

I'M AT MLA...NOW WHAT?



"Music Libraries: The Great Unknown"; Image courtesy of Michelle Hahn

Table of Contents

From The Editor	MLA as Truly-Experienced Professionals
MLA as a Student Who Intends to be a Professional	MLA as Experienced-to-the-Point-of-Retirement Professionals
MLA as a Paraprofessional Seeing a Professional Position	General Advisement
MLA as a Professional Who Used to be a Student	MLA From Common Ground
MLA as a Professional Who Used to be a Paraprofessional	Next Steps
MLA as a Quasi-Experienced Professional	Bringing It All Together

THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE AT MLA

General Editor: Michelle Hahn

Guest Assistant Editors: Jessica Abbazio, Kristen Heider, Allison McClanahan, Charles Roush



Hello readers. It's not often you get to read the *MLA Newsletter* from the other side of the page! I am Michelle Hahn, the [General] Editor of this publication on behalf of the Music Library Association. I hope you enjoy this special treat!

The *MLA Newsletter* is published 6 times per year, in even-numbered months. The previous issue was in December (month 12), and therefore the next issue would come out in February (month 2). The timing of the annual meeting in 2018 meant the February issue would be published a little off schedule, after the meeting was complete. Yet, two months before the meeting and then one month after the meeting would not allow for critical or last-minute information about the meeting itself to get out in a timely manner.

That got me thinking...should I move the post-meeting issue to pre-meeting?

In turn, that got me thinking...it might come too soon after December, and then be too far ahead of April (the next publication date)... What to do?

A random series of events and conversations got me on this track: make an off-cycle, special issue dedicated specifically to first-time attendees about attending MLA! But, it's different for everyone, and especially for students and emerging professionals who may be apprehensive about an unfamiliar event this big. As the train-of-thought progressed along the track, I started to bring in some of our colleagues who have already been to MLA and are currently in those situations, to get their perspectives and to share those perspectives for others who may be headed to their first meeting in the same situations. What about an MLA meeting will be important for them? What are some pitfalls they may want to avoid? How can they get the most out of the meeting?

I then invited several of those colleagues to write about attending MLA from their perspectives. In addition, I invited them to assist with editing the whole issue to feed each other's perspectives and ensure a more complete overview.

And, voilà! Welcome the Guest Assistant Editors: Jessica Abbazio, Kristen Heider, Allison McClanahan, and Charles Roush. They have been to at least one MLA meeting in their current roles, and each has been to at least one MLA meeting in more than one of those roles! So, they know what it's like. They know what you don't know. They know what you should know. And they know the answer to the question "I'm at MLA...now what?" from your perspective. This off-cycle issue will be a recurring thing, as every year is a new experience.

This issue will be a critical read for anyone about to attend their first MLA meeting, no matter where they are in their career--students and experienced professionals alike--so share it with your friends and colleagues who will be coming to MLA for the first time! It will also be an informative read for anyone who thinks they know how to answer that question, so share it with your friends and colleagues who could expand their horizons! And it will be a useful read to anyone who's been to more MLAs than they can count on one hand, so read it and share it with your friends and colleagues regardless!

MLA AS A STUDENT WHO INTENDS TO BE A PROFESSIONAL

By Jessica Abbazio, Guest Assistant Editor



Attending the annual Music Library Association meeting has been one of the most valuable aspects of my MLS studies, and one of my favorite parts of my overall student experience. I attended the meeting as a student four times; I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in music librarianship several years prior to completing my PhD in Musicology at the University of Maryland, and I joined MLA before beginning my MLS studies at Indiana University. Since then, I've found that my membership in this organization is a crucial element in my professional growth and preparation for a future as a music librarian. At each meeting I've attended, I've made connections and friendships with students and professionals from all over the country. In doing so, I've worked toward building a network of MLA members that I will interact with and rely on for years to come. Over the years, I've learned a few things about attending MLA that I'd like to share with other students who are

traveling to this year's meeting:

Talk to everyone you can. The Music Library Association is a very welcoming organization whose members readily accept new participants. If you have a question, ask it; during a session, at a coffee break, or at a reception, don't be afraid to approach any MLA member and start a conversation. Some of the most valuable pieces of information and advice I've received have emerged from discussions with my MLA colleagues after sessions and during breaks at past meetings, including suggestions for useful classes to take, skills to learn, and professional development activities to pursue. If you're able to attend the evening social events, you could even learn to tango and make some new friends in the process.

Don't be afraid to attend committee and interest group meetings. These meetings are open to everyone, even if you're not a member of a particular committee or interest group. Curious about current trends in music librarianship education? Plan to attend that interest group's meeting. Want to learn more about issues of diversity and inclusion in the field? Stop by that committee's session. Is film music your thing? Put that interest group's time slot on your schedule. Students can become official members of MLA committees so if you're interested in serving the Music Library Association in this way, attend a meeting and then contact that committee's chair to inquire about opportunities to join.

Attend something during every session block. For me, attending MLA is all about learning and making connections, so my advice to students is to go to as many sessions as possible. Exploring a new city is fun, but you never know what you might miss if you skip a meeting session. There's always something to learn and someone to meet, so make it a priority to attend as many sessions, meetings, and events as you can while you're at the meeting.

Attend sessions that are outside your primary area of interest. There's something for everyone at MLA, and this variety is reflected in the wide range of sessions on this year's program. If you're still in school and uncertain about what you'd like to focus on in your future career, take the opportunity to explore different

aspects of librarianship during the MLA meeting by attending presentations on different subjects. Even if you're certain you're working toward a career in a particular field of librarianship, there will be something interesting and useful to learn at sessions that fall outside your main area of interest. You might even discover a new path that you hadn't considered in the past.

Take advantage of programs for first-time attendees and new members. If this will be your first meeting, don't miss the First Time Attendees Reception. If you're a first-time attendee and didn't receive an invitation to this year's event, or if you missed this reception when you were a first-time attendee, contact the [Career Development & Services: New Member Forum](#) coordinators to be added to the list. This event (which includes a free dinner!) presents an opportunity to connect with other new members and to learn a little bit about the friendly faces you'll run into during the rest of the meeting. I also strongly encourage all students, whether or not this will be your first MLA meeting, to sign up for the [Conference Mentoring Program](#). This fantastic service will match you up with someone who can help to guide you through the meeting experience and who will be available to answer your questions throughout the meeting. I've participated as a mentee in the past and it's one of the best and most rewarding experiences I've had as a student member of MLA. Lastly, don't miss your chance to connect with other student members by attending the Music Library Students and Emerging Professionals (MLStEP) Interest Group meeting. This group is dedicated to providing students and emerging professionals with opportunities to ask questions, contribute ideas, and connect with others who have similar interests as we all work towards careers in music librarianship.

I've found that my membership in this organization is a crucial element in my professional growth and preparation for a future as a music librarian.

MLA may seem like a big meeting, but it is actually a tight-knit community. During the years that I've been a member, I've always been impressed by how friendly, helpful, and supportive music librarians are to students entering the field. Attending this meeting is about learning from, and connecting with, music library professionals, and there are always many kind people who are ready to help students and new members at each year's meeting. My membership in MLA has introduced me to many different aspects of music librarianship, helped me to develop into a more well-rounded professional, and provided me with opportunities to build lasting professional relationships. I look forward to meeting new colleagues and catching up with old friends at this year's meeting, and I hope that every student feels confident in taking advantage of the great services and programs that MLA has to offer during the meeting.

Jessica (Ph.D. and M.A., Musicology, University of Maryland; B.M., Music Education, George Mason University) was a Master of Library Science candidate in the Music Librarianship Specialization at Indiana University, Bloomington at the time of this writing; she is now the Music Librarian at the University of Minnesota Music Library. Jessica has served as Chair of MLA's Music Library Students and Emerging Professionals group (MLStEP; 2017-present), MLStEP's Programming Officer (2016-2017) and as the President of IU's Student Music Librarianship Group (2017). She was a Library of Congress Junior Fellow (2017), completed an instruction internship with the Head of Public Services and Outreach at IU's William and Gayle Cook Music Library (2017), served as the graduate assistant to the Head of UMD's Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library (2009-2016), and was teaching assistant in the Musicology Division of the University of Maryland's School of Music (2007-2008).

