

10-2018

Serving the Professional Graduate Student: Health Sciences

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Recommended Citation

Evener, J. (2018). Serving the professional graduate student: Health sciences. In C. Renfro & C. Stiles (Eds.), *Transforming libraries to serve graduate students* (pp. 63-76). Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries.

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CHAPTER 6

SERVING THE PROFESSIONAL GRADUATE STUDENT

Health Sciences

Julie Evener

Students pursuing graduate-level degrees for careers in the health sciences have specific, and sometimes unique, needs regarding library resources and information literacy (IL) skills and instruction. The key to these considerations are the principles of evidence-based practice (EBP) taught in health science curriculums. EBP, also known as evidence-based medicine or evidence-informed practice, is best defined as “the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients.”¹ The library can help both in providing resources that contain the current best evidence and in teaching graduate health sciences students how to find the current best evidence.

When serving professional graduate students, it is crucial to keep the end goal in mind—students will graduate and work in clinics and hospitals directly with patients. They will need to be good decision-makers with the ability to synthesize evidence to reach a conclusion. Some may conduct and publish research themselves. Multiple studies support the idea that health professionals consider limited research skills and accessibility of research to be barriers to EBP.² The resources to which students are exposed and the skills they learn while earning their graduate degrees are resources and skills to which they will return when they are practicing clinicians.³

Resources

Library resources required to support graduate health sciences curriculums may differ quite a bit from traditional library resources. For one, there is a greater demand for current and varied research in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles. Especially in libraries serving smaller schools, interlibrary loan services become essential. The curriculum involves hands-on learning, so libraries that serve these students should consider nontraditional resources like medical equipment, anatomy models, and assessment manuals and kits. On the electronic resources side, providing anatomy software, practitioner videos, and mobile applications is valuable.

Journal Articles

Journal articles play a larger role in EBP than do books. A library supporting graduate health sciences students should provide access to books, certainly, but the real focus is on providing access to the major journals in fields related to the curriculum. Some EBP experts even go so far as to advise practitioners to “burn your traditional textbooks,” noting that it is difficult to tell whether information within a book is the most up-to-date, or even whether the information is evidence-based or “simply expertise-based.”⁴

The *Journal of the Medical Library Association* periodically publishes articles “Mapping the Literature” of various health sciences fields: pediatric nursing, radiation therapy, and more.⁵ These studies evaluate the citations from major source journals within the determined discipline, listing journals that are cited most often in the literature of that discipline, as well as the type and age of cited sources. The researchers almost always find that journal articles are the most-cited publication type. Additionally, the “Mapping the Literature” studies are excellent tools for collection analysis and development.

In securing access to full text journals for your students, the two primary methods are through institutional subscriptions to individual journals and through database subscriptions. The “Mapping the Literature” studies typically also include the major databases for the discipline and which of those index each of the top cited journals. One advantage of database subscriptions is the ability to provide full-text access to a wide array of journals at once, whether it is a discipline-specific database like CINAHL Complete or a more general database like ProQuest Central. A disadvantage is that full-text access within databases is often delayed or embargoed for a period set by the journal publisher—12 months, 18 months, and so on. That means that the most current articles are not available in full text, and of course, with EBP it is often the most current articles that stu-

dents will want to access. An institutional subscription to an individual journal or collection of journals from the same publisher (e.g., Ovid Nursing collection) will include the most current articles, including the e-first, Epub ahead of print, or online only articles that have not yet been assigned to a specific issue of the journal. However, these subscriptions may be difficult to manage and expensive to provide.

