Defining a project proposal to enhance the Medical Library Association's annual meeting through Session-level assessment: The exploration of the 2017-2018 Rising Star cohort

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Objectives: Associations and organizations rely on feedback from membership to assess conferences, programs, and meetings. The Medical Library Association (MLA) utilizes post-conference assessment to get an overall evaluation of the meeting. While this informs future meeting planning, it does not provide targeted assessment data about the perceived quality and relevance of sessions, papers, or posters. Incorporating session-level, just-in-time feedback would further engage meeting attendees and ensure relevance of the meeting to the membership.

Methods: The 2017-2018 MLA Rising Star cohort investigated the interest in and use of session-level, just-in-time feedback at conferences of seven peer associations. A five-question survey to

gauge MLA member interest in session-level feedback was distributed in February 2018. The survey was only available to current MLA members and advertised on the MLA blog, distributed to Section and SIG, state, and select MLA Chapter lists. Live polling was also conducted at the May 22, 2018, MLA Rising Star project proposal presentation.

Results: The cohort received responses from five peer associations and only three are using some form of session-level, just-in-time assessment at their conferences. The February 2018 MLA membership survey yielded 157 responses. 94% of respondents (n=147) had attended a MLA meeting and 72% of respondents agreed that they would find session-level assessment valuable. Respondents indicated that they would be interested in receiving feedback from attendees about the application of their session's content, whether attendees learned something new, and if their session met expectations. Of attendees at this May 22, 2018, project proposal presentation, 97% agreed that they would value the opportunity to provide session-level, and 91% indicated that as a presenter would find attendee feedback useful.

Conclusion: The investigation by the 2017-2018 MLA Rising Star Cohort indicated an interest in session-level, just-in-time feedback for MLA's annual meetings.

Introduction

For the past seven years, the Medical Library Association's (MLA) Rising Stars program has provided members with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the association, develop leadership skills, and contribute their insights and ideas. Usually this has manifested in the form of an individual yearlong project that investigated a need in the association. The project's ultimate goal was to have each member of the cohort contribute to MLA in a tangible way.

The format for the 2017-2018 MLA Rising Star project was a departure from previous years' projects. This new approach was based on feedback from previous cohorts, who expressed a desire to work more closely and collaboratively with one another. The change sought to address and encourage collaboration, cohort development, and investment in MLA. Instead of being presented with a question to investigate the 2017-2018 cohort was tasked with identifying and creating a project proposal that was both forward thinking and would support MLA's current and future needs. The intent of this approach was that if MLA, or any group within the association, decided to implement the project, it would be relevant and could be easily adapted to the association's needs and values.

The cohort initially drafted two project proposals: one that addressed assessing diversity and inclusion, and a second to investigate the MLA Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success. After receiving feedback from the MLA Rising Star faculty and other key stakeholders, one proposal was selected to expand upon. The final proposal, "Just-in-Time Assessment at a National Conference: Increasing Member Engagement and Assisting with Professional Development," was an exploration of integrating an electronic assessment option for session-level content at the MLA Annual Meeting. For this proposal,

the cohort defined just-in-time assessment as an approach that would allow MLA Annual Meeting attendees to provide feedback on session-level presentations, such as posters or papers, throughout the duration of the conference, at their convenience, and while the content of the presentations was fresh.

The intent of the proposal was to build upon existing member involvement with the association and offer a mechanism to increase feedback and participation with the Annual Meeting, its presenters, and content. A secondary goal of this project was to identify avenues for membership to engage with the MLA Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success. The cohort proposed that options for constructive, session-level feedback should be available through several platforms including the MLA website, the MLA Annual Meeting app, kiosks at the meeting, or through other means.

Literature Review

There is little published in the library and information science (LIS) field specific to session-level, just-in-time feedback at LIS conferences and meetings. The closest example was the 2010 Evidence Based Scholarly Communication Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which piloted an approach to conduct real-time peer review by conference attendees on presentations [1]. Session-level assessment is present at conferences and annual meetings outside of the LIS fields, including medical professional conferences [2]. There is a rich corpus of literature on assessment and standard approaches to assessing the qualities of meetings or conferences. Many assessment approaches include a post-meeting evaluation distributed to attendees. While an overall evaluation of the conference is helpful to the association, it does not always capture the quality or value of individual sessions, nor does it provide a means where individuals improve on their practice. By implementing this proposal, MLA would be in the forefront of library associations when it comes to peer review and assessment at conferences. The proposal would also align MLA with other professional associations outside of LIS, as demonstrated in the published literature.

