An Innovative Partnership to Recruit and Educate Biomedical Information Professionals
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Abstract
There is a growing need for biomedical sciences information professionals who have strong backgrounds in the biomedical sciences. This project pilots an innovative model for recruiting and educating students with these backgrounds. The project includes recruiting students from undergraduate biomedical programs, creating and teaching a basic course in biomedical information management, and awarding ten fellowships for advanced study. The University of North Texas (UNT) and Texas A&M University (TAMU) administer the project.

The Problem
Advances into new frontiers in the medical sciences are fueling a need for new and inventive information services. For example, the growth of genome databases has created a need for information professionals who can develop methods for creating and effectively retrieving information from genome databases. There is a growing consensus that the biomedical sciences information profession needs personnel with the scientific background directly pertinent to the information services performed. The recruitment of students with this related background is the first step in addressing the problem.

Background
The purpose of the project is to develop and test a pilot for an innovative model for recruiting, teaching, and launching the careers of students in biomedical information services, particularly students with biomedical sciences backgrounds. The academic partnership includes the Department of Biological Sciences (Pre-med programs), the Dept. of Kinesiology and Health Promotion, and the School of Library and Information Sciences (Health Informatics Program) at UNT. Included from TAMU are the Department of Biomedical Sciences (Health and Kinesiology) and the Medical Sciences Library. The project is funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Recruiting Students
Undergraduate advisors in the participating units play a primary role in recruitment. They distribute materials and counsel students concerning the opportunities of a career in biomedical information services.

The Introductory Course
The course, Biomedical Sciences Information Management, is a general introduction to the field of biomedical information management and has as an auxiliary goal the recruitment of biomedical undergraduates into the field. It is based on the premise that biomedical sciences research and practice depends on the ability to collect, organize, evaluate, interpret and communicate information. A unique aspect of the course is that students from TAMU and UNT are enrolled in the same course offered through both institutions. The teaching team is composed of faculty from the Medical Sciences Library at TAMU, Health Informatics Program at UNT and invited experts in the field of Biotechnology. The course is Web-based with three mandatory face-to-face videoconference sessions conducted between both universities. The course provides an overview of bioinformatics, ethics-legal and societal considerations, information retrieval, including principles of information organization, database design, biomedical literature databases, hazard substances and gene databases and consumer health databases. They have the opportunity to apply principles of evidence–based practice in the biomedical sciences. Ten students will receive fellowships to work on a Masters’ degree with a specialization in biomedical informatics at UNT.

Evaluation
The course will be evaluated by measuring student learning outcomes, satisfaction level and student's general comments. Follow-up surveys will be conducted one year after the students graduate in order to determine how many pursued a career in biomedical information management.