

HYPOTHESIS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RESEARCH SECTION OF MLA

HYPOTHESIS. The Newsletter of the Research Section of MLA

VOLUME 10, Number 3, Fall 1996

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RESEARCH SECTION CHAIR'S MESSAGE

BY ZOË STAVRI, PHD

In October I attended back-to-back symposia: the 1996 AMIA Annual Fall Symposium in Washington, DC and the First Library and Information Science Research Symposium in Tallahassee, FL. After a week of cramming in research and evaluation sessions, I hit on a message for our newsletter: *good research is good research*. But first, these general observations:

Much of the work that our Section members produce could benefit from wider dissemination. Since AMIA meetings and journals are obvious venues, I think it's time to step up submissions of papers and posters to this conference and its publications. (See Call for Papers, p. 2) No matter how much the problem areas addressed at AMIA are of interest to me, there is not enough of what I consider research for my present interests. One reason I'd like to see our Section members contribute is because of the quality of their work. Fortunately, while I still would like to see more research oriented presentations at AMIA, qualitative methods seem to be more visible within the medical informatics community. A wider acceptance of the soundness, rigor and science behind what Chuck Friedman calls the 'subjectivist' approach to evaluation was evidenced, for example, by the well attended panel he chaired devoted to qualitative research methods. (I picked up a book he's recently co-edited, and I would recommend it: Friedman, C.P. and Wyatt, J.C. (1997) *Evaluation Methods in Medical Informatics*. New York: Springer)

Surprisingly, while some of the research questions and library programs being evaluated at the Library and Information Science Research Symposium were outside of my scope of interest, the techniques, rigor and analytical techniques could be easily transferred onto the problems we address in health sciences information research. In short, the quality of the research presented at the LIS Symposium exceeded all my expectations. The impact of intervention programs, user needs assessment and satisfaction with services are issues we address on a daily basis. We could learn from researchers who have successfully instituted



Don't forget to return the enclosed ballot for Research Section Officers

See next page

**HYPOTHESIS. The Newsletter of
the Research Section of MLA**

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HYPOTHESIS is the official newsletter of the Research Section of MLA. It is published three times a year by the Section: Spring (March), Summer (July/August), and Fall (November). Items to be included should be sent to the Editor by the 15th of the preceding month (i.e., February 15th for Spring, June 15th for Summer, October 15th for Fall). Copy is preferred by e-mail, but will be accepted in other formats.

Message, continued

a six-year national impact evaluation, even if the libraries in question are in elementary schools. The management issues, the resource allocations, the framing of answerable questions, the demonstrations of impact: these are all questions we too are trying to address.

It did not surprise me that more medical information specialists were not present especially since this was the first ever LIS research symposium. Most of the attendees were faculty members and doctoral students at LIS programs across the US and Canada. However, should this symposium become an annual event as promised, I would encourage you to seek it out and attend. At the close of the conference, there was still debate about where the full-length papers submitted to

the symposium would be published, but as soon as I get the word, I will pass it on.

At the week's end, I realized that I have been mistaken in staying away from what I have considered to be traditional LIS evaluation and research and focusing instead on what seemed to be more domain specific to my interests. It stands to reason that the sophistication of the methodological and statistical techniques discussed at the LIS Symposium would be impressive since most of the disciplines which feed into LIS are from the social sciences, disciplines which promote a high standard of science. This is why the Research Section of MLA will continue to garner my support: it is where my domain and research interests merge.

One of the goals we made for ourselves as a section this year was to try to identify researchers and faculty members who could help us develop our expertise and mentoring services. We need to expand our net to draw upon our LIS colleagues who practice exemplary research and evaluation. We have compelling problems to investigate, but medical librarianship is sometimes seen as unapproachable by those outside the field. A number of my former classmates have never considered going to an MLA conference because it might be too specialized. But good research is good research, and this is what we have to sell. We need to identify good researchers in our community and invite them to speak at our meetings and teach our CE's. It is our responsibility to bring in fresh ideas and not just recirculate old ones.

