

Recap of SLA 2018

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I feel fortunate to have been able to attend the 2018 Special Libraries Association (SLA) conference. After attending my first SLA conference, I feel confident that this is the association for me!

I started by attending a half day workshop on finding and using chemical information. This was amazing! Two experts presented to just a handful of attendees, so the presentation was very personalized. We learned about the types of literature used by chemists; basic and advanced strategies for finding chemical information; how to respond to different types of questions; the basics of substructure, sequence, and reaction searching; and the types of questions that chemists typically ask. It was well worth the additional cost of attending a pre-conference workshop!

I attended many other equally informative sessions, the highlights detailed below:

During the Astronomy Roundtable, attendees learned about efforts to produce a Unified Astronomy Thesaurus. Experts currently use a variety of astronomy subject headings, but this would be a way to standardize the language. Astronomers are encouraged to join the conversation.

I also attended a session on using PICO in the health sciences, where:

P = Patient or Problem or Population

I = Intervention

C = Comparison

O = Outcome (desired)

For example:

P = 65 year old female with osteoarthritis in the hip

I = magnetic bracelet

C = standard therapy

O = pain control

I found this method to be limited for my use since it only really works with a certain kind of question, and there is not much flexibility.

Next, I attended a lightning round on collection development in special libraries. In brief, these were their presentations:

1. The first presenter talked about having a “disaster” collection. This is in case e-resources cannot be accessed for a reason such as a network outage. It would have to be updated frequently and is most beneficial for a setting like a hospital library.
2. The second presenter talked about the benefits of having a discussion list for faculty about collection management issues.
3. The third presenter talked about her method of “renting” popular books so they don’t have to be purchased and formally added to the collection.
4. The biggest piece of advice I took from the fourth presenter was to “feed your network as well as take from it”.

5. Finally, the fifth presenter, who works for Rolls Royce, talked about her “petting zoo” for engine parts.

At the Physics Roundtable, attendees met Katie Mack, a funny astrophysicist (Twitter: astrokatie). She talked about the inevitable and abrupt end to the universe (likely a long, long time from now!).

Finally, I attended a session on science communication. The presenter encouraged future, popular science writers to think about these things:

1. Who are you trying to reach?
2. What’s your “take home” message?
3. What type of communication is best suited when writing for the public?
 - a. Use a catchy headline.
 - b. Write about what was learned, not how it was learned.
 - c. Stay clear of jargon, acronyms, or science terms (without defining them).
 - d. Use metaphors for difficult concepts.
 - e. Use personal anecdotes.
 - f. Some of these techniques could work for instruction, too!

Overall, it was a fantastic conference, and I would highly recommend it for any type of special librarian.