

“Florida Library Association 2017 Conference Summary”

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I had three goals in mind when entering the conference on May 10, 2017: 1) network with professionals attending the conference, 2) gain a better understanding of what librarians do beyond what I have been taught in my classes, and 3) form an understanding of what this conference has to offer so that I can report it to the Suncoast Information Specialists. This conference far exceeded my expectations, and the value of what I have gained cannot be measured.

While attending the conference, I went to several presentations. Many of which dealt with how to prepare college students for their responsibilities and obligations. As librarians, we consider the success of every student to be of the utmost importance. However, we must remember that although teaching students how to use library resources is our primary role in the university system, we also concern ourselves with their mental and physical well being as well as how to prepare them for their lives proceeding their graduation. We can be more effective in accomplishing these tasks by not only investing time in our own professional development, but also through interdepartmental collaborations. Librarians should be called upon by professors to explain to students how to use the library resources, and librarians should take the initiative to inform certain professors and departments of their content specialty. Libraries should establish cooperative events with career services as well as writing centers, and student organizations. All of these ideas, and more which were suggested during conference workshops will lead to a more integrated and engaging library experience for the students. These initiatives will benefit the students during their studies at the university and as graduates while they seek employment.

I also learned a tremendous amount about the roles of academic and public libraries in emergency situations. The top priority of a library in an such a situation is to provide a sense of safety and a return to normalcy. Libraries are supposed to have contingency plans for fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, blackouts, insect and pest infestations, and more. I, personally, found the lengths to which libraries go in order to protect their patrons to be inspiring. I was especially impressed with the role that the Ferguson Public Library played during the riots in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 and 2015. During this period of civil upheaval, schools were temporarily closed; however, the public library remained open so as to provide a safe venue for students to meet with their teachers, and continue with their coursework. The library provides a sanctuary to its patrons in times when life is interrupted by severe, life threatening events. It is important to understand the role in which the librarian may find him/herself, and it is important to surround one's self with reliable staff members who can react effectively in times of emergency.

The opportunities to network with other librarians was just as important as the time I spent in the workshops. By speaking with other librarians, many of whom were at one time students at the University of South Florida like myself, I was able to compare their library school experiences with my own. I received feedback on the coursework I am pursuing, and furthered my understanding of how my newly acquired knowledge and skills will be applied in the field. I consider myself to be lucky, and am most appreciative for the opportunity afforded to me by the Suncoast Information Specialists. For, without this opportunity, I most likely would not have met such fantastic individuals who strive to not only make librarianship more formidable, but also wish to invest in me as a student. I have learned that these librarians see MLIS students as a breath of fresh air, and individuals to whom they can pass on the torch. Upon retiring, librarians want to be ensured that library school graduates are fully prepared to carry on the responsibility of serving the institution's patrons. I, for one, look forward to fully preparing myself to continue and further such a legacy.