

Comics as Professional Development

If you think a comic convention could never be a legitimate form of professional development (PD), you need to rewire your neural pathways more than Doc Ock. Sure, comic conventions can be massive fun with countless collectibles, frenzied fans, and crazy cosplay, and writers, artists, and celebrities galore. But along with such gleeful sights, you may be surprised just how much of an educational experience a comic convention can be. Nearly every comic convention will host panels, presentations, and lectures to educate the public on the comics industry, genres, upcoming releases, and so on. There is never a lack of news and content to make for some interesting discussions in the world of comics.

Beyond general comics information, many conventions, especially the larger ones, have been hosting educational events that are specifically targeted toward educators and librarians. These range from events lasting an entire day to single presentations, but the comics industry has realized that librarians and educators are a key demographic that would benefit from the information best obtained at a comic convention. At a comic convention, librarians and educators can attend panels about readers' advisory, collection development, supporting diversity in comics, trends to watch, comics for the curriculum, even the occasional presentation about cataloging. At a comic convention, librarians and educators can have the opportunity to speak directly to comic creators, and vice versa, allowing the possibility for productive dialogue about the value that libraries see in comics and the value that the comics industry sees in libraries.

This chapter will briefly explore the ways that professional librarians and library support staff can benefit from attending comic conventions

and what can be expected. Attending comic conventions as PD can come with challenges that you may need to find ways to overcome. But if you are able to successfully attend a comic convention, you may be thrilled at just how valuable of a PD opportunity it can be, possibly more valuable than a traditional library convention, especially for those librarians who are focused on the comics medium. Member of ALA Council, the GNCRT, and a coordinator for convention Pop-Up Libraries, Natalie DeJonghe explains, “Graphic novels circ very well in many libraries. It’s vital for library staff to be able to provide readers advisory and programming around these collections to help highlight them for current graphic novel fans and to introduce them to possible new fans. Professional programming at comic conventions provides the resources staff need to do these things. Also, since many attendees are local to the area, it’s an amazing way to let fans of comics and graphic novels know that the library has these books available.”¹

So, where should you look for PD opportunities if you are a comics librarian, aspiring comics librarian, or a librarian who just cares about comics? There are all kinds of places to look. Some of them you’d be expecting, as they are more traditional library sources. But others may surprise you, since they would be unorthodox sources, ones that many librarians may otherwise overlook. Hopefully, the ideas below will be helpful to you as you pursue PD opportunities, perhaps also helpful to your staff, and in convincing your library superiors that these are perfectly legitimate sources to improve your knowledge, skillset, and ability to serve your communities.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The most important PD activity for you to engage in is joining a professional organization. Such organizations can guide you to the opportunities being presented hence and then some. Besides leading you to additional PD opportunities, you’ll find that professional organizations are the best way to keep abreast of the conversations and trends happening within comicdom. Not all of these organizations are for librarians, *per se*, but by simply following the organizations, following the conversations taking place, from articles circulating, to memes going viral, to reading any output of literature from these groups, you can keep your finger on the pulse of comics. There may be those who still think comics are just for kids or for a niche crowd, but there are professional and scholarly organizations composed of very educated experts who would disagree. The members of these organizations have dedicated their time, energy, and critical minds to proving that comics deserve to be

taken seriously and are an artistic and literary force worthy of attention. Comics studies has become an accepted field of academics in many colleges and universities around the world. Here are just a few.