I would like to leave you with this challenge: invite someone outside the MLA or AMIA community, whose work you respect, to consider joining our organization by pointing out our Section's mission and work. We are well organized, we are action oriented, we are dedicated, and our parent organization has an exemplary research policy statement. These are only some of the things which set us apart as a professional organization and Section.

**AMIA SPRING CONGRESS
CALL FOR PARTICIPATION**

A call for abstracts of papers, panel presentations, and theater-style demonstrations has been issued for the AMIA (American Medical Informatics Association) 1997 Spring Congress to be held May 28-31, 1997 in San Jose, CA at the Fairmont Hotel. The theme for the meeting will be "Information Technology in Community Health." Abstracts may be submitted by e-mail, on disk or as camera-ready copy. For more information visit their web site at: <http://amia2.amia.org/s97.html>

RESEARCH SECTION OFFICERS, 1996-1997

Chair	Zoë Stavri, PhD
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Membership Committee Chair	Nancy Woeffl, PhD
Nominating Committee Chair	Julie Ann Kelly
Research Resources Committee Chair	Natalie Schoch, PhD & David Owen, PhD
Newsletter Editor	Jan LaBeaue
Layout Editor	Miriam Hudgins

For contact information, see MLA Directory or
Research Section Home Page
(<http://www-hsl.mcmaster.ca:80/lrs/index.html>)

HYPOTHESIS

A rose by any other name

With this issue, HYPOTHESIS takes on a subtle new look. With the official name change of the Section at this year's business meeting, came a change too in the name of the newsletter. HYPOTHESIS, Newsletter of the Research Section of MLA is the newest title of this publication which dates back to the Summer of 1987. It has undergone a number of title and format changes in the years since.

Introducing a new title seemed a good time to make a few other minor changes to the newsletter. An ISSN has been requested from the Library of Congress, and we have begun numbering the issues. At the suggestion of Serials Librarians, these numbers are being assigned in sequence as though all previous issues had been numbered also. Volume numbers will follow the calendar year, and issue numbers are based on the number of issues published each year, of which there are currently three.

CE COURSE OFFERINGS AT MLA '97 AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MLA '98

As highlighted in the Nov/Dec 1996 issue of MLA News (p. 14-15), continuing education courses at the 1997 Annual Meeting in Seattle are organized in tracks that correspond to the seven "Essential Areas of Knowledge" for health sciences information professionals as described in Platform for Change. The new system replaces the old one which separated NP (New Perspective) courses from the traditional MLA CE courses. Courses now numbered in the 700s cover "Research, Analysis and Interpretation." Five courses in this area are being offered in Seattle. (If a couple of the titles look familiar, see page 8 of this newsletter to jog your memory!)

Friday, May 23rd:

- 700 Survey Design
- 701 The Web as a Research Tool
- 702 Focus Group Interviewing: A Qualitative Research Method for the Library

Saturday, May 24th:

- 703 Advanced Research Methods

Wednesday, May 28th:

- 704 Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods

In addition, MLA's Continuing Education Committee is already soliciting suggestions for CE courses to be offered at the 1998 Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Please send your comments and ideas to: Marla Graber (Chair, MLA Continuing Education Committee) marla.graber@uchsc.edu (303) 315-6431 or Helen Seaton (Liaison to the '98 National Program Committee) helen.seaton@asu.edu (602)965-7609

MLA BOOKS PANEL SOLICITS SUBMISSIONS FROM POTENTIAL AUTHORS

Michel Atlas, Chair Designate, MLA Books Panel

The Books Panel of the Medical Library Association supports the association's professional publishing program. The Panel promotes the publication of materials in a variety of formats, focusing on the special information needs and interests of practitioners and students in health sciences librarianship and biomedical information management. The Panel actively solicits ideas and authors for potential publications.

Our book publishing is done in cooperation with Scarecrow Press, a division of University Press of America. Currently the Books Panel is sponsoring the publication of a new edition of the invaluable multivolume series *Current Practice in Health Sciences Librarianship*. Volumes 1 and 2 Reference and Information Services in Health Sciences Libraries and Educational Services in Health Sciences Libraries are now available and six more volumes are underway.

