

Controlled chaos: or why I stopped worrying and love the book sale

by Sherri Michaels

For those of you who have heard the horror stories about the InULA book sale, I'm here to say that the stories have been greatly exaggerated! I've found the book sale to be a great experience both as an organizer and as a buyer (there are some great bargains at the book sale!).

The Committee

I became involved with the InULA book sale almost four years ago when I first moved to Bloomington. This has really been the best committee to be on because I have met so many people that I would not normally encounter in the course of my normal work day. This was especially nice that first year when I did not know very many people at all. I've continued to be involved in the book sale committee mostly for this reason. I still get to meet some great colleagues in departments or libraries that I don't usually see. I also meet quite a few SLIS students as many of them volunteer for the sale as well.



The committee is usually made up of a group of six to nine people. There's a chair (or co-chairs) that calls the original meeting and sets agendas for future meetings as well as assigns deadlines. This role is greatly benefited by the Book Sale Manual which really lays all of the steps out that need to be followed. Other committee members make up all of the sub-committees. Some of the other duties handled by sub-committees are publicity for the sale as well as calling for book donations, recruiting and scheduling volunteers, and seeing to the details of the sale itself. All committee members are also expected to help out as they are able with various aspects of the sale itself such as set-up, clean-up, or working the sale.

The first year I was on the committee, I was the volunteer coordinator and put out the call for volunteers as well as scheduled everyone to work during the set-up, clean-up, or during the sale. I've continued to be the volunteer coordinator for the last three years as well, so I now have the process down to a science! It's actually not too difficult to get enough volunteers, although a few reminders might be needed.

I have also had the pleasure of serving as co-chair for two years. Liz Goldberg and I did this together as neither one of us wanted to take on the challenge alone! As co-chairs we discussed possibly moving the book sale to another location and we instituted a lottery system for entry to the preview sale. We instituted the lottery system two years ago because we were starting to get people lining up at the doors two days early. Overall, chairing the committee is not a large time commitment, but does require an attention to detail that most of us have by nature of our profession!

Donations

The donations to the book sale have really varied widely over the past four years, both in terms of topic as well as overall quantity. This year, we had a lot of science and business books, last year it was sports and recreation as well as foreign language. It just depends on what's donated. The general backbone of the sale though is the History and general humanities. This is the reason why the book sellers come to the sale and we make almost all of our money off the book dealers. Fiction is surprisingly unpopular. We do sell a lot of fiction at the end of the sale at the bag sale, but in general it's largely ignored. There is almost always a set of encyclopedias or two to be had as well. Dave Frasier has handled the book donation end of things for many years and deserves a special mention. He takes donations throughout the year and stores them until it's time to start all over again. Saundra Taylor has also been a long time committee member who writes thank you and acknowledgement of receipt letters to many who donate books.



The Sale

The sale is broken up into distinct phases. The first is the preview sale. This is where those horror stories come in! It's not really that bad, but it does get pretty crowded and the term feeding frenzy comes to mind. There is an entry fee for the preview sale and in general, the book dealers are the ones that pay the fee. They're coming to look for some great books that they can re-sell. During the preview sale, the books are "full" price as well, so the preview sale really is when InULA makes the most money. Following the preview sale, there is the regular sale when there is no admission fee to get in the door but books are still regularly priced. The "full" price for hardback books is \$3 and paperbacks are \$1. The second day of the sale is broken up into two parts as well. The first is the half-price sale, and the second is the bag sale. During the bag sale, all books are \$2 per bag. This is where those great bargains can be found. Many, many bags of

books leave during the bag sale. Unfortunately for my husband, quite a few find their way to my house!

The Benefits

The proceeds from the InULA book sale go to fund SLIS scholarships as well as Research Incentive Grants for InULA. The first year I was on the committee we raised over \$11,000. The two years I co-chaired the committee, we raised \$9000 and \$7000 respectively. After that rate of decline, I figured I shouldn't be chair anymore!



The Downside

The only downside to the book sale that I can think of is that it's physically taxing to set up and clean up after the sale. This is where the term "many hands make light work" comes in. The more people who volunteer the easier it is on everyone - especially the year the freight elevator was broken during set up. We had to set up a "bucket brigade" and hand books down the line from the 11th floor to the 10th to use the public elevators. This is not an experience I'm likely to forget anytime soon, and the people who volunteered to set up that year all deserve a special award!

Wrap-Up

I've really enjoyed my work with the book sale committee, and intend to continue to volunteer for it in the future. It's been a wonderful learning experience, and meeting new people is the best benefit. If you've been thinking about volunteering for the committee or to work during the sale, I do encourage you to join us. If that's not possible, please remember to think of us as you do your spring cleaning and you want to get rid of a few of those books!

Images from the 2007 sale:

Top: Mary Strow, in the calm before the preview sale.

Middle: Shoppers browse the sale.

Bottom: Bibliophiles line up to enter the preview sale.