- **American Library Association Graphic Novels & Comics Round Table (GNCRT):** This group is formally known as the Graphic Novels Interest Group but successfully obtained true Round Table status in 2018. The GNCRT advocates on behalf of comics in libraries to ALA and beyond. They'll host events and meetups at library conventions and comic conventions and promote PD as much as they can. Following this group on social media alone provides a wealth of information about what's happening in the world of comics, libraries, and comics in libraries. You can often find some GNCRT presence at major comic conventions, often times a booth. "One of the things that I find most exciting about the creation of the RT is how many opportunities for mentorship and fellowship that it supports," says DeJonghe. "We're working to create reading lists, awards, tool kits, etc. All of which provides opportunities for library workers, both RT members and non-members, to participate and to access tools they need to support these collections in their libraries." You can join the group by adding the Round Table to your ALA membership here, <http://www.ala.org/rt/gncrt/membership>, follow them on Facebook here, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALAGNMIG>, or follow them on Twitter and Instagram using the handle @libcomix.
- **Comics Studies Society (CSS):** This group of educators, scholars, writers, medical and mental health professionals, and others is dedicated to studying comics and all things comics-related, including essays and books about the topic. They publish *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society* through Ohio State University Press (see Chapter 3 for a list of scholarly sources).
- **Comix-Scholars Discussion List:** The University of Florida is a prominent school for comics studies and they offer a listserv for any and all comics scholars and professionals. <http://www.english.ufl.edu/comics/scholars/index.shtml>
- **National Cartoonists Society (NCS):** A society composed strictly of cartoonists, animators, and comic creators.
- **Scottish Centre for Comics Studies:** Located at the University of Dundee, this entity seeks to bring comics professionals, educators, and students together to teach, learn, and advocate for comics studies.
- **Siegel & Shuster Society:** This group is dedicated to carrying on the legacy and spreading the good names of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, creators of Superman and patriarchs of the superhero. The group

spearheads projects and fundraisers for the sake of preserving artifacts and historical sites connected to the pair as well as events celebrating their contributions to the world.

LIBRARY CONVENTIONS AND CONFERENCES

Most library-centric conferences and conventions hold a presentation or two about comics these days, as many more librarians find information about comics useful. At any given conference, you'll find panels about collection development, readers' advisory, and more as they pertain to comics. Sometimes, experts outside of librarianship are also brought in as presenters or keynote speakers. Scour any and all library conferences you can find and seek out comic-related programs. Though they are usually relegated to YA blocs, there are plenty of discussions regarding juvenile and adult comics, as well.

- **American Library Association Annual Conference & Exhibition:** The ALA Annual is the most well-known and well-attended library conference. Happening in the summer, you can count on a plethora of networking opportunities, educational presentations and panels, informative literature, and more, all pertaining to comics. Many of the major comics publishers, like DC, as well as many smaller publishers, are present at booths, providing previews of the upcoming titles on their docket. ALA is one of the largest conventions for librarians in the world, so it's not an understatement to say that the amount of comics knowledge you can obtain at this event is staggering. ALA Annual is likely to have events pertaining to comics in other types of libraries besides public, especially school libraries. Keep your eye on the ALA Midwinter Meeting & Exhibits, as well.
- **Public Library Association Conference:** The PLA is a division of ALA, and the PLA Conference is held biannually. It offers many of the same types of comic programming opportunities as ALA Annual, but with a focus on public libraries.
- **American Association of School Librarians National Conference & Exhibition:** The AASL is another division of ALA, and this conference is also held every 2 years. This is the only national conference exclusively for school librarians, and this often presents a perfect opportunity to learn about supporting a curriculum with comics. Comics publishers are often present that cater to school libraries, such as First Second, often giving presentations as well as running booths.
- **State Level Conventions and Expos:** If national level conferences are too far or too expensive for you, don't forget about the valuable PD

opportunities awaiting in your own state. If you are not a member of your state's library organization, it is something you need to consider, whether you are professional or support staff. State level organizations such as the Ohio Library Council or Illinois Library Association host annual conferences and expos and presentations on comics, such as graphic novels and manga, have become fairly standard fare. Many such organizations will still allow you to attend the conference or expo even if you are not a member, though often at a higher rate.

COMIC CONVENTIONS

As already discussed, many comic conventions have become valuable resources for PD, as many now offer panels, presentations, and meet-ups for those who are affiliated with libraries and education. Some of these conventions now offer programming tracks or even entire days dedicated to librarians and teachers, as many comic conventions have learned to embrace members of those fields. Some of these conventions also offer special rates for librarians and educators that are far less expensive than the standard ticket prices. Currently, C2E2, NYCC, SDCC, and Emerald City Comic Con (ECCC)² allow professional registration for librarians.³ Do not overlook comic conventions as PD opportunities, as you may find them more valuable than the usual library convention. Here are some examples of prominent comic conventions and what they can offer.

