

## GRC Presents: How to Network (On Purpose) and Why You Should!

Hello everyone! My name is Megan Siu and I am in my third and final term of the MLIS program, which is super exciting! But before leaving this place, I wanted to give one of these GRC Presents things a try, so here goes nothing!

To start off, this is a brief overview of what I'll be covering today...

First, I'll give you a bit of background on me and how I got into the idea of networking. Then I'll offer my tips for networking from my own experience. Next, I'll go over some tips that I picked up from a session I attended at the SLA Conference last month. After that, I want to relate the networking strategies to situations outside of conferences. I'll finish up with a summary, and recommend an amazing networking opportunity offered by the CLA student group here at Western, and take any other questions. Of course, you can jump in with any questions you might have at any time.

A little bit about me – I hail from Edmonton, Alberta and did my undergrad at the University of Alberta majoring in Sociology and minoring in Psychology. Over the years, I've gained a lot of library experience without realizing it, and didn't actually have knowledge about nor the intentions of pursuing the "MLIS degree" until about 8-9 months prior to enrolling here at Western. I've volunteered at the Provincial Archives of Alberta and the Edmonton Police Service, and worked at the University of Alberta Cameron Library of Science & Technology as well as the Alberta Law Libraries – Edmonton Resource Branch. After my undergrad, I wasn't really sure about what I was going to do with myself. I do have a deep interest in things like juvenile crime and reducing recidivism, social statistics, and demography, but I wasn't too sure about finding a career in that, and I wasn't so sure about applying for grad school in that respect either. While I was working at the University of Alberta Cameron Library, I worked in the Map Room with the William C. Wonders Map Collection – the map room was essentially a space that was temperature-controlled – so I wore a sweater ALL THE TIME, and there was a lot of space for you to spread out maps so you could work with them. There was a cataloguer named David and he's actually an alumnus of the MLIS program here at Western from years ago. His project at the time was cataloguing some amazingly old maps, and he didn't like working in his office upstairs because people would always come and bug him, so he would come and work in the map room too. So eventually, we became acquainted, and he started to ask me things like what I wanted to do with my life, and why I was working so many library jobs at the same time – I happened to also be working part-time at the Law Library in the Provincial Courts Building downtown. After I told him my story, he suggested that I try applying for the Library Science program. My response was something along the lines of, "that exists?" I know – terrible, right? Well, I gave it some thought, and with a little push from David, I applied to a few library schools including this one.

And now, here I am, finishing off the program, ready to head back out West in pursuit of employment. I'm happy to report that I've been getting a number of job interviews over the past couple of months, and what has helped me a lot is my network. My network includes all my family, friends and acquaintances back home, my past employers, my past colleagues, my mentors, my former professors and supervisors. And now, everyone I've met here. Basically anyone who I know and knows me.

We've all probably heard something along the lines of you get jobs through connections, and it's actually quite true. It doesn't mean that the next person you talk to will snag you a job, but that person might know someone who knows someone who knows someone who could let you know about an opportunity that could lead you to a job.

Prior to arriving here for the MLIS program, believe it or not, but I was not a particularly social person. Back home in Edmonton, I have about...2-3 friends that I talk to and hang out with, but it could be something like once every 2 months. Aside from that, it's just my family and well, I guess my boyfriend, but whatever. Long story, short, I wasn't particularly big on meeting people and mingling and going out, and wasn't so convinced about making connections and networking.

