

WDIL Conference Evaluation

A two-page evaluation instrument, developed by Seavoss Associates Inc., was administered to all participants on the last day of the conference. Responses to each query are summarized below.

I. LOGISTICS

Please offer your comments or suggestions about any of the following conference logistics: pre-conference communication, travel planning, use of WDIL website in conference planning, meals, local transportation and shuttles, on-site technology access/support for participants.

Participants were housed in two separate hotels, one near the Laboratory of Ornithology conference site (but removed from local commerce), the other downtown (but a distance from the conference site). Comments noted challenges with shuttles between hotels and the Lab of Ornithology, and difficulty in arranging “down-time” that would accommodate a return to the hotel room.

Holding the conference at the Laboratory of Ornithology was well received, with participants commenting appreciatively on both the aesthetics of the setting and the overall technological amenities. While some would have liked a change in scenery at some point, such as a dinner in town, others commented that the remote location offered a focused, productive environment without distractions.

Responses indicated that the conference website had not been as helpful for travel planning as had been hoped, but comments were overwhelmingly positive about the logistics of travel planning and other preparations via contact with Lab of Ornithology staff. Conference logistics overall were reported to be handled smoothly.

The role of the website as a tool for both pre- and post-conference content sharing and documentation may not have become evident to some participants until part way through the conference. Suggestions were made in retrospect that participant input on the agenda (which was solicited during the conference) could have been facilitated through the website prior to the event, but others commented that time constraints limited their pre-conference use of the website.

There were several suggestions for technology-mediated discussion opportunities during conference sessions, such as chat groups for capturing secondary dialog or a wiki to modify the agenda and other documents.

Comments on meals were overwhelmingly positive, although there were requests for more variety in breakfast fare.

Representative comments:

- *All of the logistics were handled expertly. It was very smooth.*
- *It was sometimes difficult to find conference-related information on the site – example, travel. (as opposed to general travel information). Food was great! Glad I had a car. Van was unpredictable.*
- *All very very good. Thank you!*
- *All rated excellent except shuttle by Holiday Inn. Attendees could have used a change of scenery once in a while – dinner somewhere else.*
- *I wish I had realized how interesting the website is (participants, links, forums) a bit earlier. An email reminder would have been helpful. The logistics and food were great. I appreciated the vegetarian-friendly fare.*

II. AGENDA AND CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

Are there perspectives we overlooked or other people we should consult as we move forward with the development of the WDIL website?

In general, comments about voices represented in the convened group were positive.

Suggestions of where to broaden future conversations:

1. Minorities and culturally diverse representatives
2. Representatives from underserved communities
3. Users/programmers with disabilities (accessibility issues)
4. Innovative sites representing non-science, non-museum content
5. User/learners and non-technical teachers

Participants pointed out that the high level of participants at this conference is useful for generating ideas, but that the largest majority of sites are created by programmers with less experience and/or smaller budgets.

It was also noted that while attention was paid to convening a diverse group, the structure of the conference could have done better to broaden the range of individual voices contributing, as well as the topics of conversation to move the group beyond “safe place” discussions.

Other briefly-mentioned topics to cover included evaluation, cognitive theory, and exhibit/web collaborations. Multi-lingual designers and upper-level administrators were also noted as absent from the group.

Representative comments:

- *Good mix of teachers, content, design, institution folks.*
- *The mix of attendees was very good I felt, although did not hear from enough of them. More discussion needed.*
- *I think we did a fair job of covering a wide range of perspectives – the issue is to expand our collective sphere of influence through the website. I have some confidence this will happen.*
- *Would be interesting to have a brief session with user/learners, though it might be difficult to provide an audience that was generalizable.*
- *Think hard about audiences for the site that will be built. For those who aren't represented here, talk to them and assess their needs. One group that comes to mind are the “amateurs,” or less experienced folks in the field.*

Did you feel you had opportunities to meet and connect with people who shared your interests?

Overwhelmingly, participants answered yes to this statement, with many using the word “absolutely” and following their answer with an exclamation point. Many felt that this was a particularly valuable outcome of the conference experience.

Answers were coded as affirmative or negative, with ambiguous answers noted below as “other.”

