Librarians' Attitudes Toward Conferences: A Study

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The authors surveyed librarians to determine the reasons why they do or do not attend conferences, as well as what their attitudes were toward the various conference offerings such as roundtables, poster presentations, and the like. Librarians were queried to gather a variety of demographic and professional data. The resulting data were analyzed to find significant relationships between respondents' demographic information and their attitudes toward specific conference offerings. The two most cited reasons given for going to conferences were professional rejuvenation and networking, both benefits not directly related to conference content. In addition to quantitative results, respondents replied to open-ended questions, and these qualitative results are included as well.

onference attendance is a requirement for the career advancement of many librarians, particularly those who work in colleges or universities. Moving from simple attendance to poster session to paper presentation is viewed as the natural progression for the professional development of an academic librarian. The American Library Association and its divisions all tout the many benefits of attending their conferences. Library deans and directors stress the importance of attending conferences to librarians as being an important factor in their career development and advancement. In addition, many librarians themselves see attending conferences as being a necessary part of their job.

The authors surveyed librarians to determine the reasons why they do or do not attend conferences, as well as what their attitudes were toward the various conference offerings such as roundtables, poster presentations, and so on. If conferences are important to librarians' careers, then it behooves all those involved—conference planners, presenters, and attendees—to be aware of librarians' views toward these conferences.

Literature Review

Although the literature on library conferences discussed individual authors' opinions of conferences, whether librarians should attend them or not, this particular study went to the source—librarians themselves—and asked directly why they do or do not attend conferences. The literature as a whole divided into two (not necessarily equal in size) camps. The majority of the articles were hortatory in nature and gave many reasons why one should attend a conference. A minority of the articles were admonitory in nature, giving reasons why conferences are essentially a waste of time.

In her 2004 article "Top Six Reasons to Attend a Conference," Rosina Alaimo

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discussed the many positive aspects of conferences, with keynote speakers being of particular value for her.[1] Jennifer England's experiences have been such that each conference has been "another adventurous rung up my professional ladder."[2] But, even more important, England saw conferences (ALA Annual in particular) as unifying events: "Here there was kinship. This act of attending, listening, and ultimately becoming part of something bigger is the whole reason for the Conference."[3] Kent Slade's "Newcomer's Guide to Attending ALA Conferences" emphasized the practical, work-specific benefits that can result from attending conferences, especially the committee meetings and programs.[4]

In "Exhibits Are Valuable, After All," Anne Turner, after making the confession that she hates entering the exhibit area, grudgingly admitted that it can be useful. She pointed out that "the exhibitors and their wares are an important part of our library conferences" because "they are the window on our options for improving services and spending money wisely."[5] The impression Turner left, however, was that exhibits were at best a necessary evil. Weisberg and Toor, while positive in their attitude toward conferences, could not help but make the first-time attendee nervous with their 1990 article "Conference Survival." They referred to the "book-sized program" for ALA Annual and encouraged attendees to "plan to spend at least one day at the exhibits."[6] While their comments were helpful, they also painted a picture of large conferences as having the potential to overwhelm the unprepared or unwary. Last, in "Conference Angst," Turner elaborated on three reasons for avoiding conferences: searching for conversation, finding someone to eat with, and selecting an identity. Turner observed with regard to solo conference attendance that it is "tiring to spend so much time thinking up either social patter or real conversation."[7] The same problem held true when trying to find a place to eat and a person or group of people to eat

with. Turner's last reason for not attending conferences was less tangible: that of identity. "Going to a conference means ceasing to be all the people I normally am."[8] Turner observed that, "I am an Invisible Person, except to the exhibitors, of course, and even they aren't much interested now that my library has selected an automation vendor."[9] The best Turner could say about a recent conference she attended was that it was "reasonably useful":[10] an example of damning with faint praise if ever there was one.

What all of these examples had in common, as mentioned above, was that none of them (besides the occasional anecdotal reference to what a friend or colleague thought of conferences) asked a large sample of librarians what were their opinions of and attitudes toward conferences.

Methodology

This study began with the design of a survey. The goal was to determine why librarians attend conferences and then compare these results to demographic characteristics to see if there was a significant relationship between any of these characteristics and reasons given for attending conferences.

