The CRLA Conference in Cleveland, Ohio this past October truly did rock. We had many opportunities to mingle with colleagues and share ideas, from formal presentations to our informal SIG meeting—we all walked away with at least one good idea—if not many more!

Some conference highlights for me were a workshop on action research, David Arendale’s concluding lecture that mentioned how graduate students are becoming larger consumers of learning assistance, and Saundra McGuire’s workshop on metacognitive study strategies (and the proof that they work with graduate students!)

Laura Heidel and I presented a poster presentation entitled “Implementing Learning Assistance for Graduate & Professional Students.” It was well received and helped us recruit more members for our SIG! (If you would like a copy, please email Melissa.)

Additionally, we had our annual SIG meeting, which is summarized in this newsletter. We also brainstormed some ideas that we need your help in implementing!

Mentors: We would like everyone to email us with a few areas of specialty that we can list in a central repository, so that we can email one another more easily when we need assistance.

Survey: We will be sending out a survey in January to all our members to understand their needs and what we can do to help. Please take a few minutes to fill it out for us!

Wonderful time of learning & reconnecting.

2009 Conference Updates

The 2009 CRLA Conference will be held in Richmond, Virginia, October 29-31. We need a few good men or women to assist this SIG by volunteering!

Proposal Review

President-elect Karon Mathews is asking for the names of five members of each SIG who will review proposals for each strand for the Richmond conference. What this means is that when people submit proposals, they are divided into various “strands”. Graduate and Professional Student issues is the strand that relates to our SIG. The reviewers for our strand are emailed each proposal and a rating checklist and asked to review them and email them back to Karon. It is an easy process. We need at least one volunteer, besides the co-chairs, to help review proposals. Melissa and I need to submit this person’s name to Karon by January 16th, so let us know if you are interested. Please consider helping with this fun and easy task.

Proposal Submission

There is currently a call for proposals with a deadline of March 31st. More information about the guidelines can be found at www.crla.net. It would be good to have more programs at CRLA that relate to our target population, since there are usually very few.

Here are some ideas:

1) Describe a workshop that you have done for this group,
2) Describe a marketing technique that you have used with this population,
3) Describe research that you or your university is doing on the needs or retention of this group, or
4) Describe an overview of resources that have been helpful to you in working with this group.

Let Melissa and I know if we can be of help to you in coming up with ideas.
We had a great meeting & talk at Cleveland!

Student quotes:

“I enjoyed the presentation and learned a lot.”

“It is hard to make an APA presentation interesting, but she did it!”

SIG Meeting Minutes

Those present at the SIG meeting which took place at the Cleveland CRLA Conference were:

Melissa Thomas, co-chair  
Melissa.Thomas@utsa.edu

Laura Heidel, co-chair  
Lheidel@uh.edu

Lorrie Gehlbach  
lorrie.gehlbach@umassmed.edu

Kelly Shryock  
kelly.shryock@umassmed.edu

Saundra McGuire  
smcgu1@lsu.edu

I. Welcome to members

II. Purpose of the Group

1. Share ideas with each other regarding programming & marketing

2. Give support to each other in working with this population

3. Examine best practices and current research in working with this population

III. Introduction of members/group discussion

Lorrie and Kelly discussed their work with medical students at the University of Massachusetts. (In years one and two in medical school students take basic science classes and then take the board exam.) They help students prepare for the board exam via content reviews. They discussed how some of their workshops are not always well attended and we brainstormed some ways to increase attendance.

Saundra discussed some of her services for graduate and professional students at LSU. Some workshops that members had given recently included “how to give a professional workshop/thesis talk”, “stress management”, and “board exam preparation”.

IV. What is your vision for the group/next steps for the group

Group members discussed finding out what areas of expertise are out there, among the 40 or so members on our mailing list. Melissa and Laura agreed to contact the members via email and ask them for 3 areas of expertise, then email that information back to the SIG. In this way, we can ask each other for information and advice when we need it.

V. Resources

Someone suggested the book The Academic Procrastinator as a good resource.

Workshop Suggestion

Each semester we will focus on a particular suggested workshop that our SIG members could implement on their own campuses. Please submit your idea for the February newsletter by January 15th!

Close to mid-semester, we see a few graduate students in our office struggling with their upcoming comprehensive exams. Many experience anxiety because they don’t know how to attack the large amount of material expected of them. Because of the number of students requiring individual coaching on this subject, we decided to offer a workshop allowing more students access to study and test taking strategies specific to the comprehensive exam.

In our new workshop, we offer a number of strategies and information to get through the study period and exam with more ease. The areas of focus include expectations, tips for success (such as talking with professors and past test-takers), time management, effective study groups (and when they don’t work), organizing research, essay writing, studying for orals, and common obstacles such as procrastination and anxiety (and how to overcome them). As we finish the workshop we always provide resources for students if they need more assistance in the matter. If you are interested in learning more about this workshop and viewing the accompanying PowerPoint presentation, please email rhoda.brimberry@utsa.edu.

Learning Strategy—Make Your Rock Roll

Time management is always something that will vex the best of us. Lately we have been coming across more and more graduate students who never thought that their graduate studies would consume this much of their time. With undergraduate students we use a handout that has them tally the time they spend on certain activities, but with graduate students we have taken a different approach.

This is in part because the things that take up their time aren’t usually consistent: some work, some have families, some don’t have any other commitments other than school. And a time management plan should be unique to them and their priorities.

So we have them label the pie pieces with things that are priorities to them and then shade in (from the inside out) how they are fulfilling that priority. It helps them see that they don’t have to spend the same amount of time on every priority and which priorities they have been neglecting and need to pencil time for on their calendar. We want the rock to roll and all pieces to be “fulfilled.”