- **Chicago Comics & Entertainment Expo (C2E2):** The first day of this convention, traditionally a Friday, has special events for librarians and educators. Some examples of offerings for C2E2 2019 included a "Librarian Networking Session," "Revolutionary Ideas: Fan Days, Cons and Large Scale Interactive Programs for Libraries," and "Get It Sorted: Keeping Collections Browse-able @ Your Library." ALA and GNCRT are often present with a pop-up library booth, and C2E2 offers professional badges for librarians and educators for only \$30 for a 3-day pass or professionals can get a single-day badge for the professional and educator day for free.
- **New York City Comic Con (NYCC):** Like C2E2, this convention recognizes the importance of librarians and educators and offers them a special day of distinct programming. Unlike C2E2, this special day is held outside of the convention center at the New York Public Library. The first day of the convention is known as NYCC @ NYPL and one can find a multitude of programs about comics in

libraries, as well as a likely keynote speaker who is a professional in comics. Some examples from 2018 included “Graphic Novels, Mental Health and the Challenges that Inspire Authors,” “#RepresentationMatters in Your School Library,” “What’s It Worth? Adult Graphic Novels Are an Investment,” plus Marjorie Liu, creator of the comic *Monstress*, as the keynote speaker. NYCC @ NYPL is actually completely free to librarians and educators who apply and are approved to attend, but the rest of the convention can also be attended at a discounted rate for professionals.

- **San Diego Comic-Con (SDCC):** Also known as Comic-Con International or simply Comic-Con, this is a sacred pilgrimage for geek culture, the ultimate convention and the most famous in the world. SDCC partners with the San Diego Public Library to offer Comic Conference for Educators and Librarians (CCEL), a 5-day conference held at the library during SDCC full of programs and events for librarians and educators. These include workshops for teachers, library panels, publisher panels, a Comics and Libraries Fair, and more. The day before Comic-Con @ the Library, there is even an event called Pre-Con @ the Library with additional opportunities for games and programs. Though this event is free for librarians and educators, registration is required as space is limited. Wondercon, in Anaheim, CA, is another convention held by the same organization as SDCC. Wondercon also offers professional registration for librarians.
- **Toronto Comic Arts Festival (TCAF):** Though outside of the United States, this is still useful and shimmering with opportunity, so perhaps professionals near the Canadian border would be interested to know that TCAF offers professional registration for librarians and educators during its Librarian & Educator Day. The event is held at the Toronto Reference Library, and 2019’s event hosted sessions on Comics Advocacy, Comics Cataloguing Best Practices, and so on, as well as Raina Telgemeier as keynote speaker (Beguiling 2019).
- **Local Comic Conventions:** If you can’t make it to one of these larger conventions in these major cities, fret not. With a quick Google search, you can possibly find that one of the smaller conventions held in your state offers opportunities for librarians. Most major cities in every state have at least one comic convention annually, and some have more than one. Columbus, Ohio, for example has CXC, which is held at the Main Branch of the Columbus Metropolitan Library and offers plenty of opportunities for librarians to learn. It also has a Wizard World and a few other smaller conventions throughout the year. Take note that Wizard World conventions, as of this writing, do not make any special arrangements for librarians or educators as far

as programming or ticket prices. Look for similar opportunities at smaller conventions like CXC in your state, and, if you have no luck, then perhaps you can be the one to spearhead such an idea and make it happen! (See Chapter 6 about partnering with comic conventions).

LITERATURE

There is now a wealth of literature about comics in libraries written by fellow librarians, which are invaluable if you are hoping to maximize your comics services. You may also find reading academic and historical works about comics useful, and some of these may be already in your library's collection. See the bibliography at the end of this book for reading recommendations that you may find helpful.

