

To: James LaRue, Executive Director, Freedom to Read Foundation
From: Katie Chamberlain Kritikos, 2016 Gordon M. Conable Scholar
Re: American Library Association 2016 Annual Conference Report
Date: July 5, 2016

Dear Mr. LaRue,

I was honored and humbled to be the first doctoral student to receive the 2016 Gordon M. Conable Conference Scholarship from the Freedom to Read Foundation. As a lawyer and student, I passionately advocate the freedom to read through my research of the law, libraries, and policy. In addition, as a lifelong reader and proponent of intellectual freedom, I have long dreamed of pursuing a doctoral degree that married these passions.

Returning to academic life was something that I never thought would be possible for me, and I happily embrace my decision every day. Additionally, retuning to an American Library Association conference was also something that I never thought would be possible. Through the support and generosity of the Conable Fund, another dream came true. I can confidently say that I am living my dream.

With gratitude on my mind, I attended the annual conference in Orlando with the expectation that I would attend a lot of meetings, hear a lot of speakers, and meet a lot of people – which indeed happened. My experience, however, was more invigorating and inspiring than I ever imagined.

After attending the FTRF board of trustees dinner and business meeting, I knew that I had at last found my professional community of like-minded colleagues, peers, and mentors all dedicated to the protection of freedom and justice, and, of course, books and reading. One of the most memorable and meaningful moments of the conference was absorbing the wisdom of the intellectual freedom fighters in attendance at these two events. Separately, we are librarians, deans, publishers, editors, students, or directors; together, we are advocates of free and democratic society. Going forward, I hope and expect to become more involved with the FTRF, whether by serving on a committee or volunteering for Banned Books Week.

Another highlight was participating in the Intellectual Freedom Committee-Association of American Publishers program, Taking the Cake: A Generational Talkback, alongside the inimitable Judith Platt of the AAP. If attending the conference as the Conable Scholar was a thrill, then speaking was the icing on the cake, as it were. The process of researching and writing my remarks was a satisfying learning experience, and collaborating with panel speakers and program attendees greatly enhanced my professional development and career. I am delighted that the Office for Intellectual Freedom Blog will post my remarks.

The most surprising aspect of the conference was how many questions were asked of me, ranging from inquiries about my opinion on free speech hot topics at meetings and events to those from passersby about the designations on my nametag stating that I was the Conable Scholar and speaker. These organic interactions immersed me in conference, and I felt like part of the discourse on equity, diversity, and inclusion that was theme of this year's conference. As I enter the second year of my doctoral program, I feel a renewed energy and focus on free speech issues, from persistent books challenges and censorship to the need for more diversity in literature.

In closing, I would like to extend my most heartfelt thanks to the scholarship committee – Julia Warga, Candace Morgan, Doug Archer, Pamela Klipsch, and Loriene Roy – for their service to the FRTF and their encouragement at the conference. Because of the Gordon M. Conable scholarship, I engaged with the conference as both a scholar and a speaker, jumping into the world of free speech and advocacy with both feet.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Chamberlain Kritikos