MLA AS A PARAPROFESSIONAL SEEKING A PROFESSIONAL POSITION

By Charles Roush, Guest Assistant Editor



I was a full-time paraprofessional working in public services at IU's William and Gayle Cook Music Library at the time of writing this. I worked at this level (with the job title, "Public Services Supervisor, Bills and Fines Coordinator") for over three years. During that time, MLA proved to be a vital resource in my professional development. I have attended the national meeting since Denver in 2015, as well as several Midwest Chapter meetings. With the annual meeting quickly approaching, I wanted to take a few moments and focus on my thoughts regarding this meeting. Specifically, what did I hope to get out of the annual meeting in this position, and will my overall

approach be similar or different to that of years past?

At previous MLA meetings, I have tended to focus on activities immediately pertaining to the work I do in public services. Through the sessions I've attended, including various town halls, lightning talks, open committee meetings, interest groups, and more, I sought to enhance my knowledge of public services librarianship and things closely related to it. This was extremely helpful for me in my paraprofessional role. I feel that I learned much, making me not only better equipped to assist patrons, but also more comfortable as a manager at the circulation desk.

MLA has proven to be a vital resource in my professional development.

In 2018, thoughts of my future in the field were increasingly coming to the forefront. I absolutely loved my job, but I did not want to stay at the paraprofessional level indefinitely. Though I am thrilled with the opportunities I had in that position, I became increasingly aware of limitations to the paraprofessional life. Aside from the lower pay and reduced opportunities for professional development, one of the biggest drawbacks is the job's nature to pigeonhole. Paraprofessionals are generally responsible for a narrow range of tasks that consistently need to be done. While this benefited me with a good degree of familiarity with my daily tasks, it also limits exposure to many other library workflows and processes.

At the time, I framed MLA in terms of preparing for the next step--becoming a professional librarian. Though I preferred to continue my career primarily in public services, I noticed that many job postings ask for more breadth of experience than what fell within my job duties. Many librarians work in both public and technical services, for example. Ever since library school, I've been proactive in staying informed about the state of the profession outside public services, but I also wanted to increase my diligence in this regard. In order to be better prepared for a wider array of positions, how could I plan my time at MLA?

Fortunately, MLA provides many options towards these aims. As ever, the program committee has done a great job of selecting a diverse array of sessions. Instead of sticking to a focus on public services, I considered adding to my usual rotation sessions focusing on archives, special collections, digital librarianship, and technical services. I hoped to solidify my understanding of big-picture context on how these areas relate to public services and fit into the overall field. Though I may not have been able to gain routine experience in

those areas at the time, it was not too early for me to become comfortable with their core principles and how they can shape my views as a librarian into the future.

Beyond the sessions, I also branched out by attending a committee meeting/interest group or two not focused solely on public services (potentially the Cataloging/Metadata Town Hall and the Digital Humanities Interest Group). As usual, there was no shortage of options. Even if scheduling gets tight, I can still find plenty of information to broaden my horizons at the poster session and at “Get Involved in MLA!” Though not directly related to the coming meeting, I also plan to read several recent publications relating to the various areas of music librarianship I’ve been thinking about--specifically relating to archives and music cataloging. I also consider attending a portion of MOUG in the future.

Finally, I believe the people of MLA are its greatest resource. I am grateful for the chance I’ve had in getting to know other music librarians over the last few years at MLA. I plan on continuing to reach out and meet new people, and am excited about future connections as I broaden my horizons!

Charles was a Public Services Supervisor and the Bills/Fines Coordinator at Indiana University’s William and Gayle Cook Music Library at the time of this writing. He graduated from IU with his MLS and MIS in 2016, specializing in Music Librarianship and Rare Books/Manuscripts. Prior to his library studies, he studied clarinet performance at IU South Bend, Missouri State University, and Michigan State University. He is now the Research & Instruction Librarian at the University Library on the Edinburg Campus of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

MLA AS A PROFESSIONAL WHO USED TO BE A STUDENT

By Allison McClanahan, Guest Assistant Editor



There are many things that MLA has to offer for all who are interested and involved in music librarianship, whether you are a student, emerging professional, or a long-established individual in the field. In this section, I will be discussing MLA meetings from the perspective of someone who was appointed to a librarian position shortly after graduating, but it’s my hope that this will be useful to individuals who are students and emerging professionals alike.

Annual meetings are exciting places, but it’s natural that they can also be daunting. The most important thing to remember is that people are here at this meeting because they have the same interests as you! So don’t be shy! Once you’ve made it to an MLA meeting, you’ll realize that others in attendance are either right there with you, were once in your position, or are extremely helpful and want to see students and emerging professional members

succeed. When I attended my first MLA (2016 in Cincinnati) I was a graduate student at Indiana University. While I probably shouldn’t have been, I was surprised to find how much the music librarians involved in MLA were invested in seeing students succeed, and were happy to see them getting involved in MLA.

I would suggest that students and emerging professionals take advantage of a lot of the tools and resources

available during the annual meeting--and there are a lot! Looking through the program for the upcoming MLA Meeting (which can be found ahead of time on the meeting website), one can find most, if not all, of these opportunities listed. Mentorship program, first time attendees reception, Get Involved in MLA sessions, cover letter and CV help sessions, interest group meetings (which are open to anyone interested!), and even simply the networking opportunities during coffee breaks and the Music Library Students and Emerging Professionals Group (MLStEP) events can all be helpful.

My first piece of general advice before discussing individual opportunities and programs that I have participated in and/or found useful--don't pigeonhole yourself if possible to only attending one type of presentation or panel. Thankfully, there are plenaries, which don't have any competing presentations, but throughout the meeting, you may find yourself at odds trying to decide between one presentation section and another. If you are a student, aren't sure whether you prefer public services, technical services, or archives, or just want to get a more well-rounded experience, try to avoid only going to technical services presentations or only public services presentations. You might learn something you wouldn't have otherwise, or find an interest you didn't know you had! Also, please don't feel nervous or afraid to ask questions or make a comment during a Q&A after a presentation--speak up!

One of the most helpful things I participated in as a student in Cincinnati was the first timer's reception and the mentorship program. Not only is there free (delicious!) food, the first timer's reception provides newcomers to MLA a chance to meet other students and first time attendees before the meeting, and even a chance to make some life-long friends in the field. With the exception of the facilitators, everyone at the first timer's reception will be in the same boat, meaning that others there will understand any nerves or worries that a first time attendee might have. Making friends and meeting friendly faces can only help you, both during the meeting itself and afterwards in your career.

In addition to this, the mentor program is something in which I would suggest everyone participate. At least in my experience, the mentor program was invaluable to me. You will likely be paired with a mentor who works in the same field as your interests (cataloging, reference, archives, etc.) who can not only show you around the MLA meeting and give practical guidance, but could also give relevant career advice. My mentor was able to introduce me to other individuals in MLA that had similar interests or who were working in my desired field of music librarianship, and gave me a perpetual resource throughout my first MLA meeting that I could turn to if I needed help, guidance, or advice. I strongly recommend that every student or emerging professional take advantage of this.

The Get Involved session is another great way for emerging professionals to learn about ways to work with, and for, MLA members. Many of the MLA committees will be at this session and are more than glad to talk with individuals about their work with MLA, and how members can get involved in those ventures. For students, you can still learn about the committees and how MLA groups function, and MLStEP will have a table and will be happy to talk with any student who would like to get involved with us! For professionals (early career or otherwise), it's a way to learn more about potential service opportunities, especially if you are in a position in your career where you will be evaluated on service (and you want to work with awesome people in your field). If you already have business cards made and available to you, bring them! They will be an easy way to share contact information, during both Get Involved sessions and networking opportunities during coffee/snack breaks and the receptions.

And speaking of getting involved, as I said earlier, interest group meetings are open to anyone interested in that topic (it's what they're for!) and MOST committee meetings are open to guests as well. So, if you're interested in Music Industry or Arts Management, Contemporary Music, Diversity, Women in Music, or any of the other topics covered by MLA Interest Groups, look for that Interest Group meeting slot in the program book! It is yet another way that you can network, get to know people with similar interests, and can potentially shape your future career interests!

