



Library Research Skills for Pre-Health Students: Partnering with the Pre-Health Advising Office

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Abstract

Introduction: This brief report describes a library initiative to deliver health professions-specific information literacy instruction to students in a college-wide Health Professions Advising Program at Hunter College, a four-year institution within the City University of New York (CUNY) system. The Pre-Health Advising Office “assists students on their path to becoming a doctor, dentist, optometrist, podiatrist, veterinarian, and select allied health fields, such as physical therapy (PT), physician assistant (PA), pharmacy, and occupational therapy. Pre-Health students . . . receive advising, skills development, access to programs and resources, application planning and review, and guided support.¹” Many of these students come to Hunter as transfers from two-year programs within the CUNY system or at other institutions; others may be freshmen, post-baccalaureate, or non-degree seeking students. In connection with a college-wide task force designed to increase retention and graduation rates among transfer students, the Hunter College Libraries formed a Transfer Committee to examine how the library can better support transfer students. In the Fall 2022 semester, after discussion with the director of pre-health advising, this committee reached out to librarians at the Hunter Health Professions Library (HPL) to conduct information literacy sessions for all students in the Health Professions Advising Program.

Methods: HPL librarians offer a “two-shot” series of workshops via Zoom every semester. Scheduling and other information for each 80-minute session is tracked in the library’s LibCal software and a Zoom link is provided by the director of the Pre-Health Advising Office. The first workshop covers basic library resources and services, developing a research question, and search strategies in databases. The second workshop, delivered one to two weeks later, focuses on advanced topics such as literature reviews, evidence synthesis, and systematic review tools and methods. The librarians provide a LibGuide on the Hunter College Libraries website which summarizes and expands upon the content of both sessions.

Results: Informal feedback has been positive. The Pre-Health Advising Office now requests the two sessions every semester. While the size of cohorts has varied from semester to semester, these workshops consistently reach much larger numbers of students than do typical library instruction sessions. The authors presented results from this program at the Annual Meeting of the Liberty Chapter of the Medical Library Association in October 2024.

Discussion: These findings will be of interest to health sciences librarians who provide instruction and research support to students pursuing admission to graduate health professions programs, including transfer students. The workshops offered in conjunction with the Pre-Health Advising Office greatly increased the outreach of HPL librarians’ instruction efforts. These workshops can also have an enduring impact as they address skills and concepts that will remain relevant for these students at varying stages of their academic careers or future employment; to the authors’ knowledge, no other examples exist of workshops covering systematic review methods for pre-health students. Further study will be needed to assess how or whether the content taught in these sessions has contributed to student success within the Health Professions Advising Program.

Introduction

This brief report describes a library initiative to deliver health professions-specific information literacy instruction to students in a college-wide advising program at Hunter College, a four-year institution within the City University of New York (CUNY) system. The Pre-Health Advising Office offers counseling, resources, and guided support to students who intend to apply to graduate or professional programs in medicine or allied health fields¹. Many of these students come to Hunter as transfers from two-year programs within the CUNY system; others may be freshmen, post-baccalaureate, or non-degree seeking students. In the Fall 2022 semester, after discussions between the director of pre-health advising and the library, librarians at Hunter's Health Professions Library (HPL) began to conduct information literacy sessions for all students in the advising program.

Methods

HPL librarians offer a “two-shot” series of workshops via Zoom every semester. Scheduling and other information for each 80-minute session is tracked in the library's LibCal software and a Zoom link is provided by the director of the Pre-Health Advising Office. The librarians determined the content of each session in consultation with the director but thus far these discussions have not included assessment of the program. The first workshop covers basic library resources and services, developing a research question, and search strategies in databases. The second workshop, delivered one to two weeks later, focuses on advanced topics such as literature reviews, evidence synthesis, and systematic review tools and methods. The librarians provide a LibGuide on the Hunter College Libraries website which summarizes the content of both sessions and expands upon topics such as library access and retrieving full text; interlibrary loan; citation management tools; and citation styles.

Results

While the librarians have yet to conduct any formal assessment of the program, informal feedback has been positive. The Pre-Health Advising Office now requests the sessions every semester. While the size of cohorts has varied, these workshops consistently reach much larger numbers of students than do typical library instruction sessions (see Table 1). The authors presented results from this initiative at the Annual Meeting of the Liberty Chapter of the Medical Library Association in October 2024.

Table 1. Workshop Attendance by Academic Semester

	Semester					
	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Summer 2024	Fall 2024
Students attending per session (N)	356	51	271	113	71	341

Discussion

These findings will be of interest to health sciences librarians who provide instruction and research support to students pursuing admission to graduate health professions programs, including transfer students. Costs of replicating this program elsewhere would include the time and labor of instruction librarians, as well as resources likely already available at many institutions such as online meeting software and a content hosting platform such as LibGuides. These workshops greatly increased the outreach of HPL librarians' instruction efforts. They can also have an enduring impact as they address skills and concepts that will remain relevant for these students at varying stages of their academic careers or future employment; to the authors' knowledge, no other examples exist of workshops covering systematic review methods for pre-health students. Further study is needed to assess how or whether these sessions have contributed to student success within the advising program.

CRedit Statement

John Carey: Investigation, Writing—Original draft preparation, Project administration.

Ajatshatru (A.J.) Pathak: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing—Reviewing and editing.

References

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