Information professionals and librarians value lifelong learning and should embrace the skills and practice of receiving feedback [3]. This is relevant in our approaches to information literacy instruction, the competencies that librarians utilize, and the desire to improve as information professionals. The gap in the LIS literature about session-level assessment at conferences reveals that a proposed just-in-time assessment mechanism would be an innovative way to benefit the association, increase professional development, provide an opportunity to engage with MLA's new Professional Competencies for Lifelong Learning and Professional Success, and improve engagement at the MLA Annual Meeting.

Methods

To better understand assessment in the LIS and other comparative fields, the cohort identified a set of peer associations to determine what they were doing in respect to just-in-time, session-level assessment at their conferences and annual meetings. The cohort, in consultation with their mentors, compiled a list of seven associations that were peers to MLA. The final list of peer associations included the Special Library Association (SLA), Chicago Association of Law Libraries, Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), European Association of Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL), American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA), American Library Association (ALA), and the Charleston Conference. The cohort developed six questions to share with contacts at each association. The questions below were sent via email:

1. Does your organization conduct session-level assessment at annual conferences/meetings?
2. If yes, how does your organization assess sessions?
   a. Paper form after the session/presentation
   b. Webform that is shared with attendees/participants
   c. Session-level assessment integrated in the overall conference assessment
   d. Other
3. What questions do you ask to attendees?
4. What is the average completion rate of session-level assessment?
5. How do presenters and attendees perceive session-level assessment?
6. How does your organization use this feedback in planning future meetings? What have you learned from this feedback?

The cohort developed a short, five-question survey for the MLA membership to gauge interest in the notion of session-level, just-in-time assessment (Appendix). The first question asked if respondents had attended a MLA in person or online. Responses were collapsed into "yes" or "no." The following questions offered a Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). In our analysis, the categories "strongly agree" and "agree" were collapsed into "agree" and "neutral", "disagree" and "strongly disagree" were collapsed as "other." An open-ended question at the end of the survey provided an option for respondents to share additional thoughts about the ability to provide session-level feedback on paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions.

The survey was available to the MLA membership in late February 2018 and was open for two weeks. It was administered through MLAnet and advertised on the MLA blog, Section and Special Interest Group (SIG) listservs, state listservs, and to some MLA Chapter listservs. Participant responses were anonymous.

Responses to the MLA membership survey were analyzed and tabulated for each question. None of the questions were required and respondents could choose which questions to respond to about their perceived value in providing and receiving feedback. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies. Comments to the open-ended question were analyzed and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify major themes. This was done by author one [NTM] identifying major themes and the second author [LM] reviewing these themes.

Results

Assessment Approaches by Peer Associations

To assess the viability of just-in-time, session-level feedback the Rising Star cohort investigated feedback approaches of peer associations to determine 1) if associations were utilizing this assessment strategy at their annual meetings and conferences and 2) if it was successful. Seven associations were contacted about their use of session-level feedback.

The cohort received responses from five associations and only two, ACRL and SLA, reported using mobile technology for just-in-time feedback at their annual meetings (Table 1). A third association, EAHIL, offered an optional paper form for feedback on oral presentations and keynote speakers. AMIA and the Charleston Conference did not respond.

Association	Just-in-time Assessment	Session-level Assessment	Mobile App	Interested
ACRL	X	X	X	X
SLA	X	X	X	X
EAHIL	X	X	(paper format)	X
Chicago Association of Law Libraries				X

Table 1. Assessment of Peer Associations and Use of Session-Level Assessment

ACRL encourages conference session attendees to rate sessions on a 1-5 scale and add comments to a text box within their mobile conference app. Overall, about 30% of ACRL attendees utilize the session-level feedback mechanism. The feedback is primarily used by the ACRL conference planning committee and sometimes presentation specific comments are shared with participants.

SLA planned to implement session-level feedback at their June 2018 conference. The association is interested in gathering data for in-depth assessment of individual sessions, presenters, and posters within their mobile conference app.

