Information Without Borders (IWB) 2024 Conference Report

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Abstract

The 16th annual Information Without Borders (IWB) Conference took place on March 25th, 2024. One of the conference co-chairs, Naomi Richards, reflects upon the major themes of the day as well as the impact of the conference on her experience as a Dalhousie Department of Information Science student and her career path as an information professional.

Keywords: Information Without Borders, Conference, LIS Conference, Student Conference, Library Science, Information Science

The Information Without Borders (IWB) Conference is an annual conference run by Dalhousie's Department of Information Science students which aims to showcase faculty and student research as well as provide a forum for interdisciplinary discussion across the entire Nova Scotia LIS community. It is a highly anticipated, long-running, community building event and networking opportunity especially for students and new professionals.

Conference Summary

The theme of the 2024 conference was The Future of Information, which encompassed a large variety of topics and opened the floor to incredible discussion in which students, faculty, and community members all enthusiastically participated. Attendees from a variety of institutions including the Nova Scotia Community College Library Tech program, the Atlantic Provinces Association, and more, brought a plethora

of interesting insights and opinions to the discussions. The broadness of the theme allowed presenters, both faculty members and students, to speak to their newest research, passion projects, and future plans.

The two keynote speakers of the day, Dr. Colin Conrad and Dr. Jamila Ghaddar both of Dalhousie University, presented on two very different aspects of the theme. Dr. Ghaddar focused on the need to address the increasingly intersectional identity of archives and information management, making some very interesting points about the colonial and imperial roots of all archive practices and therefore the conference itself. She examined case studies of how archives and knowledge have been colonized, including that of Algeria and the French Empire. Dr. Ghaddar also discussed digital colonialism, which she proposed as an evolution of the US empire. Efforts and practices being currently made to decolonize archives such as the FAIR and CARE principles as well as the Vienna Convention of 1983 were also addressed by Dr. Ghaddar. The most pivotal point of her speech was that archives cannot be decolonized as long as the land and people are colonized. She concluded her presentation with a recommendation that IWB consider presenting itself as "Information With/Out Borders" or "Information With(Out) Borders" in order to bring forth more discussions about the ongoing need for decolonization and recognition of the imperial practices and lingering tensions still present in the world of information.

Dr. Conrad's presentation centered around generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education. His keynote covered the interesting history and evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) to provide background and context for those less familiar with this field that has existed for far longer than ChatGPT. Dr. Conrad discussed GenAI, including apps like ChatGPT, as well as the activities they both excel and are incompetent at. He emphasized that because GenAI lacks human context and does not have a model of truth, it can often misinterpret images that are similar but not the same. In the second half of his presentation, Dr. Conrad made a case for optimism. He believes that GenAI can be used to enhance education rather than undermine it. For example, GenAI could be used to help provide rapid feedback, or document summarization, and Dr. Conrad himself has been testing a "Reflection Assessor" model

using ChatGPT. To conclude, the presentation focused again on the possible positive implications of GenAI in higher education.

Lightning talk presenters spoke to a variety of topics including oral history digitization, bible literacy, scientific information literacy, information searching, accessibility in libraries, ChatGPT in academic libraries, and finally data management planning.

As can be seen through one of the keynote and lighting talk presentations, the topic of GenAI was one of great interest and concern for both the conference presenters as well as attendees. Both talks relating to GenAI gave a positive spin on the subject, with the focus on how to adapt to GenAI now that it is prevalent in the world of academia and being popularized by students. The emphasis on helping students navigate these new tools and educating them on the potential pitfalls from an academic librarian standpoint was clear.

In addition to keynote speakers and lightning talks, this year's conference wanted to help bring student research back to the forefront by having students present research posters. Students presented on research or special projects at varying stages of completeness with great enthusiasm. There were five student presenters whose topics included, 2SLGBTQIA+ terms in library of congress subject headings, decolonization in community archives, and information policy in emergency communications infrastructure, among other themes. These poster sessions provided avenues for conversation as well as connection and were a highlight of the day.

Personal Reflection

I volunteered for the position of IWB Co-Chair because of my experience at the previous years' conference. IWB 2023 was my first ever conference, and a wonderful introduction to so many different aspects of the LIS profession. It was fascinating to hear how diverse the information profession is and discover new and exciting professional avenues that this degree could take me. I wanted to ensure that the new Dalhousie MI cohort were able to experience the conference and receive all the same opportunities as I did.

As the Co-Chair, and Financial Chair of IWB 2024, the conference not only allowed me the avenue to be a part of a large annual community building event, but also helped me develop my project management, budgeting, and teamwork skills. The most challenging aspects of planning the conference were gathering enough proposals to fill the lightning talk time slots, as well as encouraging student presenters. While I am very happy with the number and quality of student presenters that we had in the end, it took some external motivation for our generally shy cohort to submit proposals. The planning of the conference was a large undertaking, its success was immensely validating for everyone on the committee and involved in the planning process. I have learned so much about management during this process and wholeheartedly believe that these skills will serve me well in future professional opportunities.

I was incredibly impressed and intrigued by all the presentations at IWB 2024, as well as the insightful conversation brought by attendees. I was most surprised by the findings of one student poster that showed how inadequately the library of congress subject headings represent 2SLGBTQIA+ people. While I was not surprised by Dr. Ghaddar's findings that colonialism is still very present in our profession, I was very encouraged by her emphasis that even as students we can make changes.

A special thanks to IWB 2024's sponsors: Dalhousie University Faculty of Management, Dalhousie University Libraries, Dalhousie University Faculty of Graduate Studies, Atlantic Provinces Library Association, and the Nova Scotia Library Association. As well as to all the members of the IWB 2024 committee team.