

Something for Everyone: Thoughts on the Charleston Conference from a First Time Attendee

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For 35 years the Charleston Conference has, in the words of the organizers, served as "an informal annual gathering of librarians, publishers, electronic resource managers, consultants, and vendors of library materials...to discuss issues of importance to them all" ([Charleston Conference website](#)). This year's event boasted a record 1,788 registrants of whom 549 were presenters or speakers. Indiana University Libraries were well represented at the 2015 conference. Sherri Michaels from Indiana University Bloomington presented on the collection inventory that is currently underway at IUB ([session description](#)) and Kevin Petsche from IUPUI gave a session on the unique approach to patron-driven acquisitions that has been adopted at his library ([session description](#)). Shayna Pekala from IUB served as a panelist for two sessions ([session list](#)), one about preserving and promoting digital humanities media and another about the costs involved in publishing scholarly monographs. (Shayna also acted as a panelist of sorts for this article, responding to some questions that I asked about her impression of the event.) For a full list of speakers and sessions see <http://2015charlestonconference.sched.org/>.

The plenary sessions, which were held in the 1,800 seat performance hall of the [Gaillard Center](#), were diverse in scope, thought-provoking, and in the case of the Thursday morning sessions, [illustrated](#). A graphic recorder was present on Thursday to create infographics based on the plenary presentations. I was especially struck by Katherine Skinner, the executive direction of the Educopia Institute, who spoke on Friday morning about the changes in publishing and scholarly communication that she says have been underway since the widespread adoption of the Xerox machine in the 1960s. Skinner's postulations on the how the use of data to build and analyze collections impacts the way we perceive value ([session description](#)) led me to reflect on the ways in which our current collections are a legacy of the values of our predecessors. For the first time I thought about the connection between collection development and the discipline of the history and philosophy of science. Shayna Pekala appreciated the plenary session in which a panel explored practical and legal matters of privacy. She recalled that "[Gary Price] showed us how he could see exactly what anyone in the audience was looking at on his or her screen. Creepy!" Price called for libraries to educate ourselves about privacy issues, pass that information on to our patrons, and to take steps to protect the patron data that we maintain as well the data that is stored by vendors and resource providers ([session description](#)).

Outside of the plenary events, the Charleston conference was densely packed with as many as 20 sessions scheduled during a single time period. Of the different types of sessions, I was a fan of the "Lively Lunches". These were bring-your-own-lunch affairs that featured panelists discussing any number of topics. I was impressed by the panel compositions—it was an exception rather than a rule for two panelists to have the same perspective on any particular matter. Shayna echoed my thoughts on

panels, reporting of her experience that "it was interesting to learn from my fellow panelists about the different approaches taken at different institutions".

Charleston's schedule of events was spread across four different locations, which meant that one was guaranteed to see someone sporting a Charleston Conference tote bag in the blocks between the main sites. The weather in Charleston made these mini-walks throughout the day all the more enjoyable. The city was a lovely host, with beautiful architecture and striking flora. As the weekend approached, downtown Charleston cranked into high gear and I was able to enjoy people-watching as I made my way to sessions. On Saturday morning the Charleston Farmers Market took over the square across the street from the main conference hotel. I was able to pop over during a break to observe the craft sodas and photographs of local sites. I even stopped at the booth of an area grower to purchase some of the largest grapes I'd ever eaten. Downtown Charleston was also home to a wide variety of restaurants in easy walking distance from the main conference hotels. When I asked Shayna about her favorite part of being in Charleston her response was short and to the point: "the food, hands down."

Whether eating out with other attendees or stopping in the hallways between sessions, the conference afforded many opportunities to chat with librarians and vendors alike. As someone who constantly takes notes, I devoted a section of my notebook to jotting down thoughts and insights from those interactions. I had a particularly long conversation with Kristin Jensen, the project manager for Book Traces at the University of Virginia (project site). The project consists of cataloging marginalia in the pre-1923 imprints in the University of Virginia collection and it was inspired by researchers who are interested in understanding how people interact with books. I enjoyed hearing about this innovative way that libraries are leveraging our strengths to provide value to researchers. Jensen also presented on the surveying method used in the project (session description).

One interesting element of the Charleston Conference is that it offers vendors a voice beyond the typical vendor expo. When I asked Shayna her thoughts on the vendor presence at the conference she remarked that she was encouraged to discover "how much research collaboration has been going on between vendors and libraries ". In the course of my workday, my interactions with vendors are typically limited to their accounts receivable departments or customer service representatives. This conference was refreshing because it gave me some insight (as much as they were willing to share) into the motivations of vendors and their approaches to solving some of the issues in the library markets. A specific instance of this took place during a "lively lunch" about the academic library book market (session description). Alan Jarvis from Taylor and Francis explained that from their perspective, Taylor and Francis was looking forward to short term loans (STL) of e-books as a way to increase exposure of and gain more revenue from their long tail of old imprints. For them, STLS promised to supplement their existing revenue streams. For me this explanation supplemented the perspective that I get from libraries, which tend to view patron-driven acquisitions as a partial replacement for existing purchasing models.

I felt that these types of insights were the true value of the Charleston Conference. While I was somewhat let down by the small number of sessions that were directly related to my work in acquisitions, attending this conference was a great way to gain exposure to topics that affect my role as the Head of Acquisitions Accounting and also to understand how libraries, vendors, and publishers define and approach issues in our field. The breadth of topics was clearly demonstrated during the closing session in which Erin Gallagher, a librarian at Rollins College, used Poll Everywhere to get

audience opinions on the hottest buzzword of the conference. A variety of responses filled the screen but Gallagher counted Open Access as the most frequent response. Shayna Pekala expressed that "altmetrics seemed to be a hot topic this year," while I felt that everywhere I went people were talking about "acquisitions", but in reference to mergers in the library vendor marketplace ([blog entry on the closing session](#)).

Whatever one's interests in library collections or acquisitions might be, there is good chance that a session, poster, or "lively lunch" at the Charleston Conference would satisfy those interests. Attending was an invaluable way for me, as someone new to the field of library acquisitions, to gain perspective on the world of activities surrounding my role here at Indiana University Libraries.