EAHIL and the Chicago Association of Law Libraries expressed interest in just-in-time, session-level feedback for their conferences and meetings. However, neither association currently has plans or a timeline to implement this form of assessment.

MLA Membership Surveys

The February 2018, MLA membership survey yielded 157 responses and a response rate of 5%. The cohort did not have access to the MLA membership list and needed to rely on distribution lists that they had access to. Survey results revealed that 94% (n=147) of respondents have attended an MLA Annual meeting in person, online, or both. This number is higher than the 2017 MLA Executive Director's report, which stated that 38% of MLA members attend the 2017 Annual Meeting [4]. Although there is a low response rate to the MLA membership survey, these may be viewed as representative of MLA members who participate in an Annual Meeting.

When survey respondents were asked if they would find it valuable to "provide immediate, presentation-level feedback (on for example, paper and panel presentation, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions)" 72% (n=114) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (Table 2).

Value	*n*	%
Strongly Disagree	3	2%
Disagree	4	3%
Neutral	32	20%
Agree	74	47%
Strongly Agree	40	25%
Don't Know/Not Applicable	4	3%

Table 2. Value in Providing Feedback

When asked if, as a presenter, there would be value in "hav[ing] the option of receiving presentation-level feedback (on, for example, paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions)" 82% (n= 128) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (Table 3).

Value	n	%
Strongly Disagree	1	1%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	16	1%
Agree	69	44%
Strongly Agree	59	38%
Don't Know / Not Applicable	12	8%

Table 3. Value in Receiving Feedback

Survey respondents were asked to select from a list of feedback options that they would desire as a session-level presenter. Respondents could check more than one answer. Possible options for session-level feedback included: whether attendees learned something from my session, how participants think this may apply what they learned, and the level of attendee engagement with the session. Participants had the option of selecting multiple answers for this question. Respondents were primarily interested in knowing "whether participants learned something from my session" or "how participants think they might apply what they learned at my session" (Table 4).

Type of Feedback Desired	n	%
None	5	1%
Other (please describe)	21	4%
Met Participant Expectations	123	25%
Participate Engagement in Session	74	15%
Application of Session Content	130	27%
Learned Something	132	27%

Table 4. Types of Presenter Feedback Desired*

Participants were given the option to share their thoughts about the ability to provide feedback on paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions at MLA's Annual Meeting in an open-ended question. One primary category emerged from these comments: feedback for personal or professional use and improvement. Other comments were about the MLA Annual Meeting and not specific to this project proposal.

Respondents welcomed the notion of feedback to improve their professional practice and felt that these comments would improve their MLA meeting submissions. They felt that feedback would allow for transparency between the presenter, MLA, and Annual Meeting attendees. One participant summed this up nicely: "We can't improve without the ability to receive honest, timely feedback."

The 2017-2018 cohort also conducted a live audience poll at the May 22, 2018, project proposal presentation. Attendees responded to two questions using their laptops or mobile devices and participant responses were anonymous. Of attendees at the presentation session, 97% (n= 31) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "As an attendee of the MLA annual meeting, I would find it valuable to be able to provide immediate, presentation-level feedback (on, for example, paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions)"(Figure 1). When asked, "As a presenter at the MLA annual meeting, I would find it valuable to have the option of receiving presentation-level feedback (on, for example, paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions)", 91% (n=33) "agreed" or "strongly agree" that they would want the option (Figure 1).
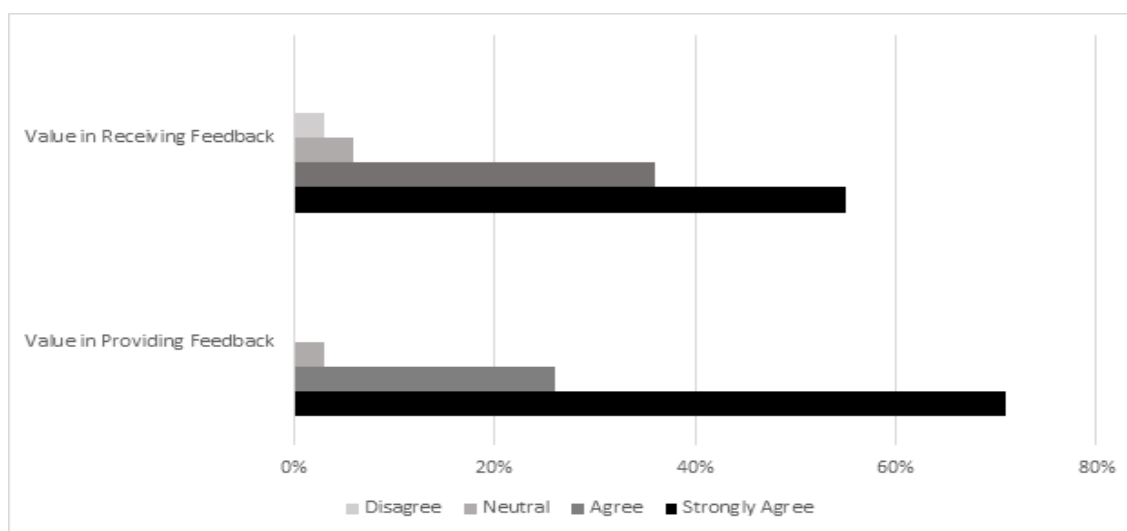