The Books Panel also produces a unique series of inexpensive materials called DocKits which are designed to provide practical information which may be readily applied in health sciences libraries. DocKits allow our colleagues to examine and compare plans, policies, procedures, forms, etc. developed at other institutions. Our newest DocKits are Descriptive Floor Plans of Library Computer Centers and Library Logos. DocKit editors select a topic related to health science library management, solicit contributions of documents currently in use related to that topic, organize the documents and provide an introductory overview.

Our latest publishing endeavor is our BibKits, current guides to the literature in specific subject areas. We are soliciting compilers to prepare BibKits in the allied health disciplines for physical, respiratory, occupational, and expressive therapists, physician's assistants, radiologic, clinical laboratory, and emergency management technicians, social workers and others. Resources to be included may be textbooks, encyclopedias, handbooks, dictionaries, bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, journals, current and classic review articles, web sites, conference proceedings and whatever the compiler deems essential as a source of information in any format in the study of that field. The first one, *BibKit #1 Communication Sciences and Disorders: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide to Reference Resources in the Field*, compiled by Judith L. Anderson of Carrier Library at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA, has just been released. Compilers of DocKits and BibKits submit camera-ready copy to MLA headquarters.

Bob Veenstra (Hartford Hospital, Hartford, CT; 860-545-2430; veenstra@harthosp.org) is the current chair of the Books Panel, Beryl Glitz (NN/LM Pacific Southwest Region, Los Angeles, CA; 310-825-1200; ecz5gli@mvs.oac.ucla.edu) is the new Managing Editor of Books, Mary Prottzman (Lyster Army Community Hospital, Ft. Rucker, AL; 334-255-7350; prott@ns.awanet.com) is our new BibKit coordinator, and Catherine Reiter, Denison Memorial Library,

Food for thought...

*"There are three kinds of lies.
Lies. Damn lies. And statistics."*

Attributed to Mark Twain (Samuel
Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910).

*"Discovery consists of seeing
what everybody has seen and
thinking what nobody has
thought."*

Albert Szent-Györgyi von Nagyrápolyt
(1893-1986) Hungarian-born
U.S. biochemist quoted by I. J. Good
(Ed.), *The Scientist Speculates*, 1962.

University of Colorado; 303-270-6444;
catherine.reiter@uchsc.edu) is DocKit
coordinator.

The Books Panel welcomes suggestions for potential publications throughout the year. Proposals for new publications are considered twice a year and are due April 1 and October 1. To submit ideas for new publications, request guidelines for submitting a proposal for either a book, a DocKit or a BibKit, obtain more information about MLA's publications program, or inquire about serving on the Books Panel, please contact Kimberly S. Pierceall, Director of Communications at MLA headquarters (312-419-9094; pierceal@mlahq.org).

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Editor's Note: The current by-laws, including the revisions approved at the 1996 Business Meeting, are printed in this newsletter (See p. 5) at the request of the Executive Committee with thanks to Leah Anderson, Bylaws Committee Chair.
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**RESEARCH SECTION,
A SECTION OF THE MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, INC.**

BYLAWS

ARTICLE I. NAME

The name of this organization shall be Research Section, a Section of the Medical Library Association, Inc. (hereafter referred to as MLA).

ARTICLE II. PURPOSE

The purposes of the Research Section are to foster research related skills of individual health sciences librarians; to promote interest in research and an awareness of research needs among members of MLA; to recommend and promote MLA programs and policies which advance research development and excellence; and, further, in concert with other MLA groups and committees, to serve as an action group for the advancement of library related research.

ARTICLE III. MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Members

Membership in the Research Section is open to all and only members of MLA with an interest in the purposes of this Section.

Section 2. Rights and Privileges

All Section members may vote on matters relating only to the Section and for elective officers of the Section. Only Voting Members of MLA shall be qualified to move or to vote on recommendations to the Section Council regarding MLA policies or actions, to vote on the selection of a candidate for the MLA Nominating Committee, or to vote on the selection of the Section's Representative and Alternate Representative to the Section Council.

