*From the Great Atlantic Ocean to the Wide Pacific Shore and Beyond:*

*some brief thoughts on the 2020 SLA Virtual Conference.*

The conference was by any measure a success and, for me and many others, exceeded expectations. Jeremy deserves the bulk of the credit for that. There were many things I could have done better as I made up the program and wanted to note those so future hosts and program chairs will have a chance to think about the following suggestions, should they be organizing another virtual or hybrid conference.

Don’t be afraid of screen fatigue. Joyce, Scott, Jeremy, and I discussed this and fretted that would be the case. But it was clear that many folks wished to ask questions and have discussions with presenters, and I didn’t provide enough time for that—especially as the ability to continue such discussions during breaks was not available to us. Turns out The Red Cup People have great stamina and are battle tested by the annoying regularity of being on Zoom.

I did not want to have two sessions in one day, not just because I wondered how long we’d be able to sit in front of a computer, but because I worried that many attendees would have child or eldercare responsibilities and could not get coverage for both a full morning and afternoon session. I also didn’t want additional days where those in the Pacific Time Zone in the US or Canada had to be logged in at five AM. If we have a virtual conference in the future and only one early start we could have both a full morning session and a shorter afternoon session and still provide 10-15 minute Q&A periods.

Jeremy managed the flow of the conference magnificently and proved this format can work, but we need a way to alert presenters who are running long, as it is crucially important in a virtual setting to stay on schedule.

Hybrid conferences or alternating virtual and in person conferences have some appeal but could be a slippery slope. It was suggested by someone—I apologize I don’t recall who it was—that this might allow more graduate students and younger colleagues to participate. I agree. I also know that funding is likely to be a challenge for all of us at least for the near future, but in person we gather not only in the conference room but at meals, for drinks, during field or fishing trips, at night in hotel lounges and dorm rooms, and that should be preserved at all costs.

These are just a few thoughts that I hope will be useful to consider.

Thanks for all the kind words before, during, and after the conference. From my first conference I have found this organization to be the most welcoming, honest, and collegial crowd I’ve ever met, and can’t wait to see you in Nouveau/New Brunswick. A Biento and “Til then…

Best regards,

Bruce