

LIS student to medical librarian: Challenges in medical librarianship promotion at the SJSU iSchool - A case report.

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Introduction

This case study reviews the challenges for San Jose State University School of Information (iSchool) students interested in medical librarianship and proposes steps that could be taken by students, the school, and the MLA to promote medical librarianship at SJSU.

Many of the skills that graduate students need to succeed in the professional world are not taught in the classroom. In order to learn the soft skills of their professions graduate students are encouraged to join professional networks in their field. At the same time, professional organizations benefit from their connections to graduate schools by attracting new graduates into their organization. The iSchool at SJSU recognizes this and offers all first-year students a choice of membership in one of three library associations.

Issues

- Students unfamiliar with medical librarianship do not get enough exposure to the field while at SJSU. Those pursuing medical librarianship must create their own pathway.
- Few specific classes in medical librarianship, and not well-attended.
- Students without science background often perceive that this specialization requires such a background.
- Difficulty in engaging students: 100% online program, and students typically also have work and family responsibilities.
- MLA not very visible: Is not one of the complimentary association memberships available to students; only two scholarships; local MLA organizations not as robust as umbrella associations such as SLA.
- Students may be apprehensive about narrowing their career opportunities.

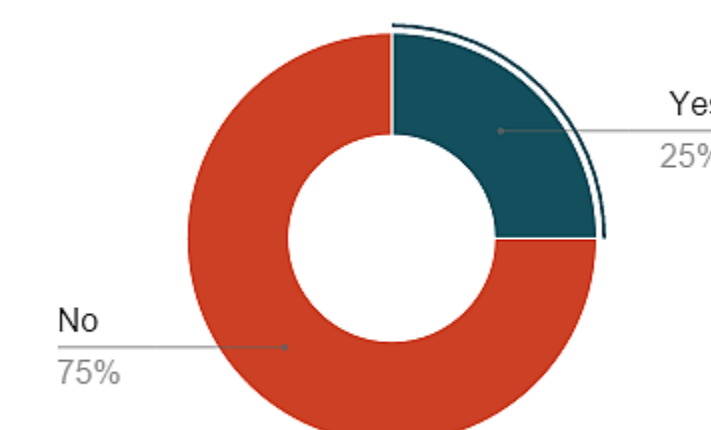
Survey Findings

Most respondents entered library school already interested in medical librarianship. None came to this specialization as a result of coursework or recruitment efforts.

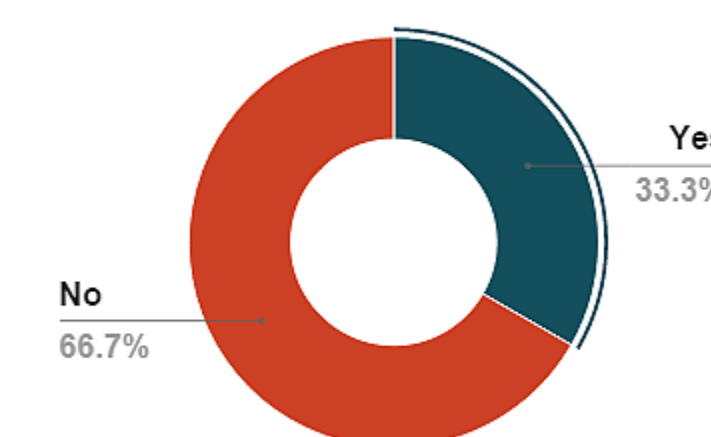
Most did not learn about and join MLA or a regional chapter until after they were employed in a medical or health sciences library.

At least one course in health or medical librarianship was available at the iSchool while the surveyed graduates were attending.

Do you think that medical librarianship was adequately represented and promoted in your MLIS program?



As a student were you aware of scholarships offered by MLA or its chapters?



Existing Efforts

- iSchool courses offered with modules on medical librarianship topics, or option to explore a specialized area of choice.
- Free student membership in many regional MLA chapters, and student rates for conferences.
- 2013 iSchool Career Colloquium online with NCNMLG members: <http://tinyurl.com/jd2nst3>
- The iSchool posts relevant announcements to its social media outlets.
- Mentorship programs in MLA and regional chapters.

Proposed Fixes

Liaising



- Liaise with SJSU SLA student chapter.
- Create robust relationships with iSchool faculty whose classes may cover health information and medical librarianship.
- Have designated professional association liaisons at SJSU.

Student opportunities



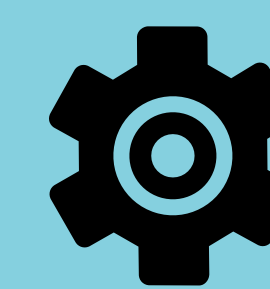
- Offer expanded internships and mentorships.
- Offer travel grants, smaller scholarships more than once a year, award of free MLA membership for grantees.
- Encourage conference participation by offering discounts for volunteering.
- Provide stipend for "clinical" in exchange for the student committing to committee involvement after graduation.

Marketing



- Advertise all relevant opportunities to the iSchool.
- Through specific iSchool courses, offer coupon with no expiration date for a discount on MLA membership.
- Present webinars periodically to student audiences on medical librarianship and MLA.
- Create and maintain informational website on medical librarianship (past websites for students are no longer in operation).

Strengthened infrastructure



- Appoint committee to liaise with faculty who teach about special libraries.
- Assist individual libraries in developing their own volunteer and internship programs.

Methods:

Reviewed SJSU course offerings related to medical librarianship and their attendance over the past years.

Surveyed medical librarians who are graduates of SJSU and other schools regarding medical librarianship promotion at library school.

Surveyed a number of MLA chapters about their student outreach strategies.

Conclusions

Most librarians surveyed had an interest in medical librarianship before entering library school.

For them, the iSchool provided classes, internships, occasional tours (through student groups), career colloquia, and job listings. For those who were not familiar with this field, and likely most other students, medical librarianship was simply not presented as a career option. Students would benefit from course modules on networking, professional associations and the importance of attending conferences. Through collaboration with the Medical Library Association and its regional chapters it is possible to promote this exciting field to the benefit of SJSU students and the MLA.

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