For me personally, I haven't really noticed a change in how I have approached MLA meetings as a student versus a professional librarian. Of course, I can no longer attend the first-time attendee reception, nor need to be a mentee as a first-timer, but I still attend interest groups, the Get Involved session, try to attend various presentations (although now trying to focus on ones that are a bit more relevant to my current position), network and socialize during coffee and food breaks (as well as the opening and closing receptions), and attend committee meetings. I will also be attending the MLStEP events, so I hope to see students and emerging professionals there!

Making friends and meeting friendly faces can only help you, both during the meeting itself and afterwards in your career.

And finally, I want to reiterate that people in MLA are incredibly friendly. If you are an emerging professional, please talk with people during breaks! It's a wonderful way to make acquaintances, professional connections, and friends! Networking at MLA meetings has been incredibly helpful in my path towards becoming a new professional. If you are a first time attendee or a student, you will also get a ribbon to put on your name badge. So, don't be surprised if people come talk to you and reach out! Get to know who people are and what they do in their work. Don't be afraid to approach someone and start a conversation if you see that they work in a field in which you are interested. One of the biggest benefits of MLA meetings is that hundreds of music librarians from around the country are in one location, so take advantage of it if you are just starting out or have questions. And, don't be afraid to dance at the closing reception when the MLA Big Band plays!

Allison McClanahan is the Collections and Cataloging Librarian at the Archives of Traditional Music (ATM) at Indiana University. She received her MLS, including two specializations in Music Librarianship and Archives and Records Management in December of 2016 from Indiana University. Allison serves in many capacities, such as the Secretary on the Board of Directors for the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC), Co-Chair of the ARSC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, and President-Elect for the Indiana University Librarians Association. In her free time, she likes to listen to her vinyl collection, drink tea, and cuddle her pets.

MLA AS A PROFESSIONAL WHO USED TO BE A PARAPROFESSIONAL

By Kristen Heider, Guest Assistant Editor

I'm at MLA...now what? Well, not to complicate matters, but that depends entirely on *you*: your interests, specialization(s), type of position, class of position, career goals, who is presenting about what in any given year, and a number of other factors. That being said, below are some things I would recommend doing to get the most out of MLA. My perspective is that of a relatively new music cataloger who spent about two years in a paraprofessional position post-MLS before landing my current professional position, so I've seen both sides of that coin. Even having spent six years in the field now, I feel like I started this gig yesterday, which is

From the Guest Assistant Editors



perhaps unsurprising given a comment by a professor in grad school that “music librarians never retire, they just eventually die.” To answer the question at hand, though: first off, get yourself to MLA (and MOUG, while you’re at it!). This may seem like an obvious point, but given the effort and expense that requires, it bears mentioning exactly why going is important in the first place. For me, the MLA meeting serves many purposes: it’s my annual job training; it shows me what other institutions are up to; it allows me to hear about both what is coming and what might be coming down the pipe, both in the cataloging/metadata world and elsewhere; it is an opportunity to reconnect and network with colleagues who form the truly impressive professional support network that MLA is; it gives me the chance to discuss challenges with people at other institutions and get their insight on how to address those challenges; and most importantly, going to MLA pulls me out of the daily grind and helps me fall in love with my profession all over again every year.

Even with all those benefits, actually getting to MLA is difficult for many people, and though I have no empirical evidence, I suspect this hits paraprofessionals, young professionals, and especially

paraprofessionals with MLSs hard due to student loans and institutional priorities about travel funding. The work of just getting here may mean various things for you including advocating for professional time off from your position, advocating for travel funding—even partial funding—from your institution (these two things are what a dear friend of mine calls “fighting the good fight”), applying for travel grants such as the Kevin Freeman Travel Grant or a grant from your local MLA chapter, finding roommates, finding affordable airfare or someone to road trip with, and any number of other financial and logistical details. Any way you swing it, it’s an expensive endeavor unless you’ve got full institutional funding (and if you do, consider yourself lucky (and, I suspect, rare!)) but there are many ways to mitigate the cost.

One of the best ways to save a little money, in my mind, is to participate in the Reduced Registration Program. The most obvious benefit to this program is that it reduces the cost of MLA registration significantly (note: this is not available for students, whose registration is even further reduced). However, the program has a number of unwritten side benefits, too. It’s a great way to essentially embed yourself in various parts of the meeting, to see the inner workings, and to get to know the folks running things. I honestly cannot recommend it highly enough, and I’d do it again if I could.

Speaking of getting to know people, one of the best pieces of advice I can give to a new (or new-ish) meeting attendee is just to listen. No, really. There is so much knowledge, wisdom, and experience in this crew. Sometimes we can take ourselves a little too seriously (::cough:: catalogers trying to start WWII over a period ::cough::), but the amount of valuable information you can pick up by paying close attention to what people are saying is enormous. Participating in discussions is an important part of learning, too, of course, but being mindful of listening to get the benefit of all the years of experience around you is not something to forget about, or to take for granted.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, don’t forget we want the benefit of your wisdom, too. If you have the

From the Guest Assistant Editors

chance, present! Yes, it is terrifying to present when you're new to the field, but that "new to the field" perspective is important and useful to everyone. Start out with a poster session if presenting seems like too much to handle. Co-presenting can also be a great way to take some of the pressure off yourself, plus it can reduce the workload for any research you do. Can't think of a presentation topic? Well, what are some challenges at your institution or challenges you see in the field right now? Odds are good that you are not the only person facing them, and that you're not the only person wondering what's behind them and what to do about them. Don't think you have to know everything or have all the answers in order to present, either.

Speaking of presentations, there sure are a lot of interesting-looking ones, aren't there? I have found that it is well worth the time to plan out a personal meeting itinerary in advance. I usually spend one evening in the week before MLA reading through all the presentation descriptions and deciding which sessions I want to go to. Pre-planning like this has been especially beneficial to me in the years I received travel funding from my institution and was therefore expected to report back on what I attended. This way, I had a record of what I'd been to, even if my notes somehow went missing. I haven't got a great deal of advice about what exactly to go to, since that varies so much year-to-year and person-to-person, but here are a few things I personally attend every year if I can:

- MOUG--Beyond the scope of this article, I know, but incredibly useful for both Technical and Public Services folks.
- Paraprofessional Interest Group meeting--If you are a paraprofessional, this should be a no-brainer. If you aren't, go to find out how you can support your colleagues.
- Cataloging and Metadata Town Hall--Contrary to popular belief, this is actually especially useful for public services folks! It's basically a crash course in everything that changed/will be changing in the cataloging/metadata world this year.
- Poster sessions--While the topics and quality vary each year, these bite-sized and low-key presentations are a great way to pick up useful info, see what other institutions are working on, and to make connections.

Ultimately, when choosing what to go to, I would say that every meeting is a mixed bag, but that in my experience MLA has a higher than average rate of "good" sessions, so just make your best guesses and try to catch up with folks who went to different sessions later, if you can.

I also tend to suffer from pretty extreme FOMO (fear of missing out) at MLA, which is something from which I'm trying to break away. My personal goal this year is to take better care of myself. Part of this stems from being in the chorus of an opera that goes into tech the day I get home (wheeeee!), but more to the point, MOUG and MLA are exhausting--especially for someone as introverted as I am. Every year I get home and the next day of work I am in a total fog trying to process all the information I've just received, recover from travel, re-gather some energy after all that social time, and catch up on the week's worth of work I'm now behind on. Meeting self care for me this year is probably going to include making sure I take the time to eat full meals, skipping some social activities and maybe even sessions so I can have alone time to process the day, and possibly even coughing up the money for streaming access so I don't have to worry so much about missing a session I'm interested in when it's scheduled against another session I'm interested in (a common problem for me). I hope that doing these things will help me absorb information better and feel less exhausted and dazed when I get home.