Section 3. Dues

A. The amount of dues shall be recommended by the Executive Committee and determined by a majority of the votes cast in a mail ballot conducted thirty (30) days prior to the Section's Annual Business Meeting. Section dues shall not exceed MLA membership dues for Regular Members.

B. Section dues shall be payable on joining the Section and thereafter at the same time as are MLA dues.

C. Dues shall be assessed on an annual basis for the period of the calendar year.

D. If dues are unpaid by the MLA Annual Meeting, the dues shall be considered in arrears and without further notice the member shall be suspended from all rights and privileges.

Section 4. Fiscal Year

The fiscal year of the Research Section shall be the calendar year.

ARTICLE IV. MEETINGS

Section 1. Meetings

At least one meeting shall be held in each fiscal year. Additional meetings may be held provided notice of such meetings is disseminated to the membership at least thirty (30) days in advance of the meeting date. The Section's Business Meeting shall be held during the same period and at the same location as the Association's Annual Meeting. No Section meetings shall be held at the same time that General Sessions of Business session of the Association's Annual Meeting are conducted.

Section 2. Quorum

A quorum of 10 percent of the Section members shall be required for the transaction of business.

ARTICLE V. ELECTED OFFICERS

Section 1. Officers and Term of Office

A. Elective officers of this Section shall be a Chair; Chair-Elect; and Immediate Past-Chair; a Secretary-Treasurer; a Section candidate for nomination to the MLA Nominating Committee; a Representative to the MLA Section Council; an Alternate Representative to the MLA Section Council. All elective officers shall be Regular Members or Fellow of MLA.

B. The term of office of the Chair shall be one year as Chair-Elect, the next year as Chair, and a third successive year as Immediate Past-Chair to take effect on July 1 following election and ending on June 30 of the year in which the individual serves as Immediate Past-Chair. No one may serve more than two full or partial successive terms as Chair or Chair-Elect.

C. The term of office of the Secretary-Treasurer shall be one fiscal year.

D. The term of office of the Section Nominee to the MLA Nominating Committee shall be one fiscal year. There is no limit to the number of terms an individual may serve as Nominee except that if elected to the MLA Nominating Committee the person is not eligible for election as Section Nominee again for five (5) years following such service as a voting member.

E. The term of office of the Representative to the Section Council of MLA shall be three years beginning on the July 1 immediately following election and ending on June 30 three years later, except that if the Section Representative's term be made shorter by action of the Council or the Bylaws of MLA, the term will coincide with that action.

F. The term of office of the Alternate Representative to Section Council shall be identical to that of the term of the Representative.

G. Elected officers shall take office at the close of the Annual Meeting following their election and serve (unless they resign, die, or are removed) until the close of the Annual Meeting at the end of the term of office, or until their successors have been chosen and have assumed their duties.

Section 2. Duties

A. The duties of the Chair are to preside at all meetings and to represent Section at all times and on all occasions not in conflict with other officers' defined duties and responsibilities, and to prepare the Annual Report of the Section for the membership and the MLA Headquarters by the date requested.

B. The duties of the Chair-Elect are to serve as Chair whenever the Chair is not able to do so, and to plan the Section's program activity at the Annual Meeting.

C. The duties of the Secretary-Treasurer are to be responsible for the correspondence, the minutes of all meetings, Section membership and financial records, distribution of dues notices, receipt, disbursement, and accounting for all monies due the Section, and preparation of an annual financial report for the Section to be sent to the Chair by April 1 of each year.

D. The duties of the Representative to the MLA Section Council are to attend all section council meetings and to represent the Research Section in the conduct of Council business, to report back to the Research Section decisions and issues discussed by the Section Council, and to ensure the selection of an MLA Nominating Committee nominee and the submission of 26 copies of the biographical form to the Elections Committee Chair before the meeting at which the vote is taken. The Representative should serve on at least one Section Council committee, but no more than two at a time, and to submit to the Council Chair the committee's objectives, midyear report, and an annual report by the assigned date.

E. The duties of the Alternative Representative of the MLA Section Council are to attend, if possible, all Section Council meetings and to carry out the duties of the Representative when he/she is unable to attend.