Based on this goal, the survey included questions to determine the following characteristics for each respondent: type of library where employed, primary work area, years in the field, gender, age, average number of conferences attended each year, and amount of institutional financial support provided for conferences. Librarians were asked to rate the importance of the following reasons when deciding whether or not to attend conferences: invited papers, general sessions, roundtables, poster sessions, networking, user groups, exhibits, professional rejuvenation, Curriculum Vitae (CV) padding, committee meeting attendance, and amount of financial support received.

This survey contained questions designed to solicit both quantitative and qualitative data. Some of the questions

asked respondents to rank conference activities or to categorize their library type or position, to harvest quantitative data that could be analyzed using statistical analysis software. Other questions were open-ended to allow people to comment upon issues related to conferences. Responses were anonymous, unless the respondent chose to give up anonymity by submitting their name and e-mail address with the survey. The e-mail address was requested so that their identity could be verified. Valparaiso University's Institutional Review Board reviewed this survey and gave it their approval. The text of the survey is included in the appendix to this article.

A commercial survey system was used to post the survey to the Web. The survey was tested before it was distributed. Notification of the survey was sent to the following listservs: CJC (Community and Junior Colleges Libraries Section), COLLIB (College Libraries Section), ILI (Information Literacy Instruction), LI-BREF (Discussion of Library Reference Issues), LITA (Library and Information Technology Association), PubLib (Public Librarians), and RUSA (Reference and User Services Association).

The selection of these listservs was based on trying to reach a large and diverse audience. The authors, both of whom worked in public-service positions at the time of the survey, chose listservs based on personal membership, size and variety of targeted audience. For example, while no TS-specific listserv, such as AUTOCAT (Library Cataloging and Authority Control), was selected, the authors thought that those listservs that were targeted would provide the desired cross-section of librarians working in a variety of positions and settings. The CJC, COLLIB, and PubLib listservs, for instance, cater to the interests of librarians who work in a particular type of library rather than in a particular position, so all areas of library work would be targeted. The LIBREF, LITA, and RUSA listservs, on the other hand, while being more posi-tion specific, allowed for the targeting of librarians in a wide variety of information centers beyond just higher education–af-filiated libraries. The ILI listserv was selected because both authors conduct instruction sessions in their library.

The total potential audience, based on listserv subscription numbers provided by the moderators, was approximately 17,000 people. The survey was made available on September 20, 2005, and closed on October 11, 2005. During that time, 794 people responded to the survey.

Profile of Respondents

Respondents were asked a series of questions to determine a demographic profile that could be compared to conference interests. For all demographic questions, only one response was permitted, so the sum of percentages was around 100 percent. However, due to the rounding of percentages to the nearest point, some percentages did not add up to exactly 100. The first question asked how long the respondent had been working in librarianship or information services. The largest group of respondents (286 or 36 percent) had been in the field longer than 20 years, while the second largest group was the newest group, having spent between one and five years in librarianship (188 or 24 percent). The final 40 percent was made up of people in the field between 6 and 10 years (128 or 16 percent), 11 and 15 years (110 or 14 percent), and 16 and 20 years (82 or 10 percent). Respondents were 14 percent male (111) and 84 percent female (668), with two percent (15) abstaining on that question.

Since many librarians enter the field as a second career, that raised the issue of whether age and years in the field would yield a difference in respondents' answers. Thus, a question to determine age was included. Using year of birth, but not month or specific day, the largest group of respondents (271 or 34 percent) were in their fifties (born 1946–1955), while those in their thirties and forties comprised almost equal amounts with 21

percent each (169 and 163 respectively). Ten percent of respondents (76) were in their twenties (born 1976–1981); eight percent (60) were 60 or older, while seven percent (55) did not indicate age.

When asked to identify their primary area of responsibility, 39 percent (312) said they worked in reference, 27 percent (218) identified themselves as administrators, and 16 percent (131) were primarily in library instruction. All other categories (Technical Services, Circulation/Access, Government Documents and other) were selected by less than 10 percent of responders. In a separate question, respondents were asked to select their library type. The majority, 68 percent or 538, worked in academic libraries. Public librarians were the second largest group with 202 people, or 25 percent. The other types of libraries (special, school, other) were selected less than three percent each.

Since the purpose of this survey was to determine librarians' attitudes toward conferences, it was important to find out approximately how many conferences a year respondents attend. The majority, 593 people (75 percent), attend one or two conferences a year. Twenty-one percent of respondents (165) attend three or more conferences a year, and less than five percent (36) do not attend conferences at all during an average year.