Ultimately, what will serve anyone best at MLA is going to vary based on a number of professional and personal factors. It is my hope that having some insight into what has been especially useful to other people at similar places in their careers will make planning and decision making a little easier for someone else.

Kristen Heider is the Metadata Librarian at Berklee College of Music. Previously, she worked as the Music and Digital Resources Cataloging/Metadata Specialist at Southern Methodist University. She has an MLS with a specialization in Music Librarianship from Indiana University and a BA in Vocal Performance/Bass Trombone Performance from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. She also serves on the NEMLA Technical Services Committee. In her spare time, she catalogs foley (i.e. live sound effect) equipment for the Post-Meridian Radio Players, an audio drama troupe, and maintains an active schedule as a performer in the Boston area.

...one of the best pieces of advice I can give to a new (or new-ish) conference attendee is just to listen...I can't tell you how critical it was for me to learn what I thought I knew.

MLA AS A QUASI-EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL

By Michelle Hahn, General Editor



When you've already been active "out in the field" for a while, you may find yourself approaching your first MLA, or even your first from a new perspective, downright daunting. I know. I've felt that. I'm with you.

I went to my first professional conference/convention/meeting as an undergraduate student who was studying to be a music teacher. As a student in Ohio, that meant I attended the Ohio Music Education Association annual conference. I went with a group of my fellow music education students. What fun! A ridiculous road trip, exploring a new city, having a slumber party, and carousing with my friends at all hours of the day and night. The convention itself was pretty big, and I got to go to some really engaging and participatory sessions. There was much singing, dancing, and playing instruments.

Even in the exhibit hall! You walk in and it sounds like a symphony is warming up as musicians like me tried out our own primary instruments, and instruments we might like to buy for our students. You could play the drums! You could buy music! You could get free toys! Gosh, you could even see the inside of a tour bus!

Several years of that, and I knew exactly what kind of things I wanted to see: certain performing groups, certain presenters, certain swag. So, when I got to library school, I expected more of the same (but maybe quieter--because libraries!) I was strongly encouraged to attend my first MLA meeting as a graduate student who was halfway to graduation. After all, there was a good job open, and I could go to an information session about it. I could "get my name out there" and maybe get a job. I could have more rousing fun and get some cool free stuff!

Turns out, MLA was very different from OMEA. My first meeting was MLA 2007 Pittsburgh. I went alone. I only knew the people in my grad school's music library, and I was an upstart kid in comparison.

However, as you've heard from all of the other authors, MLA is full of friendly people! My mentors effectively dragged me around and made people meet me. I was a staunch introvert, and it was definitely overwhelming...If I found myself sitting alone, it was not for long, as someone would see my name badge and sit with me. If I got into an elevator alone, it was not for long, as someone else with a matching name badge would get in, see my "First-Time Attendee" ribbon, and squeal in excitement, welcoming me and asking all sorts of questions. Side note: my name badge also said "student" and "Indiana University" on it, so about 90% of the time, the other person would say "I went to IU" or "I worked at IU" or "Do you know so-and-so from IU?/I love so-and-so from IU." We're everywhere!

That meeting was somewhat non-standard, as we were meeting jointly with the Society of American Music (SAM), which is a very different organization itself. We had different badges, and if they didn't know me, they didn't make a fuss. I never attended any of their sessions, either, because my interests lay solely in MLA things. But I saw a lot of MLAs wandering in cahoots with SAM members, whom they often knew through shared interests or employers. Moreover, since I was not the type to run up to a stranger and introduce myself, I never made the leap to meet anyone in SAM. My loss!

MLA Cincinnati 2016 was my 10th meeting. I had graduated from library school, gotten my first professional job, went through 2 promotions, volunteered myself profusely for committees, applied for MLA positions, went through a second job search, and moved to my 2nd professional job. MLA meetings had become "old hat" to me. I knew what I would enjoy, I knew what was outside of my expertise that might be interesting, and I was not afraid to skip out to go sightseeing. I already knew a lot of people, so I always had friends to catch up with over dinner. And, I even was more bold and open to getting ice cream with what would be a new friend!

So, I've been there several times now. From my own experience, I can definitely recommend so many things for those of you who are new. Get your résumé and a cover letter reviewed! I did this as a student, and there was a wealth of suggestions for improvement. Though I was introverted, I was also proud and confident, and I assumed there wouldn't be much to get from it. But, the suggestions from experts and people who had been on the other side were brilliant! This was such a positive experience, that I did it again with 7 years in the profession under my belt. Again, still confident, I learned even more and continued improving.

Go to the things that you know you want in on. Like I said, confident, so I knew what I would be doing in a library when I graduated. It was so intriguing and eye opening about what I was going to do. But also, go to the things you know you don't want in on. Again, confident, I just knew I would go in and roll my eyes or laugh at these people who wasted so much time on the stuff I didn't think was useful. Boy was I wrong! Though I actually understood a lot of the words they said, I found myself considering those "silly" things interesting, educational, and worthwhile!

Speak up, but don't yell. Even as an over-confident student, I didn't find myself pushing my uneducated views on the luminaries, but I took advantage of the opportunity to ask questions and say things from inexperience without judgment. I thought I already knew everything, and though everyone else knew that was not the case, no one shamed me for my ignorance. Instead, they gently corrected me when I was open to it or engaged in discussion that helped me get on track by my own volition. I can't tell you how critical it was for me to learn

what I thought I knew. It's made it possible for me to avoid near disaster or triple my workload having to go back and do things again. Now that I am at a teaching institution, I tell all of my students why I am requiring them to do what seems like menial grunt work, giving them concrete examples from my history of what goes wrong and what it's like to have to fix it.

Keep your eyes open. While this takes on additional meaning for me and many of our readers for semi-related reasons, my intent here is to tell you to pay attention to what's going on at the meeting and to learn from everything you see. You are not the first person to ever attend an MLA meeting. You are not the first person to ever come up with much of anything. Luckily, you will be surrounded by the ones who have come before you. This is your opportunity to learn a lot, grow as a person, become an expert, and take advantage of sharing space with our luminaries and legacies. They've all been first-timers like you, and upstarts like me at some point in their professional past. You'll get to their perspective, too! It won't necessarily be overnight, but an MLA meeting is the best way to start.

In addition, ask a lot of questions and take some initiative. Does it seem weird that the chairs are arranged in a certain way? Ask why! See someone you wish you knew? Introduce yourself! Want to join a committee? Ask how! Alone at lunchtime? Invite yourself to sit with someone! Despite my overconfidence, that's where my introversion comes in. It's HARD! I don't doubt that I come across as cold or aloof to unfamiliar people...and that is actually because I am a bit scared to meet new people! What if I say the wrong thing and offend them? Might I make a bad impression? Even as a quasi-experienced professional, it can be intimidating! It IS STILL intimidating! So, even when you see someone like me, go ahead and introduce yourself, interrupt, join them. We will be thankful you did, and glad to know you.

Michelle is a 2007 graduate of the Music Librarianship Specialization program at Indiana University. After graduating, she was eventually hired for full-time work as a professional music catalog librarian at Southern Methodist University, where she was incumbent for over 7 years. She has now been a professional sound recordings cataloging librarian at Indiana University for over 3 years, currently serves as the Social Media Coordinator of the Music OCLC Users Group (MOUG), Assistant Web Editor for the International Association of Music Libraries and Documentation Centres (IAML), and Editor of the MLA Newsletter.

MLA AS TRULY-EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS

Excerpted from Rob DeLand's oral history interview with Ruthann McTyre and Philip Vandermeer ([MLA Newsletter](#))

Ruthann McTyre said the following about her first MLA meeting:

For me, coming to my first MLA meeting and being welcomed by people that to me were stars. Back then we had little yellow stars on our nametags if we were first time attendees. I was so shy I didn't put it on my nametag because I didn't want anyone to know that I was new. I got on the elevator one day and Don Roberts got on with me. He looked at my nametag, shook his finger at me, and said, "I've been looking for you!" Joan Schuitema had told him to track me down. I met Kevin Freeman at that first reception, and I thought, "Wow, if everybody's like Kevin Freeman, I'm in the right place!"

