Investigating Emerging Roles for Medical Librarians at College and University Libraries

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COI Disclosure

We have no relevant conflict of interests to disclose

Institutional Review Board Information

This study's experimental design was reviewed by the Purdue University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was determined **to not meet the definition of human subjects research** as defined by 45 CFR 46

Objective

This study sought to identify emerging roles for health sciences librarians by examining recently advertised position descriptions at U.S. and Canadian college and university libraries.

Why?

- Funders and researchers are increasingly interested in using interdisciplinary research methods to investigate health-related problems
- Interdisciplinary research creates opportunities for health information specialists to contribute to the research enterprise
 - Expert searching across disciplines
 - Journal prospecting
 - Finding collaborators on campus
 - Data science and visualization support
 - Research impact assessment

Cooper, D. (2017). *Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Agriculture Scholars*. Ithaka S+R.

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Are college and university libraries
designing positions that can support
interdisciplinary health science
research?

What differences are there between positions at college and university libraries and positions at academic health sciences libraries?

Methods: Data Collection

- Collected position advertisements posted between September 1 2018 and March 1 2019
- Positions were pulled from job boards and health sciences librarian mailing lists, including:
 - ALA JobLIST; MLA Find a Job; ACRL HSIG; Medlib-I; ACRL STS-I
 - Supplemental hand searching
- For inclusion, position descriptions needed to list one of the following terms in the title, qualifications, or responsibilities: medic*, health, life, nursing, veterinary, bio*, pharma*

Methods: Data Analysis

- We used Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AASHL) membership to determine whether an institution was a “college and university library” or an “academic health sciences library”
- Quantitative Analysis: we compiled and categorized postings by institution type (AAHSL v. non-AAHSL), NNLM region, state, and position type (front line v. management)
- Qualitative Analysis: we used grounded theory to identify themes within the collected position descriptions

Quantitative Results

Total Postings Included: 104

Institution Type:

- AAHSL (n = 60): 57.7%
- Non-AAHSL (n = 44): 42.3%

Position Type:

- Front Line (n = 81): 77.9%
- Management (n = 23): 22.1%

Geographic Distribution:

- States Represented: 32/50
- NNLM Regions Represented: 8/8

National Network of Libraries of Medicine

1 Middle Atlantic Region (MAR)

MAR proudly serves: Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The Middle Atlantic Region is based in Pittsburgh, PA, at the University of Pittsburgh.

2 Southeastern / Atlantic Region (SEA)

SEA proudly serves: Alabama, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, US Virgin Islands, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Southeastern / Atlantic Region is based in Baltimore, MD, at the University of Maryland.

3 Greater Midwest Region (GMR)

GMR proudly serves: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The Greater Midwest Region is based in Iowa City, IA, at the University of Iowa.

4 MidContinental Region (MCR)

MCR proudly serves: Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Utah, and Wyoming. The MidContinental Region is based in Salt Lake City, UT, at the University of Utah.

5 South Central Region (SCR)

SCR proudly serves: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The South Central Region is based in Fort Worth, TX, at the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

6 Pacific Northwest Region (PNR)

PNR proudly serves: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. The Pacific Northwest Region is based in Seattle, WA, at the University of Washington.

7 Pacific Southwest Region (PSR)

PSR proudly serves: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, and US Territories in the Pacific Basin. The Pacific Southwest Region is based in Los Angeles, CA, at the University of California, Los Angeles.

8 New England Region (NER)

NER proudly serves: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The New England Region is based in Worcester, MA, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Quantitative Results

AAHSL and non-AAHSL Job Postings by NNLM Region

Required Education

- “ALA-accredited MLIS or the international equivalent” is nearly a universal baseline requirement across all positions
- While there are a handful of exceptions, even these qualifications are drafted in reference to an MLIS

Preferred Education

- The most common preferred education qualification is none
 - 39.4% of all postings (n = 104) include preferred education
- When listed, this qualification most often lists degrees that are directly relevant to a position's areas of responsibility
 - e.g., public health, biological sciences, etc.
- More non-AAHSL postings include a preferred education
 - Non-AAHSL (n = 44): 56.8%
 - AAHSL (n = 60): 26.6%

Required Qualifications

- There is substantial overlap between AAHSL and non-AAHSL positions in this section of job advertisements
- The overlap is so considerable that these postings look nearly indistinguishable when viewed without identifiers

AAHSL or Not?

Non-AAHSL

Health Sciences Librarian

Mount Saint Mary's University Los Angeles Libraries

Position A

“Experience in a health science library as a librarian or equivalent, preferably working with undergraduate and graduate students; Familiarity with the health sciences or related subject areas (e.g. nursing, counseling, health services, etc.).”

AAHSL

Reproducibility Librarian

University of Florida Health Science Center Libraries

Position B

“Ability, as part of a dynamic and collaborative team, to pioneer the development and implementation of a vision for a comprehensive research reproducibility and open science program to support the university’s interdisciplinary research initiatives.”

Required Qualifications

- Not all qualifications are made equal
 - “Demonstrated ability to...”
 - “Knowledge of...”
 - “An enthusiasm or willingness to learn about...”
- These differing levels of expectation may reflect different expectations for hiring officials:
 - *How hard is it to find someone with this skill?*
 - *Can we train someone to do this?*
 - *How critical is this skill for this specific role?*

Preferred Qualifications

Areas of Convergence

	AAHSL (n = 60)	Non-AAHSL (n = 44)
Subject Background	53.0%	50.0%
Teaching Experience	30.0%	34.0%
Grant Writing	9.0%	6.6%
Data Science	20.0%	25.0%
Collection Management	6.8%	1.6%

Preferred Qualifications

Areas of Divergence

	AAHSL (n = 60)	Non-AAHSL (n = 44)
Systematic Reviews	20%	0%
AHIP	15%	0%
≥ 1 Year Professional Experience	16.7%	9.1%

Liaison Responsibilities

- More Non-AAHSL position descriptions included assigned liaison responsibilities
 - Non-AAHSL (n = 44): 79.5%
 - AAHSL (n = 60): (45.0%)
- Potential for discovery bias
 - Non-AAHSL mostly reference/liaison positions
 - AAHSL positions often included functional specialists (e.g., data librarian, scholarly communication librarian, etc.)

Liaison Responsibilities at non-AAHSLs

Preliminary Takeaways

- Differences between AAHSL and Non-AAHSL position descriptions?
 - Minimal differences, especially at the required level
- Designing positions that can support interdisciplinary health science research?
 - Harder to tell at this point, but would expect to see increased mention of data support and grant experience moving forward
- Opportunity for MLA to become the “home” for biology and life sciences liaisons
 - These liaisons have similar responsibilities but do not have a clearly identified professional organization

Next Steps

- Qualitative analysis of the roles and responsibilities of each position
- Additional qualitative analysis comparing front line and management positions

Questions and Discussion

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