My perspective changed completely when I met Past President of the SLA (the HQ in the States), Deb Hunt. How did I meet her? Well, since I've been in the program, I've been very involved with the SLA student group, and in my first term, one of the people from my cohort, Andrew (who's on co-op right now), mentioned that his mom was good friends with Deb, and knew that Deb was going to be in London for a conference one weekend. What ended up happening was that our SLA student group got invited over to Andrew's house for a meet and greet with Deb Hunt. At first, I thought – hey, this is so cool. We're going to meet the past president of the big SLA organization! The thing she spoke about most was how she got her job, and how she got involved with the SLA. The biggest emphasis was placed on networking. Making connections. Reaching out. The coolest part was when we went around the group and said what library-related experience we had, I talked about one of my recent jobs at the time at the University of Alberta Cameron Library of Technology and Science. Deb immediately responded by asking if I knew Randy. I asked, "Randy Reichardt?" to confirm. Yes, it was that Randy. Somehow, Deb and Randy were apparently really good friends for many years! Now, Randy never actually worked directly with me. He's the Engineering Librarian, but I was the Special Projects student for the William C. Wonders Map Collection. I had only met Randy by chatting with him in the break room, when I baked cookies, and he ate like 7. But it's just so cool that I met someone in that sort of situation, who was connected to somebody like Deb Hunt! But back to Deb – She told us all that we NEEDED to get LinkedIn accounts and add her as a connection because that's how professionals are connecting, and some hiring for unadvertised positions happens via LinkedIn. You have to realize that at least half of the jobs out there aren't advertised, and if you only respond to job ads on places like INALJ or the SLA job board, you're missing out on a whole slew of things. It's not to talk down those job boards – by all means, apply for those jobs, but don't ONLY apply for those jobs. Anyways, I took some of her words to heart, and got started on my LinkedIn account the next day. It was kind of weird to me – posting parts of your resume on the Internet like that, but it's putting yourself out there as a professional. It's like...Facebook for professionals. I started by adding Deb along with a few classmates who had also begun to build their LinkedIn profiles. Then, I started adding my previous employers, and some of my former classmates from back home started adding me. And it just blew up from there!

The crazy thing is that earlier last month, when I was in Vancouver for the SLA Conference, Deb Hunt was there at a meet and greet booth. At the end of my conference experience, I decided to wrap everything up by paying Deb a visit. When she saw me, she gave me a hug and remembered that I knew Randy – who was also actually at the conference – crazy – and we chatted about how over the past year, I had become much more involved with SLA and was developing quite the network and experience to come with it. It felt amazing to have everything come full-circle like that! And actually, most of the professional networking experience that I did gain, was done during the SLA conference!

Some of you may have seen my blog post where I created an infographic displaying how many strangers I talked to, how many sessions and events I went to, and what my conference loot consisted of. This was really fun, by the way, and you can make your own for free at [www.piktochart.com](http://www.piktochart.com)! Well, the chart showing how many strangers I talked to kind of complemented my goals for the conference. Each day, I

decided on a number of people I would talk to, and this brings me to the first of my tips for networking at a conference based on my own experience.

1. Set goals. Set a goal for each day of the conference, and plan to talk to strangers, but plan to talk to a certain number. Once you've met that number, you can go home feeling accomplished, or go in for the long haul and feel even more accomplished! A good guideline to follow would be to talk to at least 2 people per session you attend. You could also set a goal for how many vendors you visit for free stuff.
2. Create a little script for yourself. Make it easy for you to remember without having to write on your hand or a cue card. A 1 or 2 liner that describes you in such a way that you're not talking the person's ear off, but you're saying enough for them to get something about you. Mine was really simple, and actually helped along by Cat! So, thank you, Cat! I would go up to people and say, "Hi, my name is Megan, and I'm an MLIS student. It's my first time coming to the SLA conference, and I'm learning to network!" Sometimes, I would get daring and add the line, "this place is huge and there are so many people!"
3. Ease yourself into talking to people. You only want to force yourself to mingle. You don't want to make yourself so uncomfortable that you spend all your time sitting by yourself playing on your phone. If you know you're not really good at talking to complete strangers, pick easy people to talk to. Like, when you first come in, you'll have to talk to the people at the registration desk. Those count too! What I did was go to the EXPO hall where there were booths for all the vendors. I would tell myself, "I'm going to talk to some people I don't know at all, and if everything ends disastrously somehow, at the very least, I will have some free stuff!" So, I worked my way down an aisle of the EXPO hall, walked up to the first vendor and recited my script – "Hi, my name is Megan and I'm an MLIS student. It's my first time coming to the SLA conference and I'm learning to network...this place is huge and there are so many people!" Generally, I got 1 of 3 responses. The first was something like "Oh! That's so great of you to come out and learn to network! It's really important! Do you want me to stamp your passport? Here! Have a free pencil/pen/notebook/other item!" The second was like "Oh, that's nice. Do you want me to stamp your passport?" The third was like "...You want a stamp?" Sometimes, the vendor would even give you a demo. I saw 37 vendor demos. That was a lot. For the most part, people were very nice, and I got a lot free stuff! Unfortunately, since I'm trying to fit my life here in 2 suitcases when I leave, I had to send all my conference loot back home, so I don't have anything to show you. But there was this one thing that was totally unrelated to libraries...it was essentially this toy cow that shot something like a ping pong ball when you squeezed it. Another way to ease yourself into talking to people is to approach the speakers. After the talk, just go up to the speaker, briefly introduce yourself, thank them for their insightful talk, and make a kind remark about something in the content of their talk. And voila! You've made another connection!
4. Attend events where there's food. The obvious benefit is that you'll get food, but also, where there's food, there's going to be other people. Another chance to meet strangers! Yay! There was one reception cleverly called the "Canadian Reception" - it was supposed to be for all the SLA members from Canada to mingle because the main SLA HQ is in the States. Cat and I actually volunteered at the registration desk for about half an hour each, and along with a drink ticket, we also handed each person a slip of paper referred to as an icebreaker. Mine said "talk to someone with a moustache". Once you found this person, if you took a selfie with them and