Affirmative: 33

Negative: 0

Unanswered: 1

Other: 2

Representative comments:

- *There really weren't enough opportunities to discuss with others what it is like in a real classroom setting!*
- *For me this was the real success of the conference. And real connections did occur.*
- *Somewhat. I would have welcomed more people from history museums or K-12 schools.*
- *Absolutely! The group – as individuals – is all moving in the same directions and looking for answers to similar questions.*
- *My favorite aspect of this conference. What an honor to be surrounded by this group of people.*

Did you feel you had opportunities to meet and connect with people who have different interests and backgrounds?

Answers were coded as affirmative or negative, with ambiguous answers noted below as “other.”

Positive: 29

Negative: 0

Unanswered: 2

Other: 5

Representative comments:

- *Most definitely and I've come away with a lot of resources.*
- *Yes – absolutely – and this is one of the biggest benefits.*
- *Yes, though more focus on cross-application or the broader topic would have encouraged the 'connecting' part even more...*
- *Yes, got interesting ideas from people outside my field. Very welcoming environment.*
- *Opened my eyes to different opportunities and methods.*
- *Sorta. But yes as far as non-profit vs. profit, and museums and place-less organizations.*
- *Fantastic diversity – good job! (hard to do).*

How did we do in terms of the allocation of time between presentations, large group discussion, small group discussion, etc.?

Participants had many suggestions about how to achieve an adequate balance between activities, given the ambitious schedule and limited time. Comments reveal a general consensus that small-group discussions were more productive and conducive to dialog than were large-group discussions and presentations. Some mentioned that sharing thoughts in the larger forum was intimidating, while others suggested that the formality of the large group discouraged genuine critique. Some large group activities ran long, cutting short both time for questions and later small-group activities.

Participants were generally positive about small group discussions, and suggested allowing more time for this. Some did note that discussion groups were not necessarily “small” when formed exclusively by individual interest, and that later reports in the large group could become repetitious; more task facilitation was requested by some. A few suggested moving to small-group work earlier in the conference, while others mentioned that early small-group work could have benefited if following inspiring large-group presentations, such as the roundtables.

All participants acknowledged the time constraints of the agenda, and a few suggestions for more efficient use of time were made. The prospect for technology-mediated simultaneous conversations was raised. Another suggestion was for informal working meals, but comments also revealed that some participants already used meal time for informal professional development of their own.

Representative comments:

- *A bit too much time in large group (since it was so large). I prefer the break-outs.*
- *Ambitious agenda, but mix ended up to be satisfying.*
- *Good for first stab: I suggest in future pre-seeding group activities/ideas for discussion – people will come knowing what they will jump into & participate with more engagement.*
- *There was not enough time for a real dialogue. Maybe there were too many presentations, and the critiques were in general not very critical – we need to be honest, not kind.*
- *I would prefer more time for small working groups – that’s where the best work got done.*
- *Good, but too much time was still spent in the safe places of just spouting what we know instead of discussion/debating. Don’t ask in large groups “what do you want to do” – small group folks won’t speak up.*
- *Preferring smaller groups as I do, I naturally feel there should have been more there, but I think heroic efforts were made to strike a balance and to adjust ‘on the fly’ as needed.*

How did we do in terms of conference schedule flexibility and our ability to adapt to emerging issues and topics of interest?

Acknowledging the limited time frame, participants generally appreciated the conference team's ability to adapt the agenda. Participants appreciated the addition of informal sessions that addressed group interest. While some participants suggested that the solicitation of in-progress feedback on the conference structure was time-consuming and confusing, most appreciated the responsiveness and flexibility.

Representative comments:

- *Good job at changing schedule, adding bird walk, informal presentations.*
- *It was maybe too flexible. Some more structure might have improved things.*
- *Very flexible. That was great.*
- *Schedule was too tight.*
- *The agenda was pretty flexible – that worked out well because conversation naturally evolves and can't always fit neatly into a plan.*
- *Not enough time to negotiate process & do content.*
- *Ok, although sometimes the flexibility caused more confusion as to options.*
- *Good flexibility. Thank you!*
- *Did well. Thank you for staying on track pretty well.*

III. CONFERENCE CONTENT

How useful were the following conference sessions in terms of achieving the conference and project goals?

