PARTNERSHIP

The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research
Revue canadienne de la pratique et de la recherche en bibliothéconomie et sciences de l'information

vol. 13, no. 1 (2018)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v13i1.4517>

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Roundtable: How do you like to do professional development?

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Compiled by Allana Mayer

For this issue, we asked readers how they prefer their pro-dev: face-to-face, online, conferences, journal clubs, or something else? As you can imagine, the answers indicate a little of everything. Enjoy!

Stephanie Savage

Scholarly Communications and Copyright Services Librarian, University of British Columbia Library

As an early-career librarian who works in fields that require a significant amount of subject expertise (copyright) and the ability to leverage collective action (scholarly communications), I prefer to do my professional development with my peers. As a result, I focus primarily on attending conferences, workshops, lectures, and other events that allow me to meet and interact with colleagues either virtually or face-to-face.

Currently I am taking CopyrightX, a MOOC offered by Harvard that is open to anyone with an interest in copyright. My cohort includes students from all over the world, and we meet virtually each week with our instructor to discuss readings and apply what we have learned to case studies. This allows for intellectual engagement with copyright theory, which can be absent in my daily functional responsibilities.

I am looking forward to attending several conferences and workshops this year that will put me in close quarters with other scholarly communications advocates who are working towards institutional change in various areas: open access publishing, promoting the value of alternative research outputs, and reevaluating collection decisions in response to growing consolidation and inequity within academic publishing.

Of particular interest to me is the Force11 Scholarly Communications Institute taking place in late July. This program incorporates intensive coursework with a cohort-style implementation, allowing for both deep learning and network building. I've heard great feedback about the courses being offered and I am excited to meet and learn with others who are as passionate as I am about these subjects.

Karen Tiveron

Senior Media Librarian, Mass Digitization Project, Content Management and Preservation, CBC

As an introvert with disabilities who enjoys learning and staying on top of industry changes, I need professional development delivery methods that are convenient, accessible, and affordable. Online options such as MOOCs, podcasts, online journals, and webinars are ideal for me. I can access information when and where I want and learn at my own pace. This convenience allows me to be in a comfortable environment, and I find it easier to concentrate and retain information.

Conferences, networking events, and in-class teaching can be incredibly intimidating for a lot of people; the anxiety these situations create can prevent people from learning the things they want or need to learn. Online options reduce this anxiety and provide opportunities for those who are not able to attend events in person. By using online resources, I am able to stay on top of industry trends while feeling engaged in my profession.

Online learning is also usually more cost-effective than attending a conference out of town. The lower cost means I can take more classes, which makes me a more informed professional and a more interesting person! Cost can be a huge deterrent for people, and I believe in removing, or at least reducing, barriers to learning.

Another big advantage to online learning is the variety of topics that are available. For example, a subject may not appeal to a large enough audience in a particular location to justify a conference or in-class teaching. However, online there are numerous professional development courses and formats to choose from. You can then select the topics that are the most relevant or interesting to you or your work.

Lately I have been focusing on MOOCs from Lynda.com and Coursera.com. I like that I have access to supplemental material such as readings and case studies and that I receive instant test scores. My current job involves a lot of data wrangling, so I've been taking various courses on the ethics, privacy, and bias in data management. Without these options I'm not sure I would feel as informed as I do in my career.