tweeted it with a certain hashtag, which I forget, before the end of the reception, you would be entered into a draw to win an iPad – I think. It was for a prize of some sort. This was to get you going – meeting new people that you didn't know. Sometimes, they were as specific as “find someone named Patti”. You'd have to mingle with a lot of people until you found a Patti, in hopes that Patti actually showed up. Receptions and dances are good places to mingle with people in a less formal setting. You might feel more comfortable talking about things casually like hobbies and stuff in that kind of environment as opposed to when you're out and about at the conference.

5. Reward yourself for accomplishing your goal. Get a latte or something, go for a drink! You deserve it! You did something! Better yet, go grab a latte or drink with someone you connected with! You can talk further about things and probably be a little more comfortable.

These were tips that I kind of came up with as I was at the conference, but I also want to give you some more tips that I picked up from one of the sessions I attended. There were some shorter sessions called “Quick Takes” which were 15 minutes long, but covered some useful things like what to include on your LinkedIn Profile. I attended one called “Networking Naturally”. It was presented by Tom Rink, one of the President-Elects for SLA, and an MLS instructor for information literacy. Tom talked about these strategic steps to take when networking, which you'll notice will have some overlap with the tips I just ran over:

1. Seek out opportunities – Opportunities include jobs, board meetings, and even elevator trips. Anywhere you might end up encountering people is an opportunity. When you encounter someone and connect with them, you can connect with the people that they're connected to and so on.
2. Gain exposure and make contacts – Most of us are early in our careers, or at least early in this particular career, and need to gain exposure in terms of our professional presence in the field. Exposure can happen through the creation of a blog or LinkedIn profile, or by shaking hands with someone and introducing yourself. It's important to know that when you're early in your career, it doesn't matter so much about who you know, as who knows you. It's those already working in the field who know people, and you want to get in on that, so connect with people who are already established in the profession.
3. Be Prepared - Creating your elevator pitch or a little blurb about yourself with a strong foundation. So that when you say hi, you don't totally get cold feet, and you have something else to say. Conferences generally publish a program or have a website that you can look at beforehand. Use this to create your game plan. Know who's attending, and know who you'd like to meet. Once you've gotten that down, prepare a few questions that you might want to ask. There are 3 challenges involved when you're networking – starting a conversation, maintaining the conversation, and ending the conversation. If you're properly prepared, you'll have a conversation starter, some questions to ask and keep the conversation going, and some sort of graceful exit. This doesn't mean that you have to curtsy or bow your way out, but rather, so you're not as awkward when trying to end a conversation with someone who happens to go on and on, while you may want to see something else, or talk to someone else. This is something I need to work on...I ended up being late for a session because a vendor who unfortunately wasn't very familiar with his database continued to struggle with trying to conduct literature searches, and I just stayed there. Luckily, it wasn't a session I was super bummed about missing.