Figure 1. Value of Session-Level Feedback (Results of an Audience Poll)

Discussion

Constructive feedback and assessment is commonplace in education and professional development due to the desire to improve and evolve. Feedback should not be avoided, but rather encouraged for personal and professional development. It offers external views, recognizes or interprets ways to improve past performances for the future, shows genuine interest and appreciation of work, and gives encouragement, affirmation, and support to build confidence and competence [5]. Individuals providing the feedback and those receiving it enter into a partnership with the overall goal to improve and further develop a program or outcome [5], meaning peer-to-peer feedback is mutually beneficial.

Constructive feedback and peer assessment has been used in medical education, including hospitals, to assess practitioner performance and skills, communication skills, and the physician patient relationships [6]. It is argued that peer assessment "can be valuable as a formative assessment method" [7] and that self-assessment allows individuals to "focus on aspects of their work that seem to be problematic, forming a more objective lens for self-assessment (and promoting performance awareness)" [8].

Library and information science professionals value self-assessment and constructive feedback as it provides an opportunity for them to develop, improve, and assess their impact. They "look to professional partners, broad contexts, and campus priorities with which to engage" [9]. Furthermore, "In a profession focused on lifelong learning, the skill of accepting [and giving] feedback should be an area of continual improvement" [3]. LIS professionals already embrace the desire to refine professional skills and develop new programs, initiatives, or services based on the needs, expectations, and feedback from their users and institutions. MLA members indicated a desire to both provide and receive feedback to improve as professionals and to assist peers in improving their research, presentations, and skillset. MLA Annual Meeting presenters recognize the potential of session-level feedback to assess whether attendees learned something and are interested in applying programs or services. Presenters also recognize the opportunity to assess the overall impact of their presentations. Receiving peer feedback from other LIS professionals should only further develop this culture of continual improvement and context for demonstrating impact.

For this project, the cohort investigated the use of session-level assessment at conferences. The use of mobile technology is key to this type of assessment. Mobile apps are increasingly used to enhance conferences and educational settings [10] and have the potential for real-time engagement [2]. The use of this technological platform makes sense since nearly nine in ten Americans own a smartphone and rely on these devices to access or interact with content [11]. MCI USA, a telecommunications company that supports vent

needs, offers functionality to engage with meeting attendees through surveys and questions within a mobile app.

MLA, like other professional associations, creates and manages both a conference website and mobile app for Annual Meeting attendees to learn about session offerings, manage schedules, and interact with conference content [12]. Currently, MLA only assesses its Annual Meeting through a survey link that is shared with attendees after the meeting and focuses on the event overall. Building an assessment into the Annual Meeting app and website has the potential to gather feedback on a specific portion, or subset, of the Annual Meeting and increase overall feedback. The integration of an assessment function has the potential to maintain attendee engagement and participation with conference content and provide an opportunity for the association to gather feedback as attendees participate in events or content.

The 2017-2018 Rising Stars project proposal presents a novel approach for gathering feedback at library and information conferences and meetings. The investigation of peer associations showed that while ACRL, SLA, and EAHIL conduct just-time-assessment there is range of questions asked, methods, and approaches employed in session-level assessment. The integration of a just-in-time feedback mechanism into the MLA mobile app aligns with the trends of peer institutions and is a functionality of interest to the membership. Further data is needed to identify the optimal integration of session-level, just-in-time feedback at the MLA Annual Meeting.