Section 3. Vacancies

A. A vacancy arising in the office of Chair shall be filled by the Chair-Elect, who shall cease to be Chair-Elect, shall serve out the unexpired term of the Chair, and shall continue as Chair for the full succeeding terms to which he or she was elected.

B. A vacancy arising in the office of Representative to the Section Council shall be filled by the Alternate Representative, who shall cease to be Alternate Representative, and shall serve out the unexpired term of the Representative. A new Alternate from the Section shall be selected by the Executive Committee to serve the remaining term of the Alternate who is being replaced.

C. A vacancy arising in any other elected office shall be filled by the Executive Committee.

Section 4. Candidate for Nominating Committee Membership

A. The name of one Regular Member or Fellow of MLA chosen by the Members in the same manner as Section officers, shall be submitted each year to the Section council as a potential candidate for membership on the MLA Nominating Committee; this submission is to be made to the Council before its final assembly at the MLA Annual Meeting. The potential candidate shall prepare a biographical statement and a signed statement of willingness-to-serve if elected as a member of the Nominating Committee. This statement shall accompany the name submitted.

B. No person shall consent to being a potential candidate for membership on the Nominating Committee who is already a similar candidate from some other unite of MLA; no candidate for membership on the Nominating Committee shall also be a candidate for an elective office of MLA.

C. No one shall serve on the MLA Nominating Committee as a voting member for more than one term during a period of five (5) years.

Section 5. Time and Manner of Elections

Election of Section officers and the Candidate for Nominating Committee Membership shall be conducted by secret mail ballot at least thirty (30) days prior to the Section annual Business Meeting. Election to office shall be by a majority of eligible votes cast. In the event of ties, the Chair-Elect shall draw lots to determine the result.

ARTICLE VI. COMMITTEES

Section 1. Standing Committees

A. Standing committees of the Section shall be the Executive Committee, the Nominating Committee, the Membership Committee, and the Research Resources Committee.

B. The Executive Committee shall consist of all elective officers and committee chairs of the Section and shall conduct the business of the Section between regular membership meetings. The Section Chair calls and presides at meetings of the Executive Committee and shall conduct the business of the Executive Committee between regular membership meetings.

C. The Nominating Committee is appointed by the Section Chair with the advice of the Executive Committee. The Committee presents a slate by March 1 each year for election prior to the annual meeting. The slate shall include candidates for each office falling vacant on June 30 of the current year.

D. Duties of other standing and special committees are set by charges from the Section Chair with advice and approval of the Executive Committee.

E. Members and chairs of standing committees must be Regular Members, Institutional Member Representatives, or Fellows of MLA.

Section 2. Committee Chairs

Chairs of standing and special committees are appointed the Section Chair with the advice of the Executive Committee.

Section 3. Other Committees

A. The Section Chair shall appoint such other committees and MLA Committee liaisons as are necessary with the advice of the Executive Committee.

B. Members and chairs of ad hoc or other committees must be Regular Members, Representatives of Institutional Members or Fellows of MLA.

ARTICLE VII. PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

Rules in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised shall govern the Section in all parliamentary cases that are not provided for in these Bylaws or in the MLA Bylaws which govern Sections of MLA.

ARTICLE VIII. AMENDMENTS OF BYLAWS

These Bylaws may be amended or rescinded by a two-thirds votes of those attending at any regular meeting of this Section. A copy of the text of any proposed amendment must be given to the Section's Secretary-Treasurer at least five weeks prior to the Annual Meeting. Members unable to attend the Section meeting shall have the option of voting by absentee ballot, to be included with the notice sent to members. Absentee ballots must be received by the Secretary-Treasurer at least seven (7) days before the meeting at which voting takes place.

