SYMPOSIUM

NLM planning grants for the education and training of health sciences librarians
Edited by Frances E. Johnson

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INTRODUCTION

Health sciences librarians are faced with challenging and troubling times, and this symposium section attempts to describe the efforts that are being made to affect their education and training. The evolving environment (downsizing and managed care are examples of new developments) and the dynamic technology are well documented in the literature, and both the Medical Library Association and the National Library of Medicine (NLM) have initiated efforts to effect change. Countless hours have been devoted by some of the “best and brightest” to “brain-storming” about how health sciences librarians could be better recruited, prepared, and retained in the profession. Results appeared in MLA’s Platform for Change [1], published in 1991, followed by NLM’s report on the Planning Panel on the Education and Training of Health Sciences Librarians [2], and then NLM’s issuance of the Request for Applications (RFA) [3] to challenge the health sciences community to conduct further planning.

The Request for Applications that NLM issued in February 1995 estimated that some $250,000 would be available for two to four awards; twenty-nine letters of intent were received, followed by twenty-one actual applications. Again it is impressive that so many people responded to the call and concentrated on the issue to the extent of preparing the detailed and lengthy application. This overwhelming response not only indicated greater than anticipated interest, but also represented untold meetings, discussions, and collaborative efforts to bring together diverse interests. These were not just library schools applying, but in most instances represented diverse factions—practicing health sciences librarians, library school faculty and administrators, medical informatics researchers, and health sciences administrators.

Additional monies were forthcoming to NLM to fund seven planning grants totaling $500,000. The projects began in early October 1995 and will be in effect for one year with possible extensions in time to overcome any unanticipated delays. The planning efforts are concentrated in four areas: (1) evolving roles of health sciences librarians, (2) professional education, (3) continuing education and lifelong learning, and (4) recruitment including minorities. Some of the planning grants are dedicated to just one aspect, while others have chosen several. The articles that follow describe the grantees’ plans and, to the extent they can, progress and outcomes. There are plans to offer a follow-up symposium issue dedicated to their final achievements and recommendations.

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REFERENCES