WEBINARS

Webinars are one of the simplest, commitment-free forms of PD. You can often watch them at your own pace at a time that's convenient for you and your employer. There are a multitude of webinars about comics offered every year from multiple sources. Sometimes there is a fee for webinars, but many webinars are completely free or complementary with a membership to a professional organization, such as ALA. Webinars can be just as lively as an in-person discussion, since many allow the participants to engage in live-chat with the panelists and leave room for Q&A. If you can't attend a webinar when it casts live, most can be archived and viewed later at your leisure. Below are some places on the internet to keep your eye out for comics webinars.

- **Library Journal Webcasts:** Library Journal and School Library Journal frequently provide webinars or webcasts. See the webinar from 2019 titled "Spring Graphic Novels" featuring a panel of speakers including representatives from Diamond, Marvel, and Viz Media, for instance. Most Library Journal webcasts are usually free to those who work in libraries, especially if your library has a subscription to *Library Journal*.
- **ALA Webinars:** ALA always has a slew of webinars available on-demand on a variety of topics, including comics and graphic novels. The major drawback to this resource is the price tag. ALA webinars usually come at a cost and, even for ALA members, are rarely free and only available at a discount at best.
- **Library Vendors:** Many vendors offer free webinars to their library clients about upcoming titles and their offerings that are currently

available. Digital vendors, such as Hoopla and OverDrive, are often reliable when it comes to offering webinars and webcasts on a regular basis, usually with information straight from the publishers. Many of these include comics and graphic novels.

- **Webjunction:** This is a very popular source for library webinars. What makes this especially nice is the webinars are free for those currently employed by a library. Unfortunately, there aren't any webinars exclusively dedicated to comics or graphic novels currently available, though the material pops up in discussion in many of them. It's still a good idea to keep your eye on this resource, as that can change at any time.
- **State Level Organizations:** As mentioned earlier, don't underestimate what opportunities can be offered at the state level. Local library organizations are quite likely to offer webinars and webcasts and some of those just might deal with comics. For example, the Northeast Ohio Regional Library System (NEO) has an archived webinar titled "Graphic Novels for All Patrons."

MAKING YOUR CASE

You shouldn't be surprised if your library superiors and decision makers are not one hundred percent on board with the idea of you using comics as PD, so it may become necessary to do some convincing. Making your case for using comics as PD is really no different than making your case for any other form of PD, but you may have the added obstacle of the ones who control your library's pocketbook not taking comics very seriously. If you want to attend a comic convention for PD, for instance, you'll have to prove that you aren't just going for fun. Just like attending any other event on work time, you'll need to firmly establish the PD you will receive and how that will in turn benefit your library and your community. Here are just a few things to keep in mind as you prepare your proposal.

- If you want to read comics or books about comics as PD, you may be able to convince your library to purchase copies for you. Be prepared with professional reviews of the titles you want to read as well as their prices.
- For a webinar, be sure to know how much the webinar will cost, if anything. Know the time and date and make sure it works with your schedule. Pay attention to whether or not the webinar will be archived in case there is a conflict.
- If you want to join a professional organization, your library likely has a policy in place for paying for those memberships. But in case your

library is unwilling to pay your fee for ALA or GNCRT, for example, set aside some money of your own as best you can and be prepared to pay for the membership yourself for at least a year. Be active and engaged with the organization for a year and return to your decision makers with a list of benefits and accomplishments you can attribute to your participation. They may be willing to change their minds for the following year.

- If you want to attend a comic convention, be willing to put in a lot of research, because you'll essentially plan the trip, knowing full well those plans may not be followed. Find ticket prices, the cost of transportation, a reasonably priced hotel, budget for food, and so on. Look up the previous year's convention's library-focused programs and show them to the ones you have to convince; instill confidence in them that the convention has worthwhile, substantive programs that will leave little doubt that they will benefit you professionally.
- No matter what PD opportunity you wish to pursue, remember that the most important thing to do is to articulate, concretely, what benefits will be derived from these PD opportunities. You'll need to convey to library authorities and stakeholders that comics are not just fun and enjoyable but are a benefit to the community. You'll need to establish how and why, exactly, these PD opportunities will benefit you, so you can benefit your library, so your library can benefit your community.

