

Student Involvement in Health Librarianship

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It can be difficult for library students to learn enough about different areas of librarianship to determine where their interests lie. Work experiences are valuable, but they can be highly competitive and require a significant time investment to secure. Fortunately, paid positions are not the only way students can explore health librarianship. Students at the University of British Columbia (UBC) can join the Canadian Health Libraries Student Interest Group (CHLA-SIG) to learn more about the field. Over the past year our group organized several events to help students engage with health librarians.

Library tours are a useful way to introduce groups of students to a particular library. Librarians at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia and the Hamber and Biomedical Branch hospital libraries took the time to show our members how their libraries operated. Such ventures are invaluable for students, as they provide the opportunity to see how these libraries operate within health organizations and how their patron base differs from that of other libraries. The librarians, who kindly agreed to host these tours, took an hour out of their day to show the students around, and all involved were able to take advantage of the opportunity to network.

A joint event with the Health Libraries Association of British Columbia (HLABC) allowed students to talk to a variety of health librarians. Combining the event with a regular HLABC meeting made attending more convenient for the librarians. By sitting in on the meeting, students also learned more about upcoming events and the workings of a professional group.

Paid and unpaid work opportunities allow students to contribute to health library work. Paid work opportunities are often facilitated through student work programs at universities, such as the student librarian positions offered at UBC. These programs allow university affiliated libraries to hire student librarians to work in a variety of positions, generally with funding assistance from the

university. Students can provide a fresh perspective to recurring problems, and librarians have the opportunity to act as mentors.

Ideally all work opportunities would be paid; student labour is valuable and many students cannot afford to work for free. However, some libraries may lack the funds necessary to hire a student for a project. Volunteer positions allow librarians to bring in much-needed additional help at no monetary cost, and students are able to strengthen their resumes. These projects generally require the commitment of only a few hours per week and can often be integrated with library programs to allow students to receive credit for their efforts. Many positions such as these are advertised by word of mouth, and student members of the CHLA-SIG have the opportunity to take advantage of these offers.

The opportunity to engage with working librarians helps students determine their interests and appreciate the demands of various types of library work. Health librarians with projects or an interest in mentoring might benefit from contacting a local library program or student group to discuss possible student work or volunteer opportunities.

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