LIBRARY RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

CONSULTATION WITH THE EXPERTS

MONDAY, JUNE 3, 1996

MLA ANNUAL MEETING, KANSAS CITY, MO

"Library Research Methodologies: Consultation with the Experts" was one of the most practical and well received offerings of the Research Section's program at the Annual Meeting in Kansas City. The event was moderated by Gary Byrd and featured authorities in various methodologies of library research. In addition to the traditional question and answer period following the presentations, break-out sessions were held to allow attendees one-on-one consultations with the presenters. For those who were unable to attend, or could not to stay to meet with the "experts," the synopses of their talks are published here. Members wanting further information on the methodologies discussed, are urged to contact the speakers. It should also be noted that the "survey" and "focus group" presentations have been developed into CE courses for MLA 1997 in Seattle (see related article, pg. 3), and that the "meta-analysis" presentation is being submitted for publication in BMLA (Bulletin of the Medical Library Association).

SURVEY RESEARCH

Alexandra Dimitroff, Ph.D., School of Library and Information Science, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI (dimitrof@csd.uwm.edu or 414-229-4707)

Survey research is the most widely used research methodology among librarians. It is also, unfortunately, the most misused. It is easy to do a good survey: just follow the steps. The basic steps in survey research consist of: formulating the objective, selecting the data collection technique, selecting the sample, collecting the data, and analyzing and interpreting the results. The two areas which are key to the quality of the survey are 1) sampling and 2) question design (part of data collection).

The goal of drawing a good sample is to select a sample that is representative of the study population. There are various techniques for selecting the sample, both "non-probability" samples (including accidental, quota, purposive, and incomplete samples) and (better) "probability" samples (including simple random, systematic, stratified random, and cluster samples). Also important in selecting a good sample is the determination of an appropriate sample size. The goal is to minimize sampling error while keeping within reasonable cost limits. Degree of precision needed, variability of the population, method of sampling and method of analysis should all be considered when determining sample size.

Sampling error can result from bad sampling technique, bias, faulty use of a random-number table, a "frame problem," unintentional

modification of the population, or (most frustrating) non-response. Non-sampling errors can also occur. The major area of non-sampling error relates to the validity and reliability of the data collection instrument (e.g., the questionnaire). Are you asking what you really want to ask and do your subjects understand what you want them to understand? Good questions are reliable (provide consistent measures in comparable situations) and valid (the answers correspond to what they are intended to measure). You must ask the right questions in the right way.

Does the question focus directly on the issue or topic to be measured? Is the question stated as briefly as it can be? Is the question expressed as clearly and simply as it can be? Lots of advice exists concerning question writing, the most important of which is to pretest your questionnaire.

The quality of the sample, the quality of the questions as measures, and the mode of data collection can all be addressed with varying degrees of vigor; you will probably have to make tradeoffs between costs and methodological rigor in some area. HOWEVER, be sure the implications of any tradeoffs are understood before making any decisions and be able to explain and justify these tradeoffs.

FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

Beryl Glitz, NN/LM, Pacific Southwest Regional Medical Library, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA (ecz5gli@mvs.oac.ucla.edu or 310-825-1200)

The focus group technique is one example of a qualitative research methodology used to explore the opinions, knowledge, perceptions and concerns of individuals about a particular topic. Typically, the focus group involves 6-10 individuals who have some knowledge or experience of the

See next page

Library Research, continued

topic. The group discussion is led by a moderator who guides participants through a series of open-ended questions. The data derived from this method are then sorted so that all comments on each topic are brought together, and analyzed so that conclusions can be drawn from the aggregated views and opinions of the group.


The information gathered through focus groups can provide important clues to human attitudes and values as they relate to the topics of discussion. Such information can be extremely useful to libraries in gaining a better understanding of their patrons needs and thus making better management decisions to help satisfy those needs. The technique can also be successfully used in conjunction with other research methods such as surveys, either to help develop a questionnaire or to better understand specific survey results. While there are few examples in the literature on the use of focus groups by health sciences libraries, many libraries have used the technique successfully. Evaluating collection strengths, analyzing service needs because of changes in curriculum, and understanding sources of stress for public service staff, are all examples of topics successfully explored with this methodology.

Although professional moderators are available to run library focus groups, library staff themselves have many of the skills needed to successfully carry out projects using this method. Openness to people, good questioning techniques, and the ability to probe for more information, are some of the requirements for conducting good group interviews. Libraries should, therefore, feel confident in employing the methodology with in-house staff, or by utilizing a librarian from another institution. While not suitable for studying all types of issues and problems, the focus group technique can be a useful and enjoyable research method for many health sciences libraries to employ in evaluating, planning and decision making.

