 conferences. Here's the heart of what Steve has to say:

> As far as I can remember, we didn't invite anyone, and no one got paid, not even expenses. Presenters were expected to register on their own dime if they wanted to attend the conference, but were give a clear option to just show up, present, and leave if they didn't want to / couldn't afford to register.
>
> Program planning for CAL did not include keynotes, and I'm sure that was a completely different story, as they got some noted authors and the like. Perhaps they did it on the cheap, but certainly some money was changing hands.
>
> Based on my experience (as always, YMMV) I have an analogy for you: putting on the presentations at a state conference is like putting on a high school play. If that sounds belittling, let me hasten to say that I was involved in some pretty great high school plays.
>
> When putting on a high school play, you are working with a limited pool of local talent. The goal isn't to get the absolute best talent available. The goal is to give lots of people the opportunity to get up on stage. The best actors usually wind up with the best parts, but there is a pretty wide variation in how "good" the actors are.
>
> Most people do it for fun, though there are always those people who are only doing it because their parents made them or because it will pad out their college applications.
>
> It's understood that no one gets paid. People put in a lot of time and effort and have to be content with a round of applause, some flowers, and a sense of personal growth. Exceptionally talented and/or dedicated individuals may decide to go on and seek acting jobs outside of high school, but that isn't the norm, and is sometimes viewed as a little crazy by everyone else.
>
> How good people feel about being in the school play often has a lot to do with the person directing the play. If that person makes everyone feel welcome and lets them know that that their contributions are very important, writes them a little note on opening night, everyone feels great and doesn't mind all the time and effort put in. If that person is demanding, distant, or apathetic, everyone involved wishes they'd gone out for track that semester instead and feels bitter about the experience.
>
> And if you are a kid actor who actually gets parts in professional productions or movies or something, the high school play is probably not for you. You have outgrown it, and it's time to move on.
>
> I'll leave it for you to connect the dots on the analogy. It ain't perfect, but it's what I got.

I did a keynote. I did get some money. In this case, it sounds as though CAL treated non-keynote speakers equitably, sticking with "local talent" (a great idea if you can do it) and not paying anyone. Not interested in the conference? Show up, speak, leave. If you do speak, it's as part of the association and it's professional activity.

Being there

Jenn Riley, the *Inquiring librarian* (inquiringlibrarian.blogspot.com) raises another issue in an April 12, 2007 post, "Weighing in on speaker compensation":

> I do think…that the "invited speakers get free registration for that day only" model is actually detrimental, in that it *encourages* invited speakers to blow in and blow out in a single day, and not talk to anybody or participate in any way other than their own session.
>
> Is this really the environment we want to be cultivating? Don't we want those individuals we choose as invitees to engage in coffee conversations, eclectic dinner meetups, and learn from each of our communities through attending others' presentations? Certainly, not every invited speaker will be able to (or in some cases, want to) stay much longer than his or her talk, but we need models that encourage them to do so rather than making it difficult for them.

That comment may make as good a conclusion as any for this set of notes and comments. My own response should be obvious: "Yes. **Yes, yes.** Yes." I do my best to attend whole conferences, both to be available and to learn from people at the state or specialized level. I have *never* failed to gain from that process. I'd like to think the conferees have as well. I make a point of going to the big receptions. I make a point of hanging out. I'm definitely not the only one.

Masthead

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