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Adventures in Conference Planning – University of Maine PTRC Celebrates 25 Years

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On December 23, 1983 the University of Maine established its Patent and Trademark Resource Center at the flagship campus in Orono. In October 2018 I hosted two events on campus in celebration of our 25th Anniversary. The conference, titled *Researching Patent and Trademark Information*, included one full-day program for the public and one half-day program for the library staff. Both programs aimed at providing tips for researching patents and trademarks. The presentations were done by Neil Massong from the Patent and Trademark Resource Center Program (PTRCP) office and Amelia Cohoes, the 2018 PTRCP fellow. Additionally, the public program included a local resource panel comprised of our Business Librarian, a representative from the campus Innovation Center, our Government Documents Librarian and the Director of Economic & Community Development for the town of Orono. The public program was attended by 17 participants and the staff program included 8 participants.

This was the first conference I had ever planned so I approached the task with cautious optimism. While part of me felt like I could totally handle all the planning because I am very detail oriented, part of me was also thinking, it is fall semester, I work at an academic library, is this really a good idea? I found the greatest challenges were staying organized and preparing as much as possible, as soon as possible. Here is an overview of what worked, what did not, and what I learned.

Successes

I advertised far and wide, including sending emails, posting to message boards, and contacting the local newspaper. When possible, I sent individual emails rather than group emails. I hoped the personalization would make it more likely that the recipient would read the contents of my email. If I had met with the person before, I was sure to make reference to the fact that we had met before and where we had met. In the end, my conference was attended by nearly 30% of returning public patrons. The remaining attendees were about split between on-campus participants and off-campus newcomers.

The PTRCP office provided a list of possible advertising outlets. In addition, I attended a Small Business Association event in Portland in August 2018 and made a lot of contacts there. If you'd like to read more about that experience see my article in [BRASS](#)¹.

I requested library funding for food. This allowed me to provide morning refreshments for both public and staff programs as well as lunch vouchers (\$10) and an evening reception for the public program. It perhaps goes without saying, but everybody appreciates free food.

I reserved a room for lunch for the public program. This afforded the attendees an opportunity to socialize with each other. Since I had a small group of about 15 at lunch it was noticeable that bonding occurred during the break. This sense of comradery carried into the afternoon session and even into the evening reception, as some folks exchanged contact information.

I hosted a morning social for the staff program. This was held in a room with a table for everyone to sit at together. I provided coffee, tea and snacks. This afforded the in-house staff and the two visiting librarians to interact. It set a congenial tone for the session.

I provided parking passes ahead of time. Parking is limited on campus and the current system is to park, get a pass, and then go back to your car to place the pass on the dash. Providing passes ahead of time meant attendees could skip this unnecessarily complicated process.

I planned activities for PTRCP speakers. I made sure we tried some local cuisine and checked out Bangor's tourist offerings: A 31 foot tall statue of Paul Bunyan which claims to be the largest in the world [Fig. 1]; Stephen King's private residence which is delightfully Stephen King-esque [Fig 2]; and the childhood home of Civil War General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain.

Lessons Learned

I neglected to consider the number of pre-advertising tasks. I wanted to start advertising immediately. Except first I had to confirm the date, the room(s), PTRCP speaker availability, the schedule

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http://www.ala.org/rusa/sites/ala.org.rusa/files/content/sections/brass/Publications/Acad_BRASS/2018_fall_Liu_Knapp.pdf

of events, and create a Google registration form. Once all of the forms and arrangements were completed, the actual advertising could begin right? Not yet...In order to advertise I needed a contact list. I did not have one. I needed to create a list of past PTRC users and also a local resource outreach list. Once this was done, I could finally start advertising.

Lesson Learned: Maintain a regularly updated contact list.

I prepared a flyer before talking to program office. I had to submit a proposal to the Dean of Libraries to request funds and so I created a flyer. I later found out that the program office had a template.

Lesson learned: Check with PTRCP office first.

I did not have an efficient system for registering people and sending confirmation emails, parking passes and general conference information. In hindsight, it would have been a good idea to teach myself more advanced Google Form skills. In rushing to prepare the form I failed to consider how the registration confirmation process would go, how I would keep track of responses, whether the attendee needed a parking voucher, and whether I would sent them one or not.

Lesson Learned: Slow down and think ahead.

My registration form did not ask enough questions. I wish I had asked if registrants had any previous experience with patents and if they had visited the PTRC before. This would have been good marketing feedback and useful information for the program office.

Lesson Learned: Don't miss an opportunity to collect useful data.

I hosted a reception at the end of the public program. At the end of the public event I hosted a reception with an accidentally comically large cake [Fig. 3]. I was clearly overly hopeful about the number of attendees and while the food was amazing and the idea well intentioned, the execution failed. It was a long day and although all attendees evaluated the program positively, I think everyone was ready

to go home. If I had served the cake at lunch it would have been a perfect dessert and everyone would have still been present. In the end, the staff at my library enjoyed cake in the breakroom for days!

Lesson Learned: Don't make the day any longer than necessary.

All things considered, this anniversary event was a huge success. The audience was very engaged, stayed the entire program and asked excellent questions. I think they kept the speakers on their feet. After all the hard work, it was pretty great to take a bit of a back seat and just let the events play out. I am grateful for this experience and hope you find this feedback helpful or, at the very least, amusing.

Photos included:

Figure 1. Knapp, R. K. (Photographer). (2018, October 17). *Paul Bunyan Statue* [photograph]. Bangor, ME.

Figure 2. Knapp, R. K. (Photographer). (2018, October 17). *Stephen King House* [photograph]. Bangor, ME.

Figure 3. Cohoes, A. (Photographer). (2018, October 16). *Anniversary Cake* [photograph]. Orono, ME.