META-ANALYSIS RESEARCH

Sherilynne Fuller, Ph.D., Health Sciences Library and Information Center, University of Washington, Seattle, WA (sfuller@u.washington.edu or 206-543-5531)

Unfortunately, the recent severe Winter storms in the Northwest prevented the inclusion of this synopsis at this time.

Welcome to the MLA Research Section Home Page

- [Purpose](#)
- [How to join the Section](#)
- [Research Section Profile Database](#) ** Login: mla (lower case)
The Research Section has its own online membership profile directory to foster communication, provide access to mentors and advisors, and identify members' specific research interests or professional specialization.
- [Mentoring Service](#)
- [Awards](#)
- [Research Tools](#)
 - [Research Bibliography](#)
 - [Research Spotlight](#)
 - [MLA Research Policy Statement](#)
 - [MLA Research Implementation Task Force](#)
- [Hypothesis](#): the newsletter of the Research Section of MLA
- [Calls for Posters/Papers](#)
- [Governance](#)
 - [Executive](#)
 - [Bylaws](#)
 - [Research Resources Committee: Mandate - Members](#)

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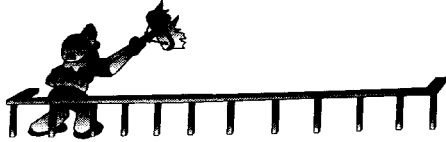
URL: <http://www-hsl.mcmaster.ca/lrs/index.html> - CONTACT: mckib@fhs.mcmaster.ca - UPDATED: December 1996

Research Section Home Page Updates

For those who haven't visited the Research Section home page lately, PLEASE DO! You can find our page at <http://www-hsl.mcmaster.ca:80/lrs/index.html> or point to it from the MLA home page (MLANET) at <http://www.kumc.edu/mla/>. Just select "Sections" under the heading of "MLA leaders, units, and staff." Many thanks to Ann McKibbon and Liz Bayley who have just updated the pages to reflect the section's name change, and completed some new links. They welcome your feedback: please help by letting them know of changes and updates. You can contact Ann at mckib@fhs.mcmaster.ca or (905) 525-9140, ext. 22733.



Research Spotlight



Editor's Note: Mitch Walters received both his BA and MA in Philosophy from Oklahoma State University where he taught for several years before migrating into librarianship. After receiving his MLIS from the University of Wisconsin, he served as Head of Serials Recording at the University of Chicago Regenstein Library and then as Head of Serials at UT Southwestern Medical Center Library. He became Research Manager at the latter in 1994 and has been actively involved in a variety of research projects ever since. One of those (co-authored with Kathryn Connell, Heather Perkins, Mike Paxton and Jeff Perkins), "Solving Problems Through Research: A Document Delivery Case Study," received the Best Research Poster Award from the Research Section at the Annual Meeting in Kansas City. Awards are nothing new for Mitch as he has also received the Publications/Presentations Award from UT Southwestern Medical Center Library and the William D. Postell Professional Development Award from the South Central Chapter of MLA, both in 1992. For more information about his research projects and his unique position at UT Southwestern, contact Mitch at 214-648-2483 or walters@medcat.library.swmed.edu.

What Does a Research Manager Do Anyway?

Mitchel L. Walters

In 1994, when the library at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas was involved in a radical strategic planning process including reorganization and redefinition of staff functions, I urged the library to dedicate significant staff time and library resources to conducting library research. Other managers in the library agreed that too often we had made decisions affecting the quality of our service based solely on anecdotes, hunches, or lobbying by a few vocal individuals. The case for carving out a library work unit dedicated to research was helped tremendously by the discussions of the MLA Task Force on Research and the imminent publication of the MLA Research Policy Statement. We argued that it was a perfect opportunity to both improve the practice of medical librarianship within our library and to clearly align ourselves with the most progressive thinking in the profession.