Respondents were also asked how much financial support they receive for conferences. Since some people receive different amounts of support based on conference location, whether they present, lead a roundtable, or other varying factors, the authors decided the response to this question would have to be free form. Some people responded with percentages, others responded with a number of conferences, while others responded with dollar amounts or comments. Some responses included:

• My campus has been very supportive. I can attend in-state functions and I have been able to attend ALA for the last four years with pretty generous support. (academic administrator)

• $1,000/year (additional for certain conferences that the admin wants you to attend). If it is a conference of my choosing (scholarly subject-oriented, not the library-professional) then I will willingly pay my own way if necessary. If the admin wants me to go there, then they had best pay as I may not go… (academic—reference)

• Almost none, which is why I haven't gone to any. (academic—library instruction)

• Almost all of it—and I realize I am extremely fortunate. (public—reference)

• As a classified staff member, I receive $850 per trip. This is to encourage more classified or paraprofessional staff to go to conferences. (academic—circulation/access)

• Barely any. We have to pay for everything out of our own pockets and then beg for partial reimbursement when we get back. I usually get about 50 percent of my costs reimbursed by the library administration. Library administrators go everywhere and anywhere they want for free, of course. (academic—reference)

• Complete. If the library can't pay for it, we don't go. Oh, except for drinks at dinner—we're on our own for those. (public—reference)

• Varies. Last year I got full support for ALA and was told money for next year would be available. Now there is no money and as a committee chair I must attend so this is a really bad situation. (academic—reference)

• None. I used to pay my own way. Now I am too poor to exercise that option any longer. After earning my MLIS, I sold my house to fund my job search. Since then I have invested 2 years and all my scarce resources working part-time in a library that has consistently cut my hours and refused me any sort of benefits. I am on the county medical rolls and food stamps… (public—reference)

Some textual responses could be converted to percentages or dollar amounts, such as, "My library pays for all my conference expenses with the exception

of alcohol and gambling," which was converted to 100 percent. Others reported that they got no financial support, but were given time off to attend conferences. The worst off received neither funding nor time off. Two hundred eighty-five respondents gave answers that were, or could be translated to, either percentages or dollar amounts. Thirty-five of those people responded that they receive no funding at all (12 percent).

One hundred forty-four people responded with percentages greater than zero. Of those people, most (101) reported that they receive complete funding. The next largest group, with fourteen responses, receives 50–60 percent support. Thirteen people responded that they receive 90–99 percent funding; nine responded with 61–75 percent; six responded with 80–89 percent; and one person responded that they receive 25 percent of the money required to attend conferences.

One hundred six people responded with dollar amounts greater than zero. The amounts ranged from $200 to $2,600 per year (there was one response of $14,000 that was thrown out because it was possibly an error). For people reporting conference support in dollar amounts greater than zero, the average amount of annual support was $871 and the median amount was $900.

Results

Using an analysis of correlations, the data was run to find out what "types" of librarians attend conferences for which reasons. (See table 1.) Each of the rankings of importance that respondents gave for attending, or not attending, conferences was run as an independent variable against all of the demographic characteristics. Many of the correlations were found to be insignificant, and those are not discussed here. All factors listed below are statistically significant.

Concerning reasons why librarians attend conferences, the most important factor, across the board, was professional rejuvenation. This was listed as very im-

portant by 447 people (56 percent). (See table 2.) In terms of significant relationships between professional rejuvenation and demographic characteristics, the older people were, and the longer they had been in the field of librarianship, the more important they found this rejuvenation. Men were less likely than women to list this reason as important. In addition, the more conferences people attended, the more important rejuvenation became.

Another highly ranked reason for attending conferences was networking. Three hundred seventeen people (40 percent) listed networking as very important. There were significant correlations between networking and three groups. People who attended more conferences and people in administration found networking important. Surprisingly, reference librarians had a negative correlation to networking, meaning that they did not find networking to be an important reason to attend conferences.

Exhibits did fairly well in this survey. Although only 174 (22 percent) people listed them as very important, 417 (53 percent) people listed them as important. The strongest correlation in this category indicated that the older people were, the more useful they found exhibits. Along those same lines, the longer someone had been in the field, the higher they ranked this factor. There were significant positive correlations between exhibits and people who work in public libraries, as well as administrators (from any type of library). The negative correlations in this category signified that two groups, those who identified themselves as instruction librarians or academic librarians (and there is overlap between these groups) were less likely to find exhibits important.