4. **Work the Room** – Arrive early to the session before the talk actually starts or as people are still arriving at a reception. Stand near the door or the food, places where people tend to congregate. Walk all 4 corners, and watch for clusters of people. Go check out what's going on over there. While this might be kind of strange when you think about it in a school context where people might be having a discussion with their closer group of friends and you don't want to interrupt, at a conference, you're expected to be a little bit overly outgoing. Don't cut off someone who's talking, but join the conversation, especially if you hear someone talk about something that you're interested in. If you have things to say, people won't mind. If you kind of barge into the conversation being like HEY! And not say anything afterwards, then yeah...people might think you're kind of rude. But conferences are for networking, so people will understand if you join them. It's not a bunch of high school cliques, one would hope.
5. **Build Relationships** – Keep in mind that when you build a relationship, it's about both give and take. When someone shares something about them with you, have something to share with them. If they see that you're open too, they'll likely want to continue the conversation. This note of give and segways a bit into Tom's last strategic step. One thing that I kind of regretted was that I didn't have any business cards to give out. I felt like "well...I'm just a student, and it's not like I'll want to hand out cards that say I'm a student when I'm going to finish the program." But it felt kind of awkward when someone handed me a business card and I could only say thank you. Some people did ask me if I had one, and I'd have to say that I didn't...But now, I'm a little more prepared. I went to the Business Card Workshop last week hosted by the CLA student group, and made these beauties. You'll notice that I didn't label myself as anything, and I kind of wanted it that way since I don't have an established title yet, and in a few weeks, I'm not going to be an MLIS candidate anymore. I also couldn't include my phone number since that's going to change when I move back, but more people communicate online anyways. So, I'll pass these around, and you can take one if you'd like. I even got a business card holder...I actually just got this on the weekend, from Bentley – that store with all the luggages and wallets and stuff. I had to confirm with the saleslady that this was in fact a business card holder, because I've never had one. She looked at me kind of weird, but at least I got one! It has owls on it!
6. **Utilize Networking Tools** – The last strategic step mentioned was to utilize networking tools. Networking tools can include business cards, stickers, or an article of clothing that the person is wearing like jewelry or shoes – something that can start a conversation. But before you go for it, consider the context and appropriateness of you making that comment...you only want to come across as inquisitive, not creepy. Try to be genuine rather than faking it, because trying too hard or looking like you're trying too hard might not be such a good thing. At the SLA conference, everyone had a badge which showed your name and what institution or company you belonged to. I was asked multiple times if I worked at Western University, and I'd have to say "No, I'm actually an MLIS student attending Western, but maybe I'll end up working there too!", but it would still start a conversation. Another thing was that you could attach various ribbons that kind of told who you were. I had a "First timer" ribbon, which basically told people that it was my first time to the SLA conference. Other ribbons had things like "VIP" or "Speaker" or the name of an SLA division. But this was a great indicator for me as well. I could find other people with the same ribbon as me, or find someone with a lot of ribbons, and pick their brains about something. NOTE: However, you should be considerate and read social cues. If someone is giving you the vibe that they don't really want to talk to you, make sure that you don't force the

issue. It's far more important to establish a positive relationship rather than leave a bad impression.

I've talked a lot about networking strategies in a conference context, but it's definitely important to network outside of conferences too.

These networking strategies can be applied similarly at school!

For instance, talk to people as they file into class or if you're walking in the same direction on the way home. Drop by and say hi to people in the GRC, the Grad Lounge, or the Grad Club. "Hi, how are you?" can go a long way. There are a number of student groups with various interests that you could join. Most of them hold socials and other events like workshops, guest speaker presentations, and tours. Join in! One thing that you should notice at least for the student groups here is that they don't really mind when you decide to join and how frequently you attend things. They're a great way to get involved and get to know people.