In discussing their terms as President of MLA, Philip Vandermeer noted:

At least in the last few years, from probably Bonna [Boettcher]'s administration, yours and mine, and everybody after, there was more of a push to involve more new and younger people and make it a more open opportunity to get involved. It wasn't, "I'm good friends with so and so, and they'll get me on. Because I know them, I'll get on a committee." I think that was the perception. Jane's right--it was kind of a closed club in a lot of ways, I think.

When Rob DeLand mentioned the difference in the administrative structure, Ruthann noted:

I'm happy to do whatever the association asks me to do. You know, Diane Parr Walker was a really important person to a lot of us. You can find a lot of people in our generation in MLA because Diane would take you aside while she was president those two years and talk to you about what your interests were. It was always, "What do you want to do next for the association?" That was a really good lesson for us both to learn, I think. She [had] that approach to things. There are a lot of people I know who have that same story.

Ruthann later commented on the those who are the future of music librarianship:

You mentioned that we sort of apologize for who we are, but to me, the younger generation of librarians don't do that anymore, and I love that! They're more chipper, they're a lot more confident than I ever remember being at that age. That's one of the fun things now about being in the position we and so many of our colleagues are in--I think you would agree too: When we come to MLA, we can sit and meet all these amazing younger librarians that are really cool! It's like, "Dang, would you come work for me please?" The way they talk...I can tell you know. That's really cool. To me, it's really fun to come now, just to watch and learn from them.

And Philip shared his interest in developing that future:

Can I just say too that you [Ruthann] and I have really similar perspectives on empowering and getting people involved...I've always liked the idea of being able to empower people to do things and being able to encourage young people to step up to the plate and to get some credit and some glory.

Ruthann made note of the regenerating nature of the annual meeting:

MLA can offer you a lot in terms of learning how to be a good leader; learning how to be a good administrator because you're working; and knowing all these other music librarians who share your experiences and who have been through what you're experiencing as a young librarian. We used to say, "I'm so tired I don't know if I want to go to MLA or not, but by the end of the week, it's "I'm so glad I came; I feel so much better! I'm not alone in the world, and that kind of thing, and the things you walk away with and that you learn from your friends and colleagues.

This is really one of the most giving groups of people I think I've ever been involved with.

MLA AS EXPERIENCED-TO-THE-POINT-OF-RETIRED PROFESSIONALS

Excerpted from H. Stephen Wright's speech celebrating MOUG's 25th anniversary, "Community, Collaboration, and Coffee Mugs: The 25-Year MOUG Mission" ([MOUG Newsletter](#)), "Oral History Insights: John Wagstaff Interview, part II" ([MLA Newsletter](#)), and "From the [MOUG] Chair: Neil Hughes" ([MOUG Newsletter](#))

H. Stephen Wright, a beloved, yet now-retired MLA member from Northern Illinois University, said the following at the 25th anniversary of the Music OCLC Users Group (MOUG) meeting:

I saved my pennies and took a Greyhound bus to Philadelphia, arriving after MLA was underway. My first MLA meeting [in Philadelphia] was a bit baffling and intimidating. Anyone who has joined MLA in the last ten years may have difficulty understanding this, because MLA has evolved into an utterly different organization than it was in 1983. Now, it's a very welcoming, newcomer-friendly group, with a multitude of opportunities for new librarians to become involved. When I joined, however, it seemed that MLA consisted mostly of grey-haired, pipe-smoking men in tweed jackets (the kind with patches on the elbows) who talked about Machaut and Josquin. It seemed so far removed from what I was studying in library school that I wondered what the hell I was doing there.

When asked, "... what inspired you to come to the US?" John Wagstaff, also a beloved MLA member and now retired from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign responded:

Well, while I was at Oxford, I knew about the Music Library Association of course, but being European, most of our allegiance (pretty much) over there was to IAML, because that is the International Association for Music Libraries after all, whereas MLA [was] considered, rightly so obviously, as a US librarians' body. There was a US branch of IAML, (IAML-US) [n.b. MLA merged with IAML-US and is now the US branch of IAML], there was the MLA, and I don't think most of us wanted to join or make head or tail of it. But I, being fairly ambitious, did want to make head or tail of it. ... I went to my first MLA [meeting] in 1995. ... In the course of those visits I got to know American music librarians, people whose names I'd see in *Notes* or maybe by now I had seen on the MLA Listserv, because it was now up and running. You know, people like Dick Griscom, Jane Gottlieb, [the now late] Suki Sommer, Jim Cassaro--those kinds of people. All of a sudden, there they were in person. I didn't feel quite as over-awed as I did in Helsinki in 1993, [because] I'd been in the game a little bit longer. Nevertheless, it was inspiring to meet those people and to talk to them.

Wagstaff was then asked about his involvement in MLA:

I certainly wanted to get involved right away. Of course, [having moved to the US,] all of a sudden I could go to MLA meetings on an annual basis ... My first one after I was appointed was at Vancouver in 2005. That was a wonderful location--I really enjoyed going to Vancouver. It's odd because, although I've always felt a responsibility to contribute to the profession and to the professional parties that represent that profession, I've always been slightly a maverick. I don't like to be pigeon-holed too much. It's that old thing about "I don't want to be in any club that will have me as a member." I've always had that slight kind of kicking back against things, and so I'm not a traditional committee person. I can be useful on committees, but usually that's

purely by accident. It might work for me or it might not. ... Also, just after I arrived here, Don Krummel very kindly allowed me to participate in teaching his intensive summer music librarianship course. So, almost by accident, I found myself getting involved in music librarianship education and that led eventually to the creation of the Music Librarianship Educators Round Table [now Interest Group] ...

Occasionally people just ask me to do things--review documents, or help out with something--and I've done it as best I can. But I'm not really a committee junkie; I never have been. I know there are some people who just seem to live for their next committee meeting; I'm not one of those people. ... So my involvement with MLA hasn't perhaps been quite as extensive as one might expect. At the Chapter level ... I was Chair of Publications because they couldn't find anybody else I think, for awhile. I enjoyed that; I did it to the best of my ability. You'll laugh at this probably, but whenever people ask me to be on something, I always say "Please just don't put me in charge of anything." But for better or worse throughout my career, people have put me in charge of things. By and large I've made a reasonable fist [i.e. success] of it, but it's by pure accident most of the time. I manage not to screw up, rather than necessarily have a plan, a five-year plan, a seven-year plan, or whatever. I never really did plan. Now I'm at this stage of my life I somewhat regret that I didn't make more of a plan, but we are where we are.

Neil Hughes, who retired from the University of Georgia several years later, commented on the support of our colleagues in MOUG (and MLA by proxy) for its support:

MOUG has had a special place in my heart since my early days as a music librarian. Here I found some of my first mentors, and my earliest encouragements to get involved and make my voice heard. So I hope that if you are a new music librarian, or a new paraprofessional in a music library, that someone in MOUG has taken the time to show the same kind of interest in you and your career. Change is inevitable, but one thing that doesn't seem to change in music librarianship is the passion we have for our work, and the recognition that our specialization will neither survive change nor grow without active support of our newer members.

GENERAL ADVISEMENT

By Michelle Hahn, Newsletter Editor

First, let's clarify a couple of points so that it is easier to understand going forward: The terms "conference" and "convention" are usually used interchangeably with "annual meeting" in MLA. It is officially called the Annual Meeting, but it is run by the Convention Manager and Assistant Convention Manager. And it is referred to colloquially as the MLA Conference in many instances.

Also, we usually meet in the meeting space at a hotel due to our size, but other organizations have met on a college campus or in a separate

convention center or conference center appropriate to their size. For example, the Ohio Music Education Association may meet in a convention center in a large city with several thousand attendees. The Midwest Chapter of the Music Library Association often meets in a lecture hall at university with 50 attendees. And, in the case of an organization like the American Library Association that brings in nearly 20,000 attendees, it may meet over a span of multiple buildings.

You may hear "conference hotel" used. For most

events with participants from out-of-town, there is a hotel selected as the official hotel where specialized rates are negotiated for this purpose. In our case, that is most often the same hotel which has the meeting space we need. So, they are one in the same!