Respondents were asked how important invited papers were to them. The most significant results were that people who worked in public libraries were less likely to consider invited papers to be important, while those who worked in academic libraries were more likely to consider them important.

TABLE 1
Correlations

	Academic	Public	Ref.	Admin.	Instruction	Tech serv	Access serv	Conf/ year	Age	Years in field	Gender
Invited papers	0.325***	-0.340***	-0.019	-0.059	0.108**	-0.024	0.008	0.104**	0.016	-0.005	0.003
General sessions	-0.044	0.011	0.026	-0.087*	0.018	0.054	0.023	-0.001	-0.083*	-0.128***	-0.170***
Roundtables	0.089*	-0.083*	-0.014	-0.036	-0.003	0.025	0.074*	0.036	-0.053	-0.066	-0.012
Poster sessions	0.203***	-0.219***	0.033	-0.065	0.100**	-0.049	-0.001	0.025	0.032	0.003	-0.036
Networking	-0.054	0.004	-0.099**	0.099**	-0.024	0.004	0.056	0.186***	0.049	0.065	-0.023
User groups	-0.019	0.003	-0.060	0.052	-0.155***	0.183***	0.089*	0.046	0.113**	0.150***	-0.045
Exhibits	-0.185***	0.184***	-0.067	0.231***	-0.191***	0.054	-0.043	-0.031	0.289***	0.281***	0.038
Professional rejuvenation	-0.048	0.048	-0.053	0.069	-0.037	0.030	0.021	0.090*	0.173**	0.136***	-0.097**
CV padding	0.115***	-0.100**	0.158***	-0.246***	0.101**	-0.027	-0.004	-0.040	-0.27***	-0.330***	-0.035
Committee meetings	0.093**	-0.074*	-0.033	0.023	-0.045	0.028	0.035	0.354***	-0.013	0.095**	0.013

***Correlation is significant at the .001 level; **Correlation is significant at the .01 level; * Correlation is significant at the .05 level

Still significant but with weaker results, instruction librarians and people who attend more conferences also ranked invited papers as important.

Another conference component respondents were asked to consider was general sessions. According to the results of this survey, men and administrators were less likely to find these sessions useful than others. The people most likely to find general sessions useful were people newer to librarianship and younger people.

Poster sessions fared well with people in academic librarianship, but not public librarianship. Instruction librarians also found poster sessions useful.

Predictably, going to conferences to have something to add to the curriculum vitae (CV) was more important to those who had been in librarianship fewer years and to younger people. In addition, those in administration, as well as public library employees, ranked CV padding as unimportant to them. Also, there was a significant positive correlation between academic, reference, and instruction librarians/library staff and this motive.

Concerning committee meetings, people who ranked this as an important factor were more likely to attend more conferences than those who did not. Academic librarians and people who had been in the field longer also ranked

TABLE 2 How Important are the Following Activities to you When Deciding Whether to Attend Conferences?					
	Very Important	**Important**	**Not Sure**	**Not Important**	**Very Unimportant**
Prof. Rejuvenation	56% (447)	35% (280)	3% (27)	5% (37)	0% (3)
Networking	40% (317)	47% (377)	7% (55)	5% (42)	0% (3)
General Sessions	24% (188)	51% (408)	10% (80)	13% (106)	2% (12)
Exhibits	22% (174)	53% (417)	9% (69)	15% (117)	2% (17)
Committee Meetings	21% (165)	32% (254)	12% (96)	27% (217)	8% (62)
Invited Papers	14% (110)	36% (289)	21% (170)	22% (174)	6% (51)
User Groups	11% (90)	43% (338)	22% (173)	22% (171)	3% (22)
Roundtables	9% (70)	42% (332)	24% (189)	22% (175)	4% (28)
Poster Sessions	5% (41)	30% (242)	23% (185)	33% (265)	8% (61)
CV Padding	4% (28)	15% (115)	21% (169)	33% (263)	28% (219)

this as important, while people in public libraries did not.

Roundtables were ranked important by those who worked in academic libraries and not important by those working in public libraries. Those who worked primarily in circulation/access services also ranked this as an important factor to them.

