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S. Kirk Cabeen Travel Stipend Award Winner Conference Report

by Susan Powell

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Overwhelming. Inspirational. Connection.

If I had to select just three, these are the words I would use to describe my experience at the SLA 2009 Annual Conference and INFO-EXPO. Connection because of the kinship I felt with fellow conference participants, and connection in the sense of being able to pull together from the conference knowledge relating to my previous work and class experiences. Inspirational because of the wealth of knowledge possessed by the attendees as a whole and because of their individual stories. Overwhelming in large part because this was not just my first SLA conference, it was actually the first professional conference I had ever attended.

Fortunately, I was able to ease in to the conference experience by attending a few introductory gatherings on the opening day. At the SLA Science-Technology Newcomer's Lunch I met other first-time attendees, as well as several experienced conference attendees who were there to make us feel welcome and answer our questions. I also attended the SLA First-Timers and Fellows Connect event later that afternoon. Both events provided welcome opportunities to meet other new conference attendees in a casual setting and gave a nice introduction to the conference. I was very glad to have been able to attend these events, as I then was able to recognize some familiar faces as the conference proceeded. Also, the opening ceremony later that first day, although amazingly inspirational, fairly overwhelmed me. I had had some idea of the number of conference attendees, but seeing the huge hall of the opening ceremony presentation followed by the masses of people milling about afterwards allowed me a visceral realization of the size of the conference. Who knew there were so many people out there involved in the same work I am?!

Although overwhelming in scale, the messages shared at the opening ceremony were inclusive and personal. The stories of what other SLA members have accomplished and continue to do in their work inspired me to pursue my own studies and work with renewed passion, knowing that librarians and information professionals continue to make a difference. I also enjoyed hearing Colin Powell's unique perspective and surprisingly humorous remarks about the

changing nature of information. As a whole the opening ceremony brought home the point that our work is still very much appreciated and needed.

The second day started for me with a quiet walk in the early morning to the Sci-Tech Division Awards Breakfast. Again, it was invigorating to learn more about the work of my colleagues. It was also interesting to witness some of the business proceedings and put faces to names. I enjoyed talking with others from around the country and world about current issues in the field and listening to their strategies and innovations. I was heartened to discover that topics discussed in my library school courses and encountered in my work at two of Indiana University's branch libraries are actually current topics of discussion in the field at large.

Over the next few days I attended many informative and thought-provoking workshops. In them I learned about innovative technologies, exciting new resources and creative solutions to trying vexing problems. I also took time to explore the attractions on the National Mall with a friend and fellow Indiana University library school student. One of the highlights of the trip for me personally was a trip to the Library of Congress. Although I have been to Washington, D.C. many times, I had never before visited the LOC. I am interested in maps, so I was especially excited to visit the LOC's Geography and Map Reading Room.

Nearly a month later I find that my experiences at the SLA Annual Conference have stuck with me. Occasionally some previously unremembered piece of information learned at the conference will unexpectedly surface. References to my experiences and knowledge learned at the conference are not uncommon in conversation with my coworkers and other library students. Upon returning to work I noticed how certain policies and activities of my libraries fit into the broader scope of what is happening in our field, such as utilizing free tools and emerging technologies. The workshops and presentations I attended also helped me to visualize how some things could be changed to better meet the needs of our patrons and their information demands.

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More significant than any one thing I learned at a workshop, in conversation with my colleagues, or at a poster session, however, is the overall sense of perspective that I gained from the conference.. As the individual pieces of information and the knowledge of nifty technologies fade into my general understanding of the field, I am left most strongly with this sense of perspective. It is so easy to become wrapped up in the details of the mundane activities required to make a library function day-to-day. I find that sometimes it can be difficult to keep in mind the broader scope of the profession. The annual conference reminded me that we do not work in isolation and that we are not facing unique dilemmas. The camaraderie and sense of connection I encountered at the conference helped renew and reinvigorate my interest and excitement in the library and information profession.

I feel lucky to have attended the SLA Annual Conference and INFO-EXPO as a student. I now know what to expect from future conferences and have begun to create a professional network. Being a student allowed me to choose my activities and schedule more freely than I might otherwise have been able to do. I was able to absorb the conference experience as a spectator without the pressures to negotiate with vendors, etc. I welcomed, too, the opportunities to learn more about what types of work other SLA members are engaged in and what their jobs entail. The knowledge, connections and perspective I found at the annual conference continue to inform my thoughts and work. I am looking forward to future SLA conferences. ❖

My Experience Attending the SLA 2009 Annual Conference in DC: A Report from the Asian Student Award Winner

by Xiang "Cindy" Yuanyuan
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Last year I received a forwarded email from the Information Center of the U.S. Embassy in Shanghai, China, which was the 2009 Asian Student Awards announcement that offered an award for Library and Information Science students to attend the Special Libraries Association (SLA) Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. Although I applied and submitted the required resume, essay and recommendation letter on the last day of 2008, by the deadline, which seemed like making a New Year's wish, I actually never dreamed of winning the award. In early April of this year, I received an email that was to not only offer me a great surprise, but also definitely gave me a chance to change my life. I could not believe that I won the award and would travel to America in June!

After two months of preparation and logistics for attending the conference, the month of June was coming. Excitement and also butterflies set in as the serious countdown began towards the final days. June 12th was a big day for me. I took the flight from Shanghai Pudong International Airport to Detroit to D.C., fortunately, everything went well according to the plan and after an eighteen-hour-flight, I finally felt my feet firmly on the American soil.

No matter how ready I was, when I got into the real dream land, everything was so different and

I could strongly feel the culture shock. Although Washington, D.C. is the capital of America, it strikes me as an atypical American city since there are no skyscrapers, which indeed are prohibited by law. However, I can still feel the city is full of culture, history and memorial when I was visiting some famous attractions. The Washington Monument at night with reflection was so impressive and stunning; the National World War II Memorial shows the great honor to the people who have devoted their lives to the peace and freedom of the world. I also learned about the symbolic art and architecture of the Thomas Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress.

I was very happy that I got the chance to attend the SLA Centennial conference. At the Opening Session and Awards Presentation, I felt inspired by a series of awards that recognized professionals in various fields for their numerous contributions. The highlight at the opening session was the opening keynote address by General Colin Powell, former U.S. Secretary of State. Although Gen. Powell did not speak about librarians directly, I still found the speech quite amazing which also proved it was possible to deliver a very interesting speech without any slides or any other visual aids. He covered everything from his many pursuits, his views on leadership and his efforts to modernize the