Limitations

Although the cohort tried to be as comprehensive as possible in exploring evidence supporting this proposal, some limitations exist. Lack of relevant information in the literature, a low survey response rate from the MLA membership, and potential challenges in implementation of the proposal are all issues that were considered throughout the process.

There is little-to-no direct evidence in the LIS literature pertaining to online or app-based session-level assessment at conferences. The cohort therefore broadened the parameters of the literature search to include conferences outside of the LIS field, as well as the value in peer-to-peer feedback. This was valuable in shaping the proposal; however, it may lack specificity and direct applicability to the proposed assessment approach at MLA Annual meetings. The cohort is cognizant of this limitation and views the possible implementation of this proposal as an opportunity for MLA to contribute to the scholarly conversation by publishing on assessment efforts.

The MLA member survey that was developed and administered by the cohort yielded valuable information on member perceptions of the proposed project. However, the

survey was not be shared directly with the MLA membership and achieved a response rate of 5% (n=157). Since the survey was advertised on the MLA blog and shared on lists that the cohort had access to the results represent a self-selected sample [13]. As the project moves forward, the cohort recommends maintaining open communication with membership for feedback and suggestions.

As this year's cohort was tasked with developing and presenting a proposal, they discussed but did not directly address limitations of the proposed feedback mechanism. Given the fact that many sessions include multiple presenters, the proposed feedback system may need to be modified for ease of use and clear interpretation of individual feedback results. Each presenter may or may not be comfortable receiving feedback, and therefore the cohort recommends that the mechanism be opt-in for presenters. This project proposal offers an additional approach to gather feedback from session-level content and engage members at the MLA Annual Meeting.

Conclusion

The 2017-2018 Rising Star cohort believes that this project would benefit MLA as an association, its members as stakeholders, and participants in the Annual Meeting as professionals. The cohort is currently exploring options for piloting just-in-time, session-level assessment. The project proposal mirrors assessment approaches used by other professional associations at events and meetings. The survey of the MLA membership and feedback received at the MLA Rising Star presentation indicates there is interest in pursuing the proposal. The potential to leverage feedback from the membership using existing MLA platforms is significant, and could have far-reaching impacts for engagement with and interest in MLA Annual Meeting offerings. In the literature and in conversations with peer associations, the cohort found that similar approaches to assessment might improve professional development, competence, and engagement within an association or professional associations.

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Appendix

Questions Shared with MLA Members

Would you like to be able to evaluate the sessions that you attend at MLA annual meetings? Would you like to get feedback on your paper, poster, or lightning round talk?

Research shows that feedback is an essential part of the process of becoming a more effective and engaging presenter. However, there currently isn't a way for presenters at MLA annual meetings to receive feedback on their papers, posters, lightning talks, panel presentations, or special content sessions.

The MLA Rising Stars cohort has created a survey to find out your thoughts on adding a session-level component to MLA annual meeting feedback.

We plan to use the results of this survey to inform a proposal to the MLA Board on how to improve the MLA annual meeting experience for attendees and presenters.

This five-question survey will take only a couple of minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous. The information we collect from the survey will be shared in a future post and may be used by MLA if our proposal is adopted.

1. I have attended an MLA annual meeting in person or online

- Yes: In-person
- Yes: Online
- Yes: Both in-person and Online
- No: Neither

2. As an attendee at the MLA annual meeting, I would find it valuable to be able to provide immediate, presentation-level feedback (on, for example, paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content session)

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly agree

3. As a presenter at the MLA annual meeting, I would find it valuable to have the option of receiving presentation-level feedback (on, for example, paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions):

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly agree

4. As a presenter at the MLA annual meeting, I would find value in receiving the following types of feedback: (select all that apply)

- Whether participants learned from my session
- How participants think they might apply what they learned at my session
- What the level of participant engagement with my session was
- To what extent my session met participant expectations
- Other:_____
- None of the above

5. Is there anything else you want to share with us about the ability to provide feedback on paper and panel presentations, lightning rounds, posters, and special content sessions?