

Conable Scholarship Report
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I would like to thank the Freedom to Read Foundation for this wonderful opportunity. This was my first time at an ALA Annual Conference, and it was an experience unlike anything else. I would like to thank everyone on the FTRF and the Conables for being so welcoming to the intellectual freedom newbie. Through the fascinating discussions that I witnessed and participated in, I was shown the full range of how and why intellectual freedom advocacy is just as alive and important now as it has ever been. Further, I find it inspiring that as challenges grow in number, complexity, and frequency, there is a strong group ready to defend the principles that all librarians hold dear.

Reading through some of the other Conable reports as I was putting mine together, I was struck by something that Audrey Barbakoff said in 2011 that I felt very keenly this year: intellectual freedom struggles can be very isolating. Too often in rural or smaller libraries throughout the United States, advocates that have to stand for intellectual freedom in the face of censors, book banners, Internet filterers, media raters, watchdog groups, and more feel like they have to stand alone against these battles. They may perceive that others have stood alone, so they should be able to do it too. And nothing has left a bigger impression on me from this experience than the fact that that simply is not true. The Office for Intellectual Freedom is there to back up people who need help. There are strong advocates on FTRF, IFC, and IFRT who are ready, willing, and able to come to the aid of anyone who asks. Intellectual freedom is challenged locally, but we can respond nationally and internationally due to the networks of talented, smart, engaged people who have made intellectual freedom a hallmark of their personal advocacy. I know now that when these challenges arrive in my future career, I can rally a team when crafting my response.

Another thing that I appreciated about my experience at this conference was that it provided me with context for the current state of affairs in intellectual freedom outside of the public library world. Since I have always worked in this sector, I can lose track of what is going on in the larger library world (a bad case of missing the forest for the trees). But the discussions that were had about trigger warnings, about the Arizona education laws, and about interpretations of library beliefs and ethics exposed me to a much broader range of issues. Standing up to these struggles is part of what makes me a librarian, and it shouldn't matter where I'm working.

The connections I made at this conference are some that I'm sure will continue for years and decades. I met people in person with whom I have worked online since I was a student, and I found several new avenues for me to assist inside of ALA. And I accomplished my goals for the conference: I wanted to find out what was happening in intellectual freedom and how I could contribute, young and new as I am, to this important cause. I've already committed to helping revive the newsletter of the IFRT. And even though Julius Jefferson was probably joking a bit when he said that I'd take over FTRF one day, I see my involvement with FTRF remaining strong for years to come.

I also want to thank my mentors. Carolyn Caywood, Mary Minow, and Candy Morgan did an amazing job of exposing me to the intellectual freedom apparatus at work inside FTRF and ALA, and they were all exceedingly willing to help me. Whether it was prosaic help like sending me schedules, maps of places to eat, or making sure I had copies of meeting agendas, or whether it was in-depth discussions of the issues before FTRF, they helped me not only survive and thrive at this conference, they provided me with context, sounding boards, and other assistance that I deeply appreciate. Any future Conable recipients that have the opportunity to work with any of these mentors should count themselves lucky.

The entire experience felt like I was walking on air. To be selected over dozens of other well-qualified applicants, to sit in a room where people are passionately debating the standards of our profession, and to have the opportunity to have my participation in the field of intellectual freedom jump started is an honor that can only be repaid through continued support of this cause. I have long believed that when someone gives me a scholarship, it is not because of what I have done in the past that was great; it is because they see potential in me to achieve great things in the future. To that end, I want to take this experience and use it as the foundation to become an intellectual freedom warrior that stands for privacy, that stands for equality, and that stands for everyone's right to access information however they would like to receive it free from any impediments.

Thank you once again to the FTRF and the Conables for this award. Like I said when I applied, I intend to use it to make a difference.