

ALA 2016 Conference Summary

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By Carrie A. Cullen

I am grateful to Suncoast Information Specialists for granting me the opportunity to attend the 2016 ALA annual conference in Orlando. It is challenging to summarize my time there, as I had so many fantastic experiences in rapid succession. I learned of exciting digital initiatives in schools across the nation, how librarians can make our voices heard and influence the future of higher education, how academic libraries can better serve the whole student by connecting students with social services, and I even got a quick lesson on how to plan a professional conference.

After attending so many entertaining and informative sessions, it was a bit of a surprise that my most valuable and memorable experiences at the conference were the social events. Not only was the networking itself worthwhile, but these events also gave me a chance to speak with others about the sessions I attended, and hear their feedback as well. I was lucky to have inspiring conversations with people from all over the country, even one from the National Library of Medicine, which was quite exciting for this aspiring medical librarian!

Looking back on the conference, the theme that emerged was that as librarians, we must take the initiative and go where we are needed, rather than waiting for an invitation. I was particularly inspired by the story of Andrew Aydin, who refused to give up on his dream of creating a comic book to bring the story of civil rights leader John Lewis' life to the younger generations. I saw this determination in many of the featured speakers – those who created truly innovative programs in their libraries and made real differences in their communities did not walk an easy road. But, they believed in their mission and persevered. Although the work we do may take a different form than the social activism of Representative Lewis, we would do well to heed his advice and get into a little “good trouble, necessary trouble,” every now and then.