The final category analyzed was user groups. Four groups had positive correlations, meaning they were more likely to find user groups important than unimportant: those who worked in technical services, those who had been in librarianship longer, older people, and those who worked in circulation/access. One group, those who worked in instruction, had a negative correlation to user groups, meaning that they did not find user groups to be important.

For all the results listed above, respondents were asked to rank the importance of different factors. The way the question was worded, a respondent could conceivably list all factors at the same level of importance, thus providing no insight into which factors were the most important to them. Thus, a separate question was asked to resolve this problem: "What are the three most important reasons you attend conferences?"

The number-one response for the most important reason, with 317 votes (40%), was professional rejuvenation. (See table 3.) General sessions were listed second in the most important category with 128 (16%) votes, while all other responses for the most important reason got less than 15 percent of the votes.

For the second most important reason, networking won out with 184 votes (23%). Professional rejuvenation and general sessions were close behind in this category with 154 (19%) and 140 (18%) votes respectively.

The third most important reason also went to networking with 167 (21%) votes. Exhibits and general sessions were behind networking for the third most important reason with 137 (17%) and 131 (16%) votes respectively.

Discussion

The purpose of this survey was to determine librarians' attitudes toward conferences and the reasons why they do or do not attend them. Analysis of the data revealed some interesting results worthy of closer attention.

TABLE 3
What are The Three Most Important Reasons You Attend Conferences?

	First	Second	Third
Professional Rejuvenation	40% (317)	19% (154)	14% (108)
General Sessions	16% (128)	18% (140)	16% (131)
Networking	14% (113)	23% (184)	21% (167)
Committee Meetings	13% (103)	6% (45)	6% (50)
Invited Papers	5% (38)	8% (67)	7% (58)
Exhibits	4% (30)	12% (94)	17% (137)
User Groups	3% (27)	4% (29)	5% (43)
Roundtables	2% (18)	5% (41)	6% (49)
CV Padding	2% (14)	2% (15)	3% (24)
Poster Sessions	1% (6)	3% (25)	3% (27)

As mentioned above, professional rejuvenation was selected as the most popular reason for attending conferences, with 56 percent or 447 of the respondents ranking it very important. There were three demographics with a statistically significant positive correlation with professional rejuvenation: people who attended more conferences per year, greater age, and longer length of time working in librarianship. There was one statistically significant negative correlation between a demographic and professional rejuvenation, and that was with men. While it could be the case that those who attend more conferences per year simply hold them in a more positive light in general, the authors hesitated to make this assumption. It was not surprising that people who have worked in the field longer might be more in need of rejuvenation than newer members of the profession. However, what was surprising was the fact that men found professional rejuvenation less important than did women. Professional rejuvenation's positive correlation with conference attendance and negative correlation with men are both areas worthy of further study. Of the 790 survey respondents who answered the open-ended question concerning what respondents found most rewarding about conferences, 12 percent or 98 mentioned professional rejuvenation in one way or another. Comments included:

• [Conferences] are stimulating and fun. I always have more energy and enthusiasm for my work when I return.

• The professional rejuvenation is extremely important to someone such as myself who works at a small, private institution that for the last few years has had serious library funding and infrastructure issues.

• Conferences give new life to a career that can sometimes get old. You see people you know from before and reconnect. There are always people there who are very enthusiastic and it can be contagious. [Conferences] give new life to my work.

• I've only been to one so far, but I found the environment was extremely encouraging—I felt stimulated and enthusiastic about my new career.

Networking had three statistically significant correlations: positive correlations with people who attended more conferences and with administrators; and a negative correlation with people who worked in reference. The authors were surprised at this negative correlation and can offer no reasons for reference librarians' negative attitude toward networking. Overall, networking ranked second behind professional rejuvenation

as a reason to attend conferences, with 40 percent or 317 respondents selecting it as very important. Of the 790 survey respondents who answered the open-ended question concerning what respondents found most rewarding about conferences, 27 percent or 215 respondents listed networking or some variation of it as most rewarding. For the purposes of this study, some answers were counted that did not include the word "networking." Examples include:

• Lunch… when a bunch of people sit around and talk, this is where the real action is at a conference.

• The opportunity to meet and share experiences with more experienced librarians. Their career guidance is invaluable.

• Meeting people interested in the same aspects of librarianship. I work in a geographically isolated region and do not have many local opportunities to meet other librarians in my field of specialization.