Socials/Mixers – How many socials have you been hearing about? There are always posters on the pillars and walls here, and those Facebook events popping up all the time, right? Well, why not attend one or two? They are great opportunities to meet new people and network, and it's kind of nice to know other people who are in the MLIS program but at different stages. Most of them are in atmospheres where you can talk about anything, and it doesn't have to be restricted to MLIS-related content!

Student Groups – Most of those socials are hosted by student groups, so why not join them? If you're uncertain, try attending a couple meetings first to see what they're all about. Keep in mind that you don't have to stick to one group! You can join all of them if you really want to. I, myself, am involved with the SLA, CLA, LWB, MLISSC, SOGS, and at times, the PLG too!

The Job Shadowing program – This isn't offered during the summer, but usually in the fall and winter semesters, you'll have a chance to sign up for an optional job shadowing placement. There'll be a list of information professionals in various locations in London, and surrounding areas. My job shadow placement was with the Collections Management Unit at the LPL Central Branch, and it was one of my favourite experiences during the program. I got to meet people in management, selection librarians, and cataloguers alike! At the very least, take advantage of it as a great learning opportunity, but you will meet at least one new person to add to your network!

Informational Interviews – I know that other people are like me and are leaving soon, so you might not have access to student group events and the MLIS job shadowing program. But fear not, there exist such things as informational interviews. Information interviews are where you approach a colleague, coworker, employer (past or present), and meet with them so that you can bounce questions off of them about their job, the specific area they work in, or how they got their job. Most of the time, they will agree, because let's face it – librarians love to talk about what they do! Meet with someone you know who works in your area of interest, and invite them out for coffee, tea, lunch, or drinks of the alcoholic kind! What usually works even better is if you treat them!

If I haven't convinced you enough about the importance of networking by now, I want to tell you one more story.

A little while ago, I applied for a job with the Theatre Alberta Library. I ended up getting an interview, and performed quite well. Unfortunately, there was someone else who had something more to offer, so I didn't get the position. However, while preparing for the interview with the Theatre Alberta Library, I ended up learning a lot about their library and Theatre Alberta as an organization. I thought that it would be interesting to learn more about this special library and open up the opportunity to other students, so when I became the Events Coordinator for the SLA student group for this term, I made an effort to reach out to the Theatre Alberta Library again, and asked them if they'd be interested in taking part in a Skype Q&A with the UWO SLA. And what do you know? On June 25<sup>th</sup>, we had a Skype Q&A with Becca Barrington, one of the librarians at the Theatre Alberta Library. Not only that, but Becca requested for a link to the blog post I wrote about the library, and now I've made myself memorable in their books (no pun intended). So much so that without submitting an application, I've got myself an interview for an internship with Theatre Alberta, the organization itself to be assistant to the Executive Director.

I'd really like to encourage you all to network because networking opens the doors to more opportunities, and opportunities are a good thing!

If you're going to take anything away with you today, please keep the following pointers in mind:

1. Take advantage of the opportunities around you while they're still there.
2. Meet new people!
3. Establish a professional presence in the field.
4. Think about who you know, but think more about who knows you.
5. Network! Network! Network!

As a final note, I would like to encourage you to take advantage of a fantastic networking opportunity. The CLA student group is hosting a Speed Networking event on Thursday, July 25<sup>th</sup> where you'll have the chance to bounce questions off of real, living, breathing information professionals from public, academic, special libraries, and vendors. How often is it that you'll have 6 engaged professionals in your field sitting and waiting for you to ask them questions? Exactly! It'll only cost you \$10, and actually, Cat is here with tickets if you are interested in purchasing them (which you are)!

Aside from that, I don't have much else to say, but if you have any other questions about this presentation, about any of my previous jobs, interview experience, or anything else, feel free to send me an email. As something to help me out, here are some comment slips. You don't have to write your name on it, but any feedback would be much appreciated!

Thank you so kindly for your attention! So there you have it, How to Network (On Purpose) and Why You Should!