



Drawing on new expertise

Graphic artist brings new perspective to ASWB conference



Artist Nitya Wakhlu gets ready to record input from attendees at the Strategic World Café.

The 2015 Spring Education Meeting included expertise from an MBA in Human Resources and Organizational Development, Nitya Wakhlu of Portland, Oregon. Wakhlu wasn't a featured speaker or a panel member, though. Instead, she drew on that extensive knowledge—and drew on some very large pieces of paper—as part of the graphic recording process for the meeting.

Her recordings are large illustrations—four feet tall and ten feet long—that she crafts during presentations, discussions, and planning sessions. Graphic recording combines images and text to create a fuller concept of what happened at a meeting, catching voices, illustrating key concepts, and exploring nuances that don't always come across in transcripts or written reports.

Having such a strong management background “helps me understand the context across a variety of structures and levels,” said Wakhlu. “It helps me understand what is important and what is not as I record the meeting.”

For the ASWB conference, Wakhlu had to work quickly. “The pace is pretty fast” at an educational conference, she said. “I try to grab the content and add detail later on.” Wakhlu managed to capture seven out of nine sessions (concurrent

breakout sessions prevented her from illustrating everything). Most of her illustrations begin with permanent markers and flow left to right, following the speaker's presentation. She uses sticky notes to mark places to add detail later, and pencils in lines that provide a guiding framework. At the end of the day's sessions, she continued to work on the panels, filling in details and adding color.

“She did a nice job of capturing the key concepts” said ASWB Executive Vice President Dwight Hymans. Hymans, along with John Mayr of British Columbia and Claude LeBlond of Québec, led a session on the first day that focused on social work competency standards. Hymans had never had one of his presentations captured with graphic recording. “It's a good way to remind people of those important pieces of this conversation,” he said.

Attendees got a chance to view her work as she was creating it, working on panels in the back of the conference rooms. Afterwards, they could look more closely as each panel was displayed in the foyer outside the main meeting room. Her tools of the trade vary, from common permanent markers to specialty art supplies, sponges, and chalk.

Wakhlu began graphic recording about five years ago, after hearing about the practice from a European firm while she was living in India. It was a natural fit for her, combining her interest in organizational development with her longtime habit of visual note-taking. “I’d say around fifth grade, my father introduced me to this book called *Mind Mapping*, which teaches you to take notes using a combination of drawing and writing.” Mind mapping made complete sense to Wakhlu, a natural doodler, although she never realized it would become her career.

Though Seattle wasn’t a far trip for her, Wakhlu has traveled extensively to capture visioning sessions, strategic planning, design sessions, and educational conferences in words and pictures. “I had one client who did a series of workshops in Africa several years ago,” she said.

Social work regulation was “fascinating and new” for Wakhlu. “Regulation of social work is not a field I have been exposed to before,” she said. “I’m just very engaged with the content—it’s interesting to learn about different facets of the same topic, and so insightful.”

Following the conference, ASWB received digital images of Wakhlu’s illustrations, along with the original paper copies. Reproductions of the illustrations suitable for framing were sent as thank you gifts to all presenters. The association will use the illustrations in the final report about the conference, which will be published in the summer.