An important resource of which to be aware is PubMed (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>), a free, public resource provided by the US National Institutes of Health and National Library of Medicine. PubMed provides a free way to search the esteemed MEDLINE database, and also includes additional citations that are not included in the MEDLINE set.⁶ One advantage of libraries linking to and teaching PubMed is in contributing to the end goal of producing graduates who will continue to use EBP skills in their clinical practice. There is no guarantee that alumni will have access to commercial databases through their places of employment, so helping them become familiar with the free resources available to them outside of a formal library prepares them for the reality of searching the literature on the job. As an added value, LinkOut for Libraries is a free tool libraries can use to connect their users to library-provided full text directly from the PubMed interface.⁷ Though any PubMed user can set up LinkOuts from participating libraries, authentication is required to access the full text resource. However, PubMed Central (PMC) is a free archive of open access articles and is integrated fully into the PubMed interface.⁸ Therefore, even searchers unaffiliated with a library can easily connect with full text content.

Interlibrary Loan

Especially in libraries serving smaller schools, interlibrary loan services are essential when working with graduate health sciences students. It is impossible to subscribe to every journal in which your students and faculty might find useful articles. Of course, direct subscriptions, either through databases or the publisher, are essential for journals that are used often in the disciplines your library supports, but direct subscriptions do not make sense for journals whose articles your students and faculty need once or twice a year or less often.

One unique interlibrary loan source available to medical and health sciences libraries is the DOCLINE System. DOCLINE is a request routing and referral service from the United States' National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health.⁹ DOCLINE membership is free for health sciences libraries in North America, as long as users agree to a set list of responsibilities, including providing articles to other libraries in addition to receiving them.¹⁰ Membership in DOCLINE allows a library to connect with other medical and

health sciences libraries across North America through a system with automated routing capabilities.

DOCLINE members can join groups based on regions and affiliations. One group is the FreeShare group. Libraries who opt to join the FreeShare group agree not to charge other members of the FreeShare group for requests.¹¹ Fellow FreeShare libraries can fill the majority of requests at no charge. If a FreeShare library cannot fill the request, standard fees for non-FreeShare libraries to fill a request are typically \$11-\$15 but could be more.

Libraries can choose to set up billing for DOCLINE requests through a program called Electronic Fund Transfer System (EFTS), hosted by the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC).¹² EFTS participants provide an initial deposit, and then fees for DOCLINE requests from other EFTS libraries are drawn from that deposit account, rather than the library receiving individual invoices from each library. Likewise, libraries that wish to charge for filling requests can avoid preparing invoices for other EFTS participants. DOCLINE members can join EFTS at any time, so new DOCLINE users may want to see what their DOCLINE usage is like before deciding to join EFTS.

Whatever the source, interlibrary loan plays an important role in ensuring the library can provide health sciences graduate students with the resources they need.

Equipment and Models

Graduate health sciences curricula are typically hands-on with labs, internships, and other opportunities for students to practice what they are learning. For this reason, libraries serving these students should consider making lab equipment and models available for students to check out from the library. While the exact equipment needed will vary depending on the programs offered, common equipment could include clipboards, stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs and sphygmomanometers, goniometers, and tape measures. Even larger equipment like wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, and portable therapy tables could be feasible depending on the library and circumstances. The main idea would be to customize these offerings based on the specific equipment students use in labs in their programs.

Give special consideration to anatomy resources, as most graduate health sciences curricula include anatomy courses, and such courses are often among the most challenging. Bone, muscle, and other anatomy models are also good candidates for libraries to make available for students to check out or use within the library.

Having equipment and models available to check out from the library can give students an opportunity to practice important skills outside of lab classes or

open lab hours. However, there are factors the library team should consider before going down that road. For example, these items will break or wear out more quickly than normal if they are circulated. Libraries should plan for the expense of replacing damaged or broken equipment and models. Keeping spare parts like screws or other hardware on hand makes it possible to repair some broken items. Additionally, bone models can be broken down and re-cataloged as individual pieces. For instance, if a wire that holds a finger together on the hand of a full arm model breaks, the hand can be removed and the model re-cataloged. One broken piece need not take the entire model out of circulation.

Storage space is also a consideration. Equipment and models can take up a lot of space, especially larger items like portable therapy tables. If the items circulate, the library will need more of each item to meet student demand, versus if the items were in-library use only. Each library should consider their unique circumstances to determine what resources they can feasibly supply and how to make them available.