Answers that indicated, directly or not, that the respondent was referring to meeting friends or existing colleagues were not included in the 27 percent. What was also interesting was how many respondents wrote that they valued the chance to meet and talk with librarians from somewhere other than their own institution. Despite the presence of multiple libraries in many locations, a sense of insularity was present in the results. Many librarians did not seem to have opportunities to meet with other librarians outside their own library, except at conferences. The impact and value of networking are certainly areas worthy of further study, given the negative correlation between networking and reference librarians, and the number of librarians who took the time to discuss its value.

Poster sessions had significant positive correlations with academic and instruction librarians. There was a significant negative correlation between poster sessions and those who work in public libraries. This negative correlation could be a result of poster content. An analysis of topics for the 120 posters presented at the 2005 Annual ALA Conference revealed that 62 percent (74) of them were targeted toward academic library issues. Thirty-two percent (38) could be considered neutral or germane to both public and academic libraries. Finally, only six percent (eight) dealt specifically with public libraries.[11] Of the 359 survey respondents who answered the open-ended question requesting other thoughts or comments, only one specifically mentioned poster sessions, saying, "Sometimes the poster sessions… are a conduit to really useful information." Of the 790 survey respondents who answered the open-ended question concerning what respondents found most rewarding about conferences, only two specifically mentioned posters: one chose poster sessions and one grouped poster and paper sessions together. Of the 789 respondents who answered the question concerning what respondents find least rewarding about conferences, three percent (22) selected poster sessions as the least rewarding aspect of conferences. While this last result was not statistically large, almost all of the respondents who selected poster sessions as the least-rewarding aspect of conferences evidenced complete apathy at best ("I have never seen a poster session that was useful to me"), or a degree of hostility at worst ("Poster sessions are useless"). The negative correlation between public librarians and poster sessions was interesting because poster sessions are frequently a librarian's first foray into the world of professional development. Creating a poster presentation, especially for the first time, represents a substantial amount of time and effort. Given that so few public librarians appear to value them, the authors suggest that a greater effort be made to include poster sessions whose content is of interest to a wider range of librarians. This is definitely an area worthy of further study.

A conference's importance with regard to adding to the Curriculum Vitae (CV

padding) had statistically significant positive correlations with academic, reference, and instruction librarians, and statistically significant negative correlations with public library staff, administrators, older respondents, and respondents who had been in the profession longer. It certainly makes sense that many librarians in academic settings would be concerned about adding to their CV. Public library professionals' negative response to CV padding probably reflects their ability to advance without a CV. The statistically negative correlations between older respondents and respondents who have been in the field longer could reflect librarians who are already in advanced positions, those who do not need a CV to advance, or those who have no desire to advance.

The statistically negative correlation between administrators and CV padding is interesting. It could be that administrators have less need for academic as opposed to administrative feathers in their caps. More intriguing is the possibility that administrators who consider CV padding a poor reason to attend conferences altogether responded so negatively (it was the second strongest negative correlation between any demographic and any reason for attendance) in hopes of quashing CV padding as a reason for attendance. In addition, the authors concluded that the survey wording might have skewed responses with regard to Curriculum Vitae. "CV padding" has a negative connotation that could have affected responses. The use of a more positive phrase such as "CV enhancement" or a somewhat neutral phrase such as "CV addition" could very well result in different responses.

Finally, the evidence from the question concerning what respondents found least rewarding about conferences and the request for other thoughts or comments revealed many reasons that librarians choose not to attend conferences, as well as what they dislike about them. Not surprising is that expense and travel were both listed as conference negatives. Based on the 789 respondents who answered the question concerning what respondents find least rewarding about conferences, 11 percent or 86 mentioned the expense. Eight percent or 64 people mentioned travel and its related hassles. What was surprising was the number of respondents who singled out logistical issues. Nine percent or 71 respondents who answered the question named logistics as the main problem with conferences. Two points should be made about these comments: 1) many of these respondents alluded to the fact that they were talking about ALA's Annual Conference, as opposed to smaller regional or divisional conferences; 2) the authors of this article did not include comments that solely mentioned dissatisfaction because of having to choose between two concurrent sessions at a conference. These 71 respondents discussed other issues, such as problems traveling to different conference sites around the host city and difficulty in negotiating the main conference center. Comments revealed a high level of dissatisfaction:

• Often, travel times and logistics of getting from one event to another prevent me from attending everything I'd like. It's frustrating when sessions are held in many different physical locations.