(1=not useful; 5=very useful)

<u>Achieving the conference & project goals</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>St. Dev.</u>
Website presentations/critiques/discussions	3.46	5	1	1.09
Daily working group breakout sessions	3.67	5	2	0.88
Roundtable on interactive storytelling	3.86	5	2	0.93
Roundtable on games and entertainment	3.94	5	2	0.83
Presentation on constructivism and interactivity (Quintana)	3.81	5	1	0.98
Wikipedia presentation (Wales)	4.21	5	2	0.81
Informal science education and diversity presentation (Jolly)	4.14	5	2	0.90
Presentation on website evaluation (Rockman)	3.17	5	1	1.04

How useful were the following conference sessions for you, professionally or personally?

(1=not useful; 5=very useful)

<u>For participants, professionally or personally</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>St. Dev.</u>
Website presentations/critiques/discussions	3.19	5	1	1.26
Daily working group breakout sessions	3.76	5	2	0.96
Roundtable on interactive storytelling	3.75	5	2	0.10
Roundtable on games and entertainment	3.75	5	2	0.97
Presentation on constructivism and interactivity (Quintana)	3.58	5	1	1.13
Wikipedia presentation (Wales)	4.09	5	2	0.98
Informal science education and diversity presentation (Jolly)	3.83	5	1	1.18
Presentation on website evaluation (Rockman)	2.97	5	1	1.29

Please share any comments or suggestions about specific sessions:

The majority of participant comments were organized around four main topics: the “critique” sessions, project evaluation, conversations on gaming, and general conference logistics. Additionally, comments were offered on overall content and the broader conference theme. For areas with multiple comments, a summary is offered and representative comments listed.

Critiquing sessions: In general, those who commented in this section suggested that critiques could have offered a deeper and more critical analysis of the websites. Suggestions were made for more variety in sites reviewed, a designer self-critique, or a group critique. Some called for more, and as many for less, time to be spent in this endeavor.

- *The critiques lacked ‘bite’ & there was little in the way of constructive outside criticism. In fact, I found the presenters were generally more critical (mistakes made, lessons learned etc.) than those charged with the critiques.*
- *More time for website critiques – establish public rubric for reviews.*
- *The critique sessions were not deep enough to tackle the problems & issues in web design.*

Evaluation session: The general comments offered here suggested that a more practical, and more detailed discussion of evaluation would have been helpful. A request was made to consider evaluation earlier in the conference, and to provide academic resources.

- *Evaluation session was too general.*
- *Need evaluation case studies (specific projects & outcomes, ‘war stories’). Why is it so difficult for people to talk about missteps & what they learned from them?*

Gaming session: In brief, folks commented the interest in this topic demanded more time to discuss.

- *Gaming session did not have any time for discussion and this is what people seem to want to discuss.*
- *More time with educational gaming. I was disappointed that you gave so little time to storytelling and gaming – disproportionate, but also all of it was at the END!! No time to combine them?*

Other topics:

- *Again there wasn’t enough on what is happening in terms of informal activities/web resources at K-12.*
- *Eric Jolly was my absolute favorite. The obvious cross-application between science and the arts was awesome and moving (emotional connection!).*

General content:

- *I felt there was too much discussion/presentation about collaborative communities and not enough about best 'practices' in designing interactive learning websites. Too much philosophical musing and not enough practical application.*
- *We ended up spending a lot of time talking about community, but self-contained content isn't dead. Need to talk/think more about it.*

General logistics: While some commented that the conference flowed well, others suggested implementing techniques to keep important ideas from becoming lost in the rapid pace of events, and to keep the group focused on the conference goals.

- *Flow between presenters worked well – did not lose group's attention.*
- *Clearer goals/planning. Not clear to me how the presentations lead towards expressed conference goals.*
- *The music Friday night was terrific.*

Broader conference concerns:

- *I got what I needed. I think the conference was fine. I consider a lot of problems with the general field to be reflected in the group – which is to be expected (but not accepted) and I know what I can do & feel sustained by my new connections to cool people.*
- *You tackled a great topic and I think we've made great progress. As you know, the challenge now is to keep that momentum going.*

What issues and ideas do we need to consider that didn't come up at the conference?