Software, Videos, and Other Online Resources

Online multimedia resources play an important role in graduate health sciences library services as well. Software, videos, apps, and other resources can be helpful in the hands-on curricula. 3D anatomy software is particularly valuable for the library to provide for students. This software is often hosted online with authentication methods similar to those for standard databases. Streaming video databases for the advanced health sciences students are somewhat limited, but increasing in number. Videos on topics like anatomy, physical examination, and specific disciplines (nursing, physical therapy, and so on) are useful for supplementing what students learn in their courses, as well as for faculty members to incorporate into those courses. Faculty evaluation of videos during a free trial period is essential, as techniques and methods may differ between what the video shows and how instructors teach the skills in class.

Mobile applications (apps) are a growing necessity in supporting health sciences students at the graduate level. Curating free apps is an inexpensive, though time-consuming, way to provide access to the best apps. Some apps, like READ by QxMD and Docphin, allow integration with the library resources, either freely or for a yearly fee. App versions of online databases or tools are available as well, such as PubMed for Handhelds, the EBSCOhost app, and more. The library can also provide fee-based apps. Some are available as institutional site licenses, such as the Visible Body collection, but some may need to be individually downloaded on mobile devices with the devices made available for check out. This chapter will not provide a comprehensive list of the best or most

useful apps, but such lists are available online from technology blogs and library guides.

Instruction

The key to IL instruction for graduate health sciences students is linking the principles and terminology of IL to those of EBP. Similarly, librarians can adapt the PICO model of formulating research questions to help students better grasp what keywords to use in a database search. Both tactics have the benefit of scaffolding new information on top of concepts with which the students are already familiar. Though not enough evidence currently exists to determine what teaching methods are most effective for health sciences students,¹³ educational principles like scaffolding—where a teacher purposefully plans learning to help students bridge the gap between what they already know and what they need to learn—are well-established.¹⁴ One common mistake when working with graduate students is making assumptions about what the students should be able to do.

Linking EBP to IL

Though EBP and IL use different terminology, they each point toward the same types of skills. The direct connections are easier to see with the more skills-based, but rescinded *Information Literacy Competency Standards*,¹⁵ but each step in the EBP process can be mapped to a frame in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)'s *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. Franzen and Bannon suggested that the *Standards* be used as a bridge between the *Framework* and EBP.¹⁶ One potential map of these three concepts together is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1

One Way to Map EBP to ACRL's *Standards* and *Framework*

EBP^a	<i>Standards</i>^b	<i>Framework</i>^c
1. Form a research question.	Determine the nature and extent of the information needed (Standard 1).	Research as Inquiry
2. Search for evidence.	Access needed information effectively and efficiently (Standard 2).	Searching as Strategic Exploration
3. Critically analyze the evidence.	Evaluate information and its sources critically (Standard 3).	Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

EBP^a	Standards^b	Framework^c
4. Integrate the evidence.	Incorporate selected information into knowledge base and value system (Standard 3).	Information Creation as a Process
5. Evaluate the outcomes.	Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose (Standard 4).	Information Creation as a Process
6. Disseminate and communicate knowledge.	Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose (Standard 4); access and use information ethically and legally (Standard 5).	Scholarship as Conversation; Information Has Value
<p>a. Susan H. Lin, Susan L. Murphy, and Jennifer C. Robinson, "Facilitating Evidence-Based Practice: Process, Strategies, and Resources," <i>American Journal of Occupational Therapy</i> 64 (January/February 2010): 165–167, https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.64.1.164.</p> <p>b. Association of College and Research Libraries, <i>Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education</i> (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000), http://hdl.handle.net/11213/7668.</p> <p>c. Association of College and Research Libraries, <i>Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education</i> (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016), http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.</p>		

Putting IL in the language of EBP when working with graduate health sciences students and faculty will help avoid the concepts being lost in translation. Students already know EBP and have an awareness of how critical EBP is to their future practice, so talking about IL in terms of EBP can heighten the significance of IL instruction in their minds.

