I attended the SLA Conference in 2018 as a recipient of the 2018 ANZ and Science-Technology Division Diane K. Foster Student Award.

I am a student in the Queensland University of Technology LIS masters course combining studies whilst working as a geoscientist focussing upon Quality Assurance, Quality Control and data management. In a digital-rich world, information is gold and my studies are enabling my goal of being an informed and up to date information service provider. Discovering SLA in March – an organization for innovative information professionals was a new lens on the world of special librarianship and allied with my aim of working within the science and technology area. I immediately joined SLA as I could see benefits regardless of my geographical location and student award application. The breadth of Divisions and Caucuses and also an ANZ Chapter was impressive.

In April, having learnt I was a lucky recipient I concentrated upon handing in University assignments early to enable departure for Baltimore in June, whilst reading the useful Conference threads and exploring the Conference App. The possibilities seemed endless as I pondered breakfasts and receptions, wondered about Board meetings, highlighted talks and booked a baseball game and health and wellness activities. I arrived in Baltimore in the early hours of Sunday morning after travelling for over 24 hours. The First Timer’s Orientation was full of newbies plus also experienced SLAers and it was great to catch up with Kevin, also from the ANZ Chapter. On Sunday I learnt it was fine to dip in and out of sessions, was encouraged to try everything and started meeting loads of people. The friendliness of attendees plus the ribbons on badges made the Conference flow very smoothly, this was also assisted by Monday evening’s Tips and Tricks Bootcamp for students and new professionals. By Conference end I had met four past Presidents as well as the Current and President-Elect- a testament to SLA’s commitment to connecting people and information.

The Science and Technology breakfast meetup was a welcome start to the Conference, bookended by the Sciences and Engineering Poster Session that evening. Both informal settings were invaluable, I met the members of the Science and Technology Division and had interesting discussions on careers, posters topics and STEM library futures. On Monday morning I was focussed on Data- Big Data and Analytics are only useful if the data is clean and used effectively. I made sure I was sitting at the front to hear Carla Hayden, 14th Librarian of Congress opening address, a fangirl moment. Her message of authenticity and trust, valuing information and accuracy resonated with my scientific mind. Monday afternoon I dipped into bibliometrics, competitive intelligence and listened to Quick Takes (useful and thought provoking).

Tuesday was back to Data management -an instructive and practical session followed by Web Portals and Web of Science and impact metrics. Tuesday’s keynote Dr Sayeed Choudhury championed the importance of data conservation which segued for me into the Data Management planning session. Prowling the exhibitor’s hall provided more opportunities for learning as I watched demos, asked questions, bought books (taxonomy and data science) and connected across the globe. I also attended my 1st board Meeting (the Asia Chapter) and ball game.

On Wednesday I delved into the world of competitive intelligence, science communication and more bibliometrics. The closing keynote by Wes Moore was an inspirational story on how education and community support can overcome adversity. Assisting on the Military Libraries Division After Party’s annual jigsaw was a satisfying end to the conference.

What did I learn? The varied backgrounds of information professionals at SLA and the possibilities in data management, competitive intelligence, knowledge management, taxonomy and RDM is endless. The different presentations (posters, Quick Takes, Panels, Hot Topics), events, exhibitors Hall and Main Street SLA meant I was jotting ideas down for later reflection, confirming thoughts and highlighting new areas to pursue. It was exciting to be at an overseas conference and receive a different perspective on issues and challenges facing the information profession. Follow-up and reading of presentations on the App and by discussion threads meant I had time to read about sessions I did not attend, thank you to those speakers who did this, much appreciated. I have widened my SLA communities as I explore being an informed information professional.

Thank you very much ANZ Chapter and the Science-Technology Division for the award opportunity to attend. We were urged to “Bmore” at Baltimore and the Conference definitely did this! I look forward to continuing my SLA membership and learnings.

Anitra Ross

Student QUT

Brisbane, Australia.