The areas mentioned as overlooked fell into five basic categories: audience, design logistics, techno-innovation, science, and evaluation. A few comments on the conference in general were also included. For areas with multiple comments, a summary is offered and representative comments listed.

Audience: Many requests were made for both a better understanding of audience's needs and ways to expand the user base. Discussions on accessibility, older adults, K-12, and underserved audiences were suggested.

- *Wish we talked more about connection between formal & informal learning.*
- *What do users really want?*
- *Could have done better on underserved audiences.*
- *More focus on audience and understanding thereof...*

Design logistics: Several respondents suggested that practical web design concerns are worth discussing, particularly politics, economics, marketing, and management. Young, innovative developers were noted as missing from the conversation.

- *Politics & process of developing interactives.*
- *Pay attention specifically to economics... we're all spending grant money, but what else?*
- *Youth developers. How do people beginning in their careers look at this process differently from established management types/presidents.*

Techno-innovation: Several participants suggested discussions of technology linkages, making use of multiple media formats (videochat, radio, etc.) to expand design options and more broadly support science learning. A discussion of design aesthetics was suggested. One participant mentioned that this is an ideal forum for discussing opportunities for technology sharing.

- *"Beauty" and elegance in design.*
- *Connections between the web environment and physical activities in 'real' spheres.*
- *New models/metaphors for web design.*
- *I think there is room for "meta" statements that will allow learning site-creators to leverage one another better – content sharing, code sharing, cross-marketing, etc.*

Science:

- *Sites that use actual scientific data sets. Sites that present the "scientific method" or use scientists as 'primary sources' of information.*
- *Using science data in learning apps (e.g. students as scientists, more than just collecting it). 5 steps of inquiry – how to adapt to informal setting? To web?*

Evaluation: A more practical discussion of site evaluation was requested, including details on how particular sites have approached and accomplished the task of evaluation.

- *I would've liked to have heard more about the design/evaluation processes of some of the developers, especially given our 'best practices' theme.*
- *More discussion of how to define and measure learning.*
- *To arrive at best practices we must identify failures and how to identify them.*

General:

- *I feel that it was very addressed the concepts of authenticity & community involvement with the larger society of this group. I still have issues that this group reflects the dominant power structure of America – but that won't change overnight & I'm still optimistic. Jimmy Wales & Eric Jolly helped that.*
- *Nothing strikes me right now since so much came up. I think the challenge is going to be distilling these 3 days into some kind of framework for moving forward. This has been a major brainstorming session. Now the fun begins. Good luck!*

Additional comments are welcome!

Notable is that for this open-ended question, fifteen out of twenty-three responses included a mention of conference in a future context, and most of those mentioned specifically their continued participation in the group. While some topical suggestions were made regarding WDIL-specific web design and general conference goals, the majority of respondents commented exclusively on their participation in this event and community, all in a positive sense. Representative comments are listed.

Website suggestions:

- *Please keep the contents of the conference (bios, ideas, agenda, goals) web site there – as archive or whatever – it will be helpful as a reference – especially the bios. Maybe have people repost their bio for their thoughts on the conference. Can we edit our bio? Add more links?*
- *Web site needs to be a Wiki & not a forum... too much noise, not enough structure for lasting reference tool. Add a wiki to forum.*

Closing comments:

- *Overall very successful. Very ambitious – I look forward to seeing and participating.*
- *Social time was great – I met wonderful people and felt more comfortable & social than at any other conference I've attended. Please remember the value in community-creation when evaluating the effectiveness of these 3 days!*
- *Very much enjoyed being at Cornell Lab. The woods made a great balance point for all the high level conversations.*
- *We need to do this again and just talk and think as a group.*
- *Thank you! A lovely site & thoughtful group. Best of luck in synthesis & next steps.*
- *Well done, all. Look forward to helping this evolve over the next year.*
- *Thank you very much for including me. I gained a great deal – I hope you did as well!*
- *Thank you very much for inviting me to attend the conference. It was a very interesting and valuable experience. I look forward to continuing the discussions.*
- *Well done. Glad that it is a continuing work in progress and not over when we leave.*