NOTES

1. Natalie DeJonghe, in email exchange, April 28, 2019.
2. C2E2, NYCC, and ECCC are all run by the ReedPOP company.
3. Natalie DeJonghe, in email exchange, April 28, 2019.

Maximizing the Impact of Comics in Your Library

Graphic Novels, Manga, and More

Jack Phoenix

1 VOLUME

This unique guide offers fresh insights on how graphic novels and comics differ from traditional books and require different treatment in the library—from purchasing, shelving, and cataloging to readers' advisory services, programs, and curriculum.

FEATURES

Addresses common challenges librarians face with comics and graphic novels collections and shows how to surmount them

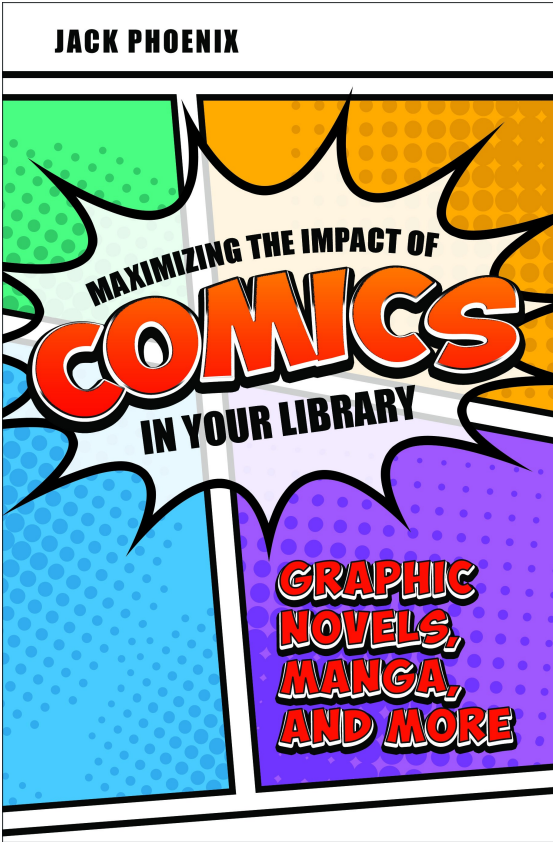
Offers a solutions-focused approach

Describes how comics can be used to better engage your community and to educate youth

Fills a gap in the professional literature, covering topics not touched upon in the existing literature

Serves as a vital resource for public, academic, and school libraries

Jack Phoenix is a librarian and writer in the Greater Cleveland area. He has worked in or with public libraries for more than a decade in various capacities. An active member of the American Library Association, the Ohio Library Council, and the Comics Studies Society, he has presented at professional conferences on topics such as comics organization and self-published works in libraries.



March 2020, 248 pp, 6 1/8x9 1/4
Hardcover: 9781440868856
~~\$65.00~~ \$44.00

ABC-CLIO Order Form

Order online at abc-clio.com | Call 800-368-6868, Fax 805-685-9685,
or return form to ABC-CLIO, PO Box 1911, Santa Barbara, CA 93116-1911

Name: _____

Title: _____

Institution: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Institution Order

Purchase Order #*: _____

Signature: _____

Maximizing the Impact of Comics in Your Library QTY: _____ @ ~~55.00~~ \$44.00

Sales Tax: _____

U.S. residents add applicable state sales tax; Canadian residents add 6% or 8% HST

Shipping and Handling: _____

U.S. residents add 9%, \$6.00 min charge; Canadian residents add 10%, \$12.00 min charge

Total: _____

Individuals Must Prepay

Check Enclosed Payable to ABC-CLIO

Visa Master Card American express

Account Number: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature: _____

ABC CLIO®
Explore. Connect. Understand.

*No purchase order needed. Signature authorizes order.