For the purposes of this special issue of the *Newsletter*, we will use the term “conference hotel” to represent the space in which most of our events are held and most of our attendees are staying, and “meeting” to represent the event itself.

As we move on, here is some “meeting etiquette” business.

On name badges: While you are in the conference hotel, it is important to wear your name badge as much as possible. That makes it easier for others at the meeting to know you are connected to them in some way, and makes it easier for conference hotel staff to know you belong there. In the event that you lose it or forget it at a remote hotel, don't fret! Just head to the registration desk. You may be able to get a replacement!

Of course, try not to let it get turned around backwards! Know that typically, MLA name badges of late have been the type that hang on a lanyard (provided with the name badge), so they will not leave holes in your clothing from a pin, and they will not fall off when the adhesive wears off of a sticker. Just in case it gets turned around, you may consider writing your name on the back of the insert, just in case. Also, at the end of the meeting, keep an eye out for recycling opportunities! The insert itself is recyclable as paper, and the holder or lanyard may be collected for reuse in the future. Recycling is not required, though, if you want a souvenir!

Consider taking off your name badge when you leave the conference hotel though. Wearing it at all times may make you susceptible to unwanted

attention, and identifies you, by name, as someone likely visiting from out-of-town. It is useful at dinners outside and less likely to be trouble in groups, but especially when venturing out alone it may be wise to take it off.

You may also consider personalizing it with your email address or Twitter handle if you are so inclined!

On business cards: If you have business cards from your employer, conferences and meetings are the place to bring them! If you want to get in touch with someone after the event, it is not rude to ask for one from that person. It's an easy way to share contact information! However, if you don't have one, don't feel the need to make them or buy them just for this purpose. You can also give or ask for information directly!

On what to carry: At MLA, if you are staying in the conference hotel, go ahead and leave your coat in your room. If you aren't, go ahead and check your coat, hang it up on a shared rack, or carry it with you. If you don't have it on your person throughout the day, don't worry! You will not be alone, and you will have plenty of time to get it before going outside for lunch or dinner, even if you plan to go with other attendees. Everyone is in the same boat, and it is perfectly acceptable, even normal, to plan to meet in a particular location once everyone has stowed their bags and retrieved their coats.

Sometimes, with your registration, you receive a bag branded with the meeting logo and/or a vendor logo. Treat these as you would a name badge, meaning use it as an easy way to be identified at the event, but don't necessarily make it an identifying object outside. And, like coats, there will be plenty of time to stow it away when you go out for lunch or dinner so that you are not having to carry a heavy, stuffed bag everywhere!

If it's possible you don't get a bag with your registration, it's a good idea to bring one with you.

It is not unusual to see other kinds of bags being carried by attendees. If you are more comfortable with your laptop case, that is fine! If you have a favorite tote bag, bring it along!

On what to wear: This is one of the most difficult topics to cover, for several reasons. There are those who have very strong, clear-cut expectations for high-level professional attire, and those whose primary target is comfort. You will see both, and you will not be able to pinpoint it to a particular kind of person, which may make it difficult to gauge what you “should” wear based on trying to match those like you.

Bottom line, this is a professional gathering, so even your most comfortable attire is not necessarily appropriate, if it’s your sweatpants or your undies! “Business casual” (i.e. slacks and a polo shirt--not black-tie, not even necktie) is perfectly acceptable. If you are attending a job placement service information session with a potential employer, you should look your best, but that could actually be as simple as making sure your wrinkle-free polo shirt is not covered in ketchup--and tucked in.

YOUR comfort is key, and that means both physical and mental/emotional comfort. You will be on your feet for extended periods of time and walking A LOT, so you may not want to wear those new dress shoes that give you blisters. You will be in less-than-comfortable chairs all day where your feet may not touch the floor, so you may not want to wear a shorter skirt. It could be uncomfortably hot in one of the meeting spaces, so a suit coat may make you sweat too much, or it could be uncomfortably cold in one of the meeting spaces, so a short-sleeved/sleeveless top may bring out the goosebumps. Consider layers, each of which will be comfortable alone.

If you simply do not feel confident without a dress, wear it. If you will be dying to get out of a tie within minutes, don’t wear it. Be aware of your physical

comfort (blisters, sweat, etc.) and your mental/emotional comfort (confidence, pride, etc.) and dress accordingly. It is OK to be both comfortable and professionally dressed! (secret: I wear pajama pants or jeans and a dressy shirt for Skype interviews; I also don’t wear a full suit or a dress for in-person interviews...and I got the jobs! My physical comfort made me mentally confident, and that comes through.)

On what you may or may not need: Even with a perfect memory, you should have some way to take notes. Conference hotels usually provide pens and pads of paper in some way, whether it is available at a table where you are sitting during a workshop, or available on a table at the back of the room. The same goes for unlimited water--it may be at a table in the back of the room, or on the table where you are sitting at a workshop. In either case, it comes with glasses. Go ahead and take advantage! There may even be hard candies! In this case, you won’t have to carry a water bottle around just to be sure you stay hydrated (which you should do!) But if you prefer “your water bottle,” go ahead and carry it.

From my experience, I know that it is also critical that you bring your photo ID and insurance card with you when you go out of the conference hotel in case of emergency. Not that you should intentionally worry, though. Just be sure you have your vigilance and pay attention to your surroundings! And make sure your loved ones or friends know where you are for the meeting!

A definite need is your attention. Conference centers and hotels have plenty of signage to help you get around. Meetings also come with directional and informational signs to help you find your way or familiarize yourself with the event. Keep an eye out for these! And, if you aren’t sure or have additional questions, just ask! Other attendees (recognizable with their name badges) and conference hotel staff (recognizable by their name badges or uniforms) are eager to provide

assistance, directions, or other information. After all, a library conference is full of people wanting to help!

Now, on to the meeting itself.

On conference/convention/meeting differences:

Yes, MLA annual meeting attendance is a number significantly larger than your course rosters or your coworkers. It is also larger than attendance at other types of meetings. However, it is also significantly smaller than others. For example, MLA has an attendance around 400, the Ohio Music Education Association sees about 9,000, and the American Library Association may bring in about 18,000 at its annual conference.

Considering what you may see at other events, you will definitely not get “lost in the crowd” at MLA, despite its size. And, as our authors have already said, MLA is a very welcoming and friendly group, and won’t even give you much opportunity to get lost! In fact, if it’s your first time, you get a special ribbon to add to your name badge, and you will get an abundance of welcomes, invitations to meals, and new friends!

Another difference is the way in which sessions are presented. There are many organizations where instead of a presentation with PowerPoint slides, you will hear an author read a research paper. That is common in organizations like the Society of American Music (SAM), and even at meetings with topics similar to ours such as the International Association of Music Libraries and Documentation Centres (IAML). Organizations such as a state music education association may also include the type of session where you actively participate by playing, singing, or dancing. Those are not common at MLA! Though, don’t be surprised at dinner with music librarians for Happy Birthday at another table to break out into 4-part harmony...

While some sessions may include mild audience participation or information about research, you

will likely see more slides with images, hear more about current projects, and get more information that perks up your librarianship-related senses. That is not to say that papers are not accepted or presented! It’s just to say that MLA may look different than other events you attend.

On Presenting/Presentations: The folks you see standing at the front of the room are also just like you. The enormity of any conference audience is intimidating, and there are times when the presenters themselves don’t feel worthy of standing in front of an audience of their peers. But, if they are up there, that means they have gone ahead and taken a leap. Like Nike would tell you, “Just Do It.”

Sometimes, presenters take that leap because they have a professional need or requirement. Sometimes organizations don’t get enough proposals so they invite people to present. Sometimes organizations get too many proposals, and though they are all fantastic and fit the bill, there isn’t enough time in a day to include them all. Sometimes, organizations don’t even solicit proposals, and only invite certain people with specific expertise. You may have seen, or will start to see, all types of presentations and programming processes in this field or others, and may be expected to participate yourself in a variety of ways at a variety of events.

