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A Year in Review: MLA-RTI Fellow Reflection

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The Medical Library Association-Research Training Institute (MLA-RTI) is an opportunity for librarians to get hands-on experience and mentoring from faculty experts on how to design, execute, present, and publish the results of a one-year research project. The MLA-RTI program director, Susan Lessick, worked with five faculty members (Sally Gore, Lori Kloda, Mark MacEachern, Jodi Phelps, and Emily Vardell) to design pre-institute online training modules, a five day in-person training, and a mentoring structure for the projects that Fellows design during the fellowship year.

In early December, MLA-RTI applicants submitted a brief biography describing their research experience, a study proposal, proposed research project timeline, letter of intent, and a letter of support from the Fellows' library. Participants in the MLA-RTI can request financial assistance and most of the 2018 MLA-RTI Fellows received financial assistance. In March 2018, I received an email inviting me to be a member of the inaugural cohort of the Medical Library Association-Research Training Institute (MLA-RTI). After completing the pre-institute training, I arrived for the in-person training, eager to learn and ready to adjust my proposed MLA-RTI project.

At MLA-RTI In-Person Training

In general, I found accepting and providing feedback during the in-person training to be challenging. It meant keeping my mind open to comments, feedback, and criticism. I also found, when providing feedback or criticism to others, it was best to be constructive (e.g., "I find this confusing", "have you considered?") and candid (i.e., "I really like this"). If authors located and stated a quote that I found interesting and pertinent, I might respond, "Great quote!"

I arrived expecting to be challenged and to get guidance on how to improve my project; however, it quickly became clear that I was *a Fellow* and this was *my project.* I had no list of instructions or bullet points on how to proceed and, if I had questions or concerns, it was my job to approach other Fellows and faculty members to get answers. Upon reaching this conclusion, I used my 30-minute mentor session and discussions with Fellows and experienced faculty members, to expand my knowledge and improve my project. Following this in-person training, the responsibility of solving issues and completing the project in one year rested completely on me.

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During MLA-RTI Fellowship Year

Each MLA-RTI faculty member had mentor groups and four mentees. Mentor groups and mentees were pre-assigned based on project if possible. For example, if a Fellow was doing a qualitative study, they might be paired with Emily Vardell. If working on a survey project, they might be paired with Jodi Philbrick. My MLA-RTI Mentor, Mark MacEachern, established a monthly check-in opportunity that I found to be essential. We primarily communicated via email with me describing, in 3-8 sentences, what I had done and what I hoped to do in the upcoming month. Quarterly reports were also used to keep a Fellow's project moving forward and to keep the MLA-RTI Program Director, Susan Lessick, and the assigned mentor apprised of how the project was progressing. In each report, Fellows describe issues with the project, collaborations, and outcomes from participating in the MLA-RTI.

One problematic issue I faced was including interviews in my MLA-RTI project. I had no prior experience with conducting interviews for a study and when it came to analyzing the transcripts, I spent about three months deciding how to organize the information from the interview and trying to determine what form of analysis to use. I contacted my assigned mentor for ideas, but I found a conversation with the Educational, Research, and Measurement Program Director at the University of Toledo to be most helpful. After consulting a handbook on qualitative research, I had a plan and could move forward with analyzing my data. Figuring out how to analyze the data, and recognizing that I should have structured interview questions differently, proved to be the most challenging aspect of my MLA-RTI project.

As part of the MLA-RTI, all Fellows participate in the MLA-RTI Session at the MLA Annual Business Meeting and the Conference Poster Presentation. I confirmed my MLA Annual Business Meeting and Conference attendance early in January and received additional instructions in subsequent months on how to proceed. I also gave a Lightning Round presentation on my MLA-RTI project. Several of the MLA-RTI fellows also presented posters. Quite a few Fellows could not attend due to conflicting meetings and delayed providing a final report until the MLA-RTI session at MLA in 2020.

Unanticipated (but Positive!) Developments due to MLA-RTI Participation

In January 2017, I designed a session with first year medical students that incorporated use of medical information tools, such as DynaMed, UpToDate, Epocrates, and VisualDx. I was able to teach the session in both Fall 2017 and Fall 2018 and my project investigated how the students discover and use these medical information tools. My study highlighted positive changes resulting from instituting the new curriