



**Duke University Medical Center Library** is the primary library for the Duke University Medical Center and Health System, including the Schools of Medicine and Nursing, Duke Hospital, and health system members. Budget: 3.924 million (2006/07 report) 39.36 FTE staff



**The IMLS-funded TRLN Doctoral Fellows Program** supports doctoral candidates interested in teaching and research in academic librarianship, having the objective of combining doctoral coursework with a research assignment in one of the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) libraries, where the fellow is mentored by senior academic library administrators. Rationale for the program also includes the need to help alleviate known boundaries between research and practice settings.

#### THE FELLOWS

Lonelyss Charles, M.Ed., MLIS followed her studies in the medical librarianship track at the University of Pittsburgh with a Fellowship at the National Library of Medicine and involvement with the World Health Organization through HINARI, a global health initiative.

Carol Perryman, MSLS has 20 years of experience in medical, public, and law libraries. Her experience includes work with an online health support forum and in Second Life, and research interests include evidence-based practice in libraries (dissertation focus) and consumer health information.



**UNC Health Sciences Library (UNC-HSL)** is the primary library for the UNC-CH Schools of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, and UNC Hospitals. Budget: 6.8 million (2006-07 Report) 70 FTE staff

# Becoming Colleagues

## The Experiences of Doctoral Research Fellows in Practice Settings

| PROJECTS<br>P: Perryman C: Charles   | OUTCOMES  | OBSERVATIONS   |
|--|---|--|
| P1: Assess environment for Consumer Health Information (CHI) at UNC and Duke using extensive review of collections, intra-and Internet, and paper files; interviews.           | 'Snapshot' report on CHI collections and initiatives to support administrative decision making. Other: Switched dissertation focus from consumer health to evidence-based practice in LIS.  | Retrospective review based solely on documentation difficult or impossible; key informant interviews are crucial. Secondary focus on CHI can mean program fragmentation and little confidence in performance of CHI support services.                              |
| P2: Technological competency assessment of Duke Medical Center Library staff using job descriptions, surveys.  | Assessment tool and survey instrument; comprehensive listing of technological skills, grouped by concept and skill level; decision support documentation for training; updated position descriptions to support evaluation, training and planning for expanded roles in the future. Other: Poster session at MLA. | Some staff members perceived task review as a threat to job security, which may have affected feedback during the interview phase.   |
| P3: Case studies of three library projects using file review, interviews, and participant observation.   | Scaleable project template incorporating key elements of both evidence-based practice and traditional project management for use by library administration and project teams. Other: Poster session at MLA; paper.  | Use of external information in the planning process was extremely limited. Project documentation did not encourage follow-up evaluation or dissemination. Reconstruction of projects was difficult due to insufficient documentation and human memory instability. |
| C1: Researched technological trends at comparable institutions for campus-wide IT Strategic Planning Committee (ITSP) at UNC; reported directly to the chair of the committee. | Reviewed documents and provided editorial support for IT plan draft for the ITSP executive committee.   | Working with top administrators was unique to Fellow's experience and offered valuable perspectives on library and campus wide administrative decision making.   |
| C2: Researched library staffing plan for UNC-HSL addressing recruitment of new librarians, with consideration for equity in age and gender.                                    | Co-authored white paper for UNC-HSL in support of library staffing plans.   | Heightened awareness of various funding mechanisms used at public and private institutions.  |
| C3: Research in support of UNC campus-wide initiative for avian flu epidemic.  | Provided documentation and recommended guidelines.  | Increased Fellow's awareness of urgent need for interdepartmental faculty and staff participation in large-scale planning for disasters and epidemics.   |
| C4: Organized training seminar for Duke medical librarians on the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI).  | Created awareness of global health resources, logistics, and issues.  | Expanded Fellow's knowledge of entrepreneurial philosophy in academia.   |
| C5: Collaborated with Duke's nascent School of Global Health to define the role of the global health librarian.  | Created job description for global health librarians  |  |

**SAMPLE AND SETTING:** Two new doctoral fellows, one with 20 years of experience in libraries, and the other, a former National Library of Medicine Fellow, were placed in two large academic health science libraries.

**QUESTIONS:** Does the fellowship experience ameliorate well-documented barriers between research and practice? How do the two cultures mesh, clash, and/or benefit one another in mentoring future faculty and research in LIS?

**METHODS:** Fellows spent one year at each of two different medical library settings (Duke University Medical Library and UNC Health Sciences Library), mentored by top administrators and conducting projects intended to benefit the libraries and their own growth as researchers. This study uses qualitative methods to retrospectively examine the fellowship experience, with particular focus on issues of access to practice settings, and the alignment between doctoral research- and workplace-related demands. An initial literature review was conducted to identify studies on the LIS doctoral experience and research in practice settings, as well as exemplars of ethnographic inquiry in work settings.

**RESULTS:** At this interim stage of our doctoral growth, we were able to characterize elements of our experiences into general topic areas: Research in a practice setting, observations of the practice setting, and recommendations for future programs. Outcomes for Fellows include an improved understanding of what it means to conduct research in library practice settings, as well as unique perspectives on the practice settings. Projects contributed to the library's own objectives, but may have had limited impact upon Fellow's progress as LIS educators and academic researchers. Future experience will be informed by these experiences.

#### OBSERVATIONS

Mentored research is valuable in proportion to the level of access and disclosure in the relationship.

TRLN Doctoral Fellows experienced dual transitions simultaneously: as new doctoral students and as researchers in what had been their customary work environments.

Status of doctoral fellows as researchers within the library work environment needs careful negotiation of identity and function, and informed, sensitive support by mentors in order to succeed. Researchers entering library environments should not assume trust or an understanding of roles by even top library staff, but need to consider the same issues as research in other, less familiar settings.

At times our presence (depending upon the focus of our work) was accompanied by a subtextual discourse that included perceptions of threat, uncertainty about change, and about the relationship between library staff and Fellows. These issues are sure to affect the success and selection of the fellowship projects and the ensuing connections to dissertation research. Mentors' roles in encouraging a dialog about such issues are therefore important to the fellows' achievement of balance, and may function as formative elements in their future doctoral course.

The TRLN Doctoral Fellowship experience was an important experiment, particularly in the medical libraries, because objectives were left to Fellows and their mentors to define, giving Fellows considerable flexibility to change research directions, but also inserting uncertainty into the overall process.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Doctoral students may benefit from initial integration in the SILS educational environment, working closely with faculty mentors, prior to engagement in the practice setting as research fellows. Such involvement may help new doctoral students to more readily identify as researchers in the library environment with a surer sense of their research interests.

For those who intend to become LIS faculty, increased mentorship in the LIS setting and focus on teaching could be strengthened by collaborative research in the work setting. For those whose goals may include library administration or a mix of LIS/library environments, increased involvement and participation in the library practice setting can be supported by faculty mentorship.

Mentorship as junior faculty, perhaps as an added year to the fellowship, would enlarge the contribution of the student. Students could be paired with a senior and a junior faculty member in order to better understand the faculty experience.

In addition to the more project-oriented focus of Fellows' activities, continued exploration of the potential 'fit' between theoretical and applied research during (and following) the active portion of the Fellowship would benefit the profession as a whole, particularly if this is an identified objective.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

Few studies have examined the LIS working environment from an ethnographic perspective, particularly concerning doctoral fellows. The effects of culture and political issues on decision making in library settings are both sensitive and unexplored. Exploring questions about librarian (and librarian-researcher) identity and about the culture of libraries as supportive environments for research will help us to educate new generations of librarians, collaborate across the research-practice divide, and ultimately benefit all those concerned.

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