Keep an eye on the faces you see and the names you hear. Those are likely people with an area of expertise to share that interests you. In that case, you should feel comfortable chatting with them about it. If you find yourself considering a presentation in the future (at MLA or otherwise), don’t fear submitting a proposal. At the *very worst*, it won’t be accepted, and that’s it. You won’t be put in front of a firing squad, you won’t become the butt of a joke, but you WILL get the experience of proposing, and would certainly be welcome to solicit feedback. Tips: think critically about your topic, what kind of audience you might desire or

encounter, talk through your idea with others before you write, and get feedback on your potential submission from your colleagues/peers/mentors.

On organizational culture: You've read from our authors that MLA is a group of exceptionally friendly and welcoming people who are very interested in supporting you and helping you navigate and grow in the profession. This is true! The environment of the meeting itself is an indication of that. You will have opportunity to get to know others in the field closely and interact with them regularly.

If you know what you want to do in libraries in the future, you can learn all about it from those of us who have been through it and actively do it. If you don't know, you can learn all about what there is to do from those of us who do it. Know that you are not alone in this, and even unlikely to be the first to attempt any of it.

Approach this meeting with open ears. There is much to learn from the luminaries (i.e. long-time experts) that have gone before us, and even from some of our newest members. Trust us, you don't want to suffer the hassle of having to do something over again because you were unaware of how it was supposed to be done, or even how it was done before! Though it is possible for actions to fall into the pit of "that's just how we've always done it," it is more likely that it's just always been done the most effective and efficient way after the trials and tribulations of the first who discovered the pitfalls and worked out the solutions. They don't call it troubleshooting for nothing! Feel free to share your ideas, ask questions, voice your opinions; we just ask that you be respectful in your delivery and know that you are among like-minded individuals with the added benefit of experience and expertise.

You can get just about everything you'd need to know about how MLA is structured and who does

what in the organization by reading the [no. 188 Supplement issue](#) of the *MLA Newsletter*. If the activities of a particular committee are of interest to you, just go ahead and show up at the meeting. MOST committee meetings are open to attendance by anyone, even if you aren't an official member of said committee. If you show up at a committee meeting that is not open (i.e. closed), the Committee Chair will let you know.

The same goes for the Interest Groups (which you may hear referred to as Round Tables, as that was the previous, official name). Is it of interest? Then go to it! These are much less formal and are usually open to less-structured discussions. Some do include a program of some kind, but it is a great place to meet like-minded members and share your thoughts. Committees and Interest Groups alike may also sponsor meeting sessions, so consider attending those when sponsored by a committee or Interest Group of interest.

Also know that it is ok to walk out of any sessions if you need to be somewhere else, if you find you are in the wrong place, or you just want to get out. This is one of the more uncomfortable actions to achieve, especially in a committee meeting or interest group. However, do not be alarmed when you see others leave. But, as with any situation, common courtesy would dictate that you not take a seat in the middle of a row if you may need to leave so as not to inconvenience many others and draw undue attention to yourself.

One of the many assets of the MLA culture is that there is not an unfriendly person in the bunch! See someone familiar or wearing a badge sitting alone? Go say hi! Sitting alone yourself? Do not be alarmed if you are approached by what will become a new friend! Remember, it is just a stereotype that librarians sit and read all day and don't want to be disturbed. So if you see one, do not be afraid to interrupt! But, if you need a break and some alone time, also do not be afraid to find a

quiet corner or head back to your room. You won't be the only one!

Also know that you shouldn't sit alone in your room at night. If it's just after dinner time, and you have nothing to do and wish you could do something more fun, GO TO THE HOTEL BAR. No, I'm not saying you need to go to a bar alone to drink or meet a stranger. But, if you go, you will find it to be full of MLA attendees. The hotel bar is a long-standing gathering place for everyone, and you won't be alone or required to drink anything more than a glass of water.

On you: A meeting this size and length can be a lot. It will be easy to get exhausted or overwhelmed.

Again, you won't be the only one! Make your health and safety a priority. Skip a session and take a nap. Drink more water. Have a good cry in the bathroom. Do your homework! There is nothing about MLA that will ever take precedence over your wellbeing. So, take care of yourself--practice "self-care." Doing so will make you better prepared to learn, and more able to participate at your fullest. And, nothing you do to take care of yourself will ever have a negative impact. There is nothing MLA-related required of you by law, and you should not feel obligated to make yourself a lower priority than an MLA meeting.

MLA FROM COMMON GROUND

By all of us

Tip: Attend sessions outside of your area of librarianship interests

Allison: It's important to not limit yourself to certain topics--all parts of the library interact with each other, so if you are interested in public services, it's beneficial to know about developments in technical services, and if you are interested in technical services, it's important to know how resource use can impact technical services. Plus, it's always fun to learn something new... in addition to presentations and sessions, consider looking through the interest group meetings to see if there are any that are, well, of interest to you!

Jessica: This is a great opportunity to build on what you learn in your classes or to explore topics that you haven't had experience with in the past.

Kristen: To paraphrase an internet meme that went around last year, "everything you learn makes you a better librarian." Knowing what's happening in other parts of music librarianship will only make you better at your job (or future job).

Michelle: You don't know what you don't know. You might even find a new interest that you never expected to have!

Charles: When I've done this in the past, it not only gives me a clearer big-picture understanding of the field, it also equips me to do my current job better.

Tip: Attend something in (almost) every time slot

Kristen: There's almost always something in every time slot that I want to attend. In fact, I seem to have all the "luck" in that the presentations I'm most interested in every year are inevitably scheduled against one another. My point being, go to as much as you can. There's such a wealth of good information to be had.

Michelle: The nice thing about MLA is there isn't as much overlap as other conferences. So, you won't have too much trouble going to something different and missing something you know you want to see. But, that is not to say that it's not a potential downside!

Jessica: Take the time you need to recharge your batteries but it's worth it to try to attend as many sessions as possible. There's always something interesting happening so you never know what you might miss!

Tip: Talk to people/make connections (and don't be afraid or timid)

Jessica: MLA is a really friendly and welcoming group of people who will be glad to chat with you about your questions and thoughts about the conference and music librarianship in general. Don't be afraid to say hello and ask a question!

Kristen: This is difficult for me, but it's now one of the biggest reasons I go to MLA. Getting to know your colleagues, even just a little bit, is incredibly helpful. Most everyone in MLA will go above and beyond to get you information, give you advice or input, or answer your questions--but it's a huge advantage to know who to ask for help when you need it.

Charles: Every year, I make an effort to talk to several people I've never met before, as well as making sure to chat with those I've met in years past.

Michelle: It's scary, I know. Talking to strangers is intimidating and can be uncomfortable, even if you are outgoing! But anyone you talk to at MLA will be a new friend. And, when you are sitting at work or in class and have a question, you will be able to get an answer from them--for the rest of your professional life and more.

Allison: It can seem really daunting when attending a large conference for the first time, but as mentioned by others in this newsletter, MLAers are generally a friendly bunch. We all have similar interests, and people are very happy to talk with students and early career professionals! The benefit of name badges is that you can see the names of people and where they work. If you are in a coffee break and see someone who is working in a field you're interested in, it is perfectly fine to say hello and introduce yourself (if they don't introduce themselves first seeing your student or first-time attendee ribbon(s)).

Tip: Consider your needs and don't forget self care

Charles: Sometimes I try to do too much and get a little overwhelmed by the end of the conference. I've found that planning in a few breaks really helps me keep focus.

Allison: Sometimes all of the noise and commotion can get really hectic or overwhelming. If you feel yourself running out of energy, take advantage of the coffee and snack breaks, and don't feel bad if you need to excuse yourself and take a little break either in a quiet corner or in your hotel room.

Michelle: Everyone needs some time to decompress. The strain on your mental capacity with all of the thinking and talking and remembering and excitement alone can take you out! Then add the amount of time you will spend moving around. It's too much! Grab a drink, take a nap, go for a walk, do whatever you need to do to relieve yourself of the burden. You know you best, so you do you.

Jessica: Take advantage of the many coffee and lunch breaks built into the schedule. Find a quiet spot to regroup so you'll be ready for the next session.

Kristen: I talk a lot about this above, so I won't belabor the point. You'll retain more information and have a better time if you take care of yourself. It may take a year or two before you figure out what this means for you at MLA, but be aware of it—even if you're the most outgoing, extroverted person on the planet.

Tip: MOUG/Preconference/Tours

There are several possibilities for events that happen in conjunction with the MLA annual meeting, usually directly before or after it. For example, the Music OCLC Users Group (MOUG) tends to meet directly preceding the MLA annual meeting, in the same place. MLA also frequently has a workshop of some kind preceding the meeting, and it is typically called a preconference. MLA also invests time in finding interesting things to see and do while you are there, and is often able to arrange a formal tour of an interesting place. That includes what's called an Organ Crawl, where you go see some of the most important instruments in a city. All of these do usually require a formal RSVP of some kind, so that arrangements can be made to accommodate the right number of people.

Kristen: Depending on what you are interested in, what training you want/need, and what's being offered that year, preconferences can be *extremely* useful or something you might want to skip. They've gone both ways for me. MOUG, on the other hand, is something I never miss. Yes, I'm a cataloger, and MOUG has a reputation for being a catalogers' conference, but since it almost always includes a bunch of information on discovery systems and user experience, that reputation is misleading at best.

Michelle: Though MOUG originated as an organization for catalogers, IT IS NOT. It is for everyone. You will hear people say "oh it's just for catalogers." THAT IS A LIE (even if they don't realize they are lying).

Tip: Career Advisory Service

The MLA Career Development and Services Committee offers several opportunities to better yourself career-wise and partake in a variety of advice from others. It oversees the New Members Forum, Conference Mentoring Program, the Résumé & Cover Letter Review Service, and the Career Advisory Service. The Career Advisory Service will pair you with an advisor in an area in which you are interested in getting advice, whom you may talk to in person or virtually. While all of these services are useful to anyone at any stage of a career, the Career Advisory Service encompasses general advice, which will assist you even more.

Jessica: I've used this service several times, both at past conferences when I met with someone in person and during other times of the year when I set up a phone call with a career advisor to get feedback on my CV and advice to consider regarding next steps for my career. I've had a fantastic experience every time!

Tip: First-Time Attendees Reception, sponsored by the New Members Forum

Jessica: As a student and/or a first-timer, this is one of the most fun events you'll attend at the conference. Everyone there will be a first-time attendee as well, so it's a great opportunity to meet and have a fun (and free!) meal.

Kristen: My first MLA conference, most of us who went to this reception seemed to bond like it was freshman orientation all over again. We became instant "allies" in this brave new conference world and we had a built-in group of familiar faces from then on.

Allison: Absolutely try to attend the reception if you can! I have made some of my best MLA friends during this first timer's reception, and it was a great opportunity to get to know people and faces before the larger meeting. Being able to pick a person out of the crowd that you already know can be a great comfort if you're ever feeling out of place or overwhelmed.

Tip: Résumé & Cover Letter Review Service (RCLRS)

While attending an MLA annual meeting, you may be confidentially paired with a member who has experience on the hiring side of job searches to gain a greater understanding of the process and what hiring managers are looking for in your documents. This does require a **sign-up** to ensure that there is an advisor available.

Kristen: I write a cover letter from scratch for every job I apply for, so I've never used this service for that, but having another experienced set of eyes on my résumé offered me both invaluable advice and a boost to my confidence during a long job search (it turns out I was doing a lot of things really well).

Michelle: I've done this twice: as a student looking for my first job, and as a Librarian looking for a new job. Both times were invaluable. I can directly attribute my success to these reviews.

Tip: Conference Mentoring Program

For anyone attending MLA, the Conference Mentoring Program is designed to formally pair you with another person who feels comfortable in sharing their knowledge-by-experience to help someone navigate the meeting.

Charles: I definitely recommend this for first-timers! It was extremely helpful for me, and I'm excited to be a mentor when I get more established in the field.

Jessica: I love the MLA Conference Mentoring service! It's really helpful to have someone to show you the ropes and to answer your questions as you navigate your first MLA Meeting. MLA Mentors are a wonderful resource!

Allison: Literally the best thing about attending MLA for the first time. Mentors are extremely helpful in navigating the conference and connecting you to MLA members! Plus having someone who is working in a field related to your interests that you can get to know and talk to/ask questions throughout the conference is another added benefit.

Tip: Job Placement Service

When an open position overlaps with an MLA annual meeting, it is possible that a representative from the hiring institution will be in attendance to meet with potential employees in an informational setting. These are not interviews. Instead, they are an opportunity for those representatives to tell you more about the job and the environment in person, and for you to ask questions. Most often, the representatives are MLA members, and the session takes place through one-on-one interaction. However, there are times when a non-MLA member, either the hiring manager or human resources personnel, are the ones to hold the session. There are also times when multiple people will be present to represent an institution, providing a wider view.

Michelle: As that eager upstart student, I took advantage of this my first time at an MLA annual meeting. No, I didn't get the job, and that is ok. Everything happens for a reason! But, I did get some valuable practice in an interview situation (though informal), and I happened to make one of my oldest MLA connections due to a mix-up on our part. I also did this a second time years later, and again didn't get one job, but did get the other! Even more good practice! And, as musicians know, practice makes perfect (actually, only perfect practice makes perfect, but even imperfect practice make valuable learning). I've even been involved on the other side of one.

Tip: Don't forget your Regional Chapter meeting

MLA has a set of Regional Chapters that bring members together based on geographic location. Regional Chapters do have their own organization structures, business affairs, and events, such as an annual meeting held separately from MLA, in a different location, and on a different date. They also regularly have an event during the MLA annual meetings, to continue business, socialize, or both.

Michelle: These are a great place to talk to people and make connections, with the added benefit of them also living relatively close to you! During the MLA annual meeting, Regional Chapters usually have a meeting or dinner. You should go! Then, when your Regional Chapter has its annual meeting, you can also go to that and see some familiar faces! They are also significantly smaller, so a little less overwhelming.

Tip: Welcome Reception

To officially kick off the MLA annual meeting, there is a reception, either called the Welcome Reception or the Opening Reception. As with any reception, there are refreshments, including hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. This event tends to be held in the exhibit hall, which also provides you with an opportunity to meet vendors and see what they have to offer. Occasionally, there have also been free products. It is also an opportunity to see what's already available in the Silent Auction.

Charles: This was where I first noticed that MLA was such a warm group! Meeting people at the Welcome Reception made it more comfortable to make connections throughout the conference in years past.

Kristen: Even if you come to MLA not knowing a single person, it will be almost impossible to get past the Opening Reception with that still being true. Walk up to any group of folks chatting and you'll be welcomed with open arms.

Michelle: I am always amazed at the Welcome Reception. I never know who I am going to talk to and what we will accomplish in our time together. There are sometimes even freebies from vendors or the organization!

Jessica: The Welcome Reception is a chance to meet new friends and to explore the exhibitions hosted by library-related vendors. It's a fun way to kick off the conference!

And, don't be afraid to dance at the closing reception when the MLA Big Band plays!

NEXT STEPS

By all of us

How can you apply these suggestions? Start here:

1. Think about your career goals and your current perspective. Ask yourself, “what do I currently do in this field? What do I hope to do in this field?”
2. Think, then, about those answers in relation to MLA. Ask yourself, “what do I hope to get out of the MLA meeting?”
3. Read through the suggestions above, and the descriptions of sessions and meetings in the Program section of the meeting website to see what fits with your answers.
4. Make a personal itinerary with sessions/meetings, times, and rooms/locations. This can be done on paper, in your online calendar, or even in the Guidebook app for the meeting!

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

By all of us

Although these suggestions come from MLA members with a variety of perspectives and are targeted to first-time attendees, we believe that they all can apply to anyone at an MLA meeting, new or returning. Take the next steps we’ve listed above and let yourself try them out. Success and defeat are equal measures for learning.

Finding the approach to conference attendance that works best for you is a process of trial and error, so don’t worry if you haven’t quite gotten a handle on it after your first MLA experience. We’re all here to help, and we’re looking forward to seeing you at this year’s meeting.



WE'LL SEE YOU SOON!