

TESTING THE WATERS AT MY FIRST LWI CONFERENCE

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The last thing I wanted to do was stand out. My goal, actually my self-proclaimed mission, at the 2018 LWI Biennial Conference was to blend into the background and soak in as much information, instruction, and insight as possible. I traveled to Milwaukee knowing only a handful of other people in attendance but eager to have my creative juices jump-started for the upcoming school year.

I carefully perused the wide array of topics, paid special attention to the panelist names, and silently cheered whenever I recognized someone familiar (usually from the Listserv). At my first panel, which focused on the Idea Bank (recently renamed the Teaching Bank),¹ I noticed two things that would prove true throughout the conference: (1) legal writing professors are some of the most generous people when it comes to sharing their ideas, and (2) there was an unusual number of “Heathers” in attendance. I chalked the second one up to most of us being approximately the same age, but I was still pleased every time I met another Heather. As for the generous spirit of those who choose to teach legal writing, I have yet to figure out what draws this collection of people together.

At the Teaching Bank panel, we broke into groups based on pre-selected topics and shared exercises we had used and found to be successful in reaching our students. The suggestions were compelling and creative, with the overall tone being one of collaboration and inclusion. I had never been to a conference where this was the norm, and I found myself forgetting my mission. Before I knew it, my hand went up and I was talking. I volunteered an exercise that a colleague had taught me regarding persuasion. It used different kinds of candy and illustrated for the students that making persuasive arguments is something they are already familiar with, even if they don't realize it.

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¹ Karen Sanner, Neil Sobol, & Anne Alexander, Idea Bank Live, LWI Biennial Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (July 12, 2018).

As someone who has only been teaching for three years, it felt good to have something to contribute, and I was pleasantly surprised that my input was well received.

Participating even for a moment helped me realize that attending LWI and merely observing would be a waste of time, money, and opportunity. There were so many people (and other Heathers) to meet, ideas to share, and topics to explore. I cautiously abandoned my plans and dove in, emerging at the end of the conference with new friends, a vast array of books to read, and an appreciation for a community to which I am now lucky enough to belong.