PICO

PICO is an approach used throughout the health sciences designed to help students and practitioners create a “well-built question” as a starting point for their clinical queries.¹⁷ The elements of PICO are as follows:

- P** Problem, patient, or population (What is the problem? What are significant characteristics of the patient or population?)
- I** Intervention (What intervention or treatment to consider?)
- C** Comparison or control (Is there a second intervention/treatment you want to directly compare?)
- O** Outcome (What is the intended outcome as a result of the intervention?)

Some disciplines, particularly nursing, add a *T* for time frame to this construct.¹⁸ Note that there is not always a *C*; it is used only if you are directly comparing two specific interventions.

PICO works well to help searchers determine what keywords to use for a search of the literature by helping them organize their thoughts about their need for information and isolating significant concepts of the topic. Because health sciences students are already familiar with PICO, they may more readily adopt this strategy versus a method that is completely new to them. The biggest difference between using PICO to formulate a clinical query and using it as a guide in determining a search string is detail. When using PICO to determine a search string, brevity works better. Rather than saying, “elderly patients after total hip arthroplasty,” say “elderly total hip arthroplasty.” Rather than “restoration of hip function following total hip arthroplasty,” use “rehabilitation.” Here’s an example:

A physical therapist works with many elderly patients who undergo total hip arthroplasty. She wants to find more information about the effectiveness of progressive resistance training for the rehabilitation of these patients.

- P** elderly total hip arthroplasty
- I** progressive resistance training
- C** (none)
- O** rehabilitation

From this, we pull the basic search string: elderly total hip arthroplasty progressive resistance training rehabilitation.

The idea is to teach students a method they can use to break a complex scenario down into simple terms to find the most important keywords, using a construct with which they are already familiar. Of course, confirming with faculty members that students have already been exposed to PICO would be beneficial.

The Danger of Assumptions

One common mistake when working with graduate students is making assumptions about what the students should be able to do. Librarians from non–health sciences backgrounds may think of their undergraduate experiences and subconsciously project that on the students they teach and serve. However, a student who majored in kinesiology, for example, likely did not have the same expectations for writing and research papers as did a student majoring in English or history.

Avoid making assumptions about what students should already know. They may not be able to look at a citation and distinguish whether it’s for a book or a journal article.¹⁹ They may not be able to determine a good starting point

for their literature search.²⁰ They may not understand how to avoid plagiarism in their work.²¹ Their instructors may also assume they have these skills and so not understand the importance of collaborating with the library.

Post-professional Graduate Students

A final, additional consideration in working with health sciences graduate students is serving the special needs of students enrolled in post-professional degree programs who have potentially been out of school for decades practicing professionally. As the level of education available in some health sciences disciplines increases incrementally, current practitioners may choose to return to school, usually part-time and online, to earn the currently recognized standard degree.²² The experience and skills of these students are likely very different from those of first-professional students. Anecdotally, I've had many post-professional students over the years tell me some form of this: "The last time I was in school, we looked things up in card catalogs and used print journals!"

Libraries that serve post-professional health sciences graduate students should be particularly supportive of the additional challenges these students might face. However, we should also be sensitive to the fact that these individuals are successful practitioners who have substantial experience in the field and clinic. They may feel embarrassed to need or ask for help using library resources.²³ They may prefer getting help in a phone call or an email rather than by chat or text.²⁴ Directing resources, services, or instruction directly to this group of students can help them to feel less anxious about using the library's resources.²⁵

Conclusion

Peer-reviewed journal articles, physical equipment and models, and electronic multimedia tools are all resources the library can make available to students to support them in their studies. In library instruction, tying IL to EBP can be effective for translating library terminology into more familiar terms. Likewise, using PICO as a strategy for isolating keywords for a search also has the benefit of scaffolding new skills and information on top of the familiar. Finally, librarians should take steps to support post-professional graduate students in their unique challenges. In serving professional graduate students, the most important factor to consider is how the library can help prepare students for their future career. In the health sciences, this means linking library resources and instruction to EBP.

Notes

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