The Research Unit was duly created in the reorganization that resulted from our Strategic Plan. We found a way, in the re-shuffling of personnel, for the Research Unit to have not only a full-time manager but a full-time computer-literate support staff person as well. When it came time to appoint the manager of the unit, I felt somewhat obligated as the one who had argued for its creation, to volunteer for the job. In spite of the old adage about being careful what you wish for, I have not regretted that decision for a moment. Because I came to the job with a lot of enthusiasm but little formal research training, the last two years have been very educational for everyone involved. The other library managers were very tolerant of my answering "I don't know, but I'll find out" in response to their myriad questions about existing research on a topic, the proper methodology for a study, or the "best" survey to use.



Mitch Walters

From the beginning, the Research Unit has had a two-fold mission. In response to the need expressed in our Strategic Plan, the Research Unit assists managers in the library in designing mechanisms to gather statistically valid data to answer their management needs. Our assistance has ranged from helping a single staff member design a simple spreadsheet to planning complete research projects involving several staff teams. With the more elaborate projects, the Research Unit also assists in the data gathering, tabulation, and analysis leading to the completion of the project. In helping with these projects large and small, the Research Unit has participated in product evaluations,

conducted needs assessments, designed an automated Management Information System, analyzed collection use, and measured customer satisfaction. All of these projects were practical research or "action" research in that they were done to answer practical management questions which arose in the library.

The second major responsibility of the Research Unit, intimately connected to the first, however, is to assure that our research results are communicated in the most useful way to those who might benefit from knowing about them. The Research Unit assists our managers even in the internal reporting of the results of research projects. In a relatively large medical library such as ours, we have found it very helpful to present the results of all projects in both live presentations and also as written reports. These in-house presentations serve to keep our staff well informed and to build their familiarity with and confidence in the research process. For those projects which might have relevance for a wider library audience, the Research Unit helps in every phase of the reporting from preparing abstracts to editing conference papers and constructing posters.

It is important to emphasize that the Research Unit "assists" the staff in conducting research. We do not carry out the research for them. The two people who make up the Research Unit could not possibly know all the questions that need answering, conduct all the research to find the answers, and report all the results that need disseminating. What we can do is lend enough assistance and expertise to enable the staff to find satisfactory answers to their questions using reasonable research methods.

The research projects conducted within the past two years cover a broad range of topics. We have studied the information needs of our clients in the following projects:

- a series of interviews with our faculty on the library's electronic resources,
- an analysis of the clients' use of our audio visual collection,
- an analysis of the use of our library's home page,
- an assessment of the specialized needs of clients using our branch library,
- an opinion survey on the library's weekend hours, and
- an expanded analysis of the clients' use of our journal collection.

We have also completed a couple of projects on more "internal" library problems. In one, we investigated and eventually alleviated the problem of low fill rate in our interlibrary loan unit. In another, we studied the cost of in-house monographic cataloging, and in a

third, we compared the durability of two methods of journal binding.

It has been both surprising and gratifying to see how much useful research the library can produce given the help even our small unit provides. It has also been gratifying (and a little frightening) to see how quickly the "research mind set" catches on. In order to do all the research the staff would like to do, we would need a Research Unit twice its present size. We never run out of ideas!

New LISTSERV in Research HSR-L: Health Services Research List

The field of Health Services Research has been defined as a multi-disciplinary field of inquiry, both basic and applied, that examines access to, and the use, costs, quality, delivery, organization, financing and outcomes of health care services to produce new knowledge about the structure, processes and effects of health services for individuals and employers. The HSR-L: Health Services Research discussion group is a newly-launched listserv intended for the discussion of all aspects of health services research. Topics may include, but are not limited to: outcomes research, health care management issues, health care reform, health policy and legislation, health expenditures, physician compensation, managed care, Medicaid and Medicare, and health services research methods. It is an open, unmoderated list or researchers, interested policy analysts, and librarians who provide information services to health services researchers.

To subscribe send an e-mail to: listproc@u.washington.edu. For more information, contact the list owner Laura Larsson, Research Librarian, Health Services, University of Washington, Seattle, WA at: larsson@u.washington.edu or (206) 616-2935

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