• Slogging from location to location (if in more than one building)…

• It would be very nice to have fewer, more centralized locations and more spread out days/times for programs and meetings.

• Least rewarding is the feeling that there is so much that has to be missed due to the time and location constraints.

Similar comments were made time and again. One respondent mentioned that these problems are certainly not limited to ALA Annual, but are rather endemic to all large conferences. Regardless of this fact, however, the results indicate that ALA should reexamine the setup for ALA Annual to see if anything can be done to improve the logistics.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons librarians attend conferences and, in turn, provide insight to those who plan conferences with regard to what people are interested in and what could use improvement. The findings showed that two of the most-cited reasons attendees gave for going to conferences were professional rejuvenation and networking, both of which are benefits not directly related to conference content.

There are many areas related to the results of this study that warrant further exploration. For example, why did many public librarians rank poster sessions so low, and how can they be altered to appeal to a wider audience? The negative correlation between professional rejuvenation and men is also certainly worthy of examination. In addition, this study showed that people who have been in librarianship longer value exhibits more than people newer to the field. Future studies may show whether the more experienced librarians have learned to navigate the exhibits better and thus get more out of them. Further studies might also broaden the scope of the survey by including more position-specific listservs, such as AUTOCAT; or listservs aimed at larger libraries, such as ULS (University Libraries Section), to achieve the widest possible potential audience. Both of these listservs would be included if the authors were to do a similar study in the future. Studies with different survey samples might yield supporting results or results that direct research toward new avenues. With the amount of effort and money required to put on conferences, more research into the psychology of librarians' reasons for attending conferences is warranted. In addition, the results of this study might prove useful to those who plan and organize conferences.

Notes

1. Rosina Alaimo, "Top Six Reasons to Attend a Conference," *Knowledge Quest* 33, no. 1 (Sept./Oct. 2004): 34–35.
2. Jennifer England, "A Case for Conferences," *Knowledge Quest* 32, no. 1 (Sept./Oct. 2003): 15–16.
3. Ibid.
4. Kent Slade, "Newcomer's Guide to Attending ALA Conferences," *Library Mosaics* 13, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 16–17.
5. Anne M. Turner, "Exhibits are Valuable, After All," *Library Journal* 129, no. 9 (May 2004): 60–61.
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Appendix: Survey of Librarians' Attitudes Toward Conferences

1. How many years have you been working in librarianship or information services?
__ 1–5 years
__ 6–10 years
__ 11–15 years
__ 16–20 years
__ More than 20 years

2. What is your primary work area?
__ Circulation/Access
__ Reference
__ Technical Services
__ Administration
__ Government Documents
__ Other

3. In what type of library or information center do you work?
__ Public
__ School
__ Academic
__ Special
__ Other

4. On average, how many conferences do you attend per year?
__ None
__ 1–2
__ 3 or more

5. How important are the following activities to you when deciding whether to attend conferences? Please use the following scale: Very Important (1), Important (2), Not Sure (3), Not Important (4), Very Unimportant (5).

__ Prof. Rejuvenation
__ Networking
__ General Sessions
__ Exhibits
__ Committee Meetings
__ Invited Papers
__ User Groups
__ Roundtables
__ Poster Sessions
__ CV Padding

6. From the list above, what are the three most important reasons you attend conferences?

First_____
Second_____
Third_____

7. In general, what do you find most rewarding about conferences and why?

8. In general, what do you find least rewarding about conferences and why?

9. How much financial support do you receive from your institution to attend conferences?

10. How important is the level of financial support you receive from your institution when deciding whether to attend a conference?
__ Very Important
__ Important
__ Not Sure
__ Not Important
__ Very Unimportant

11. What is your date of birth?

12. What is your gender?
__ Female
__ Male

13. If you have any other thoughts or comments about conference attendance, please share them here.

14. This survey is anonymous. If you would be willing to give up your anonymity and let us quote you, please enter your name and e-mail address (for verification purposes):

Note: in the online version of this survey, the multiple choice questions had radio buttons for answers, which prevented people from selecting more than one answer per question. In addition, in question five, the conference activities were arranged randomly, so as not to influence people's answers by a predetermined order. Question six had radio buttons with the conference activities as options, so people were able to select a button from a list instead of writing out their response. In addition, for most questions, a response was required in order to complete the survey; the only optional questions were 11, 12, 13, and 14.