

## **ALA 2016 Conference Summary**

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Jaime M. Goldman

I am very grateful for the support from the Suncoast Information Specialists (SIS) that enabled me to attend the 2016 American Library Association (ALA) conference this year! I found the conference to be an educational and rewarding event, and am so appreciative that I was able to attend as one of the SIS Scholarship winners. This was my first ALA conference, and thanks to the support of the SIS scholarship I was able to learn and experience so much as a first time attendee!

As a first time ALA attendee, I was a bit overwhelmed by the scope and span of the conference, especially by the daunting task of selecting the best presentations and programs that fit my librarian track. I have to commend ALA on their wonderful website and mobile app! These valuable tools helped me to plan out my entire conference and to streamline my selections for sessions. There were so many quality sessions to pick from, that I often had multiple sessions on my schedule during the same time slots! I was hesitant to select sessions held in different venues, as the conference was held across 2 concourses of the convention center and at several hotel conference centers, but all were within walking distance and connected by walking bridges, or you could opt to take an air-conditioned bus if the heat was too much! With the small breaks between sessions, I found that I was able to get to most of my next sessions at different locations in a timely manner.

The opening general session featuring Michael Eric Dyson was an invigorating start to the 2016 conference, and I enjoyed hearing about how libraries positively impacted his life and listening to him deliver his talk in a spoken word performance type format. Following the opening session, the exhibits hall opened with their opening reception. I heard from other ALA veterans that the exhibit hall can be overwhelming, but I was not prepared for the rows upon rows of vendors and booths! I have to admit that I did get turned around a few times, but after a few days, started to get the lay of the land. It was wonderful to run into many vendor reps that I knew, and to meet news ones or ones in person that I had only ever emailed with. They even provided areas to sit down and meet privately one-on-one to talk about your library and its needs, which was very helpful.

My first full day of the conference was full of informational and insightful sessions. As I work in an academic research library, I opted for many of the ACRL programs or programs on data management and scholarly communications, which were plentiful. Having used the ALA site and app, I was able to access and save the slides from many of the presentations, and following the conference, the audio recordings as well. This was especially very useful for sessions that I could not make due to conflicts with other sessions at the same time, and enabled me to learn more than my time allowed at the conference! I tried to attend a variety of different session formats, including roundtables, panels, presentations, and poster sessions, all of which were valuable and rewarding. I especially enjoyed the interaction and collaboration that resulted from the ACRL Science & Technology Section poster session. Overall at the sessions I learned about a myriad of topics, including open education resources; librarian/university partnerships; instructional design; personal librarian programs; data services, management, and visualization; finding meaning in metrics; promoting library services and increasing visibility; using data to guide strategic

planning processes and collection development; tech tools; and more! My head is still swimming with all of the new ideas and inspiration I took away from this ALA conference.

I was fortunate enough to be able to stay through the last day of the conference and attend the closing general session featuring Jamie Lee Curtis. I have to admit that prior to this conference, I was not aware that she was a New York Times bestselling children's book author! I really enjoyed her session and she was both dynamic and engaging. She is a staunch supporter of libraries and talked about taking her children to their local library. It was a wonderful note to end my first ALA conference journey on, and to get one final takeaway - a free, signed copy of her latest book!

I am grateful to SIS for this opportunity to attend my first ALA conference. I have worked in libraries for 15 years, and as a librarian for the last 6 years, and had not had the opportunity to attend an ALA conference until now. Thank you for your support! I cannot wait to start implementing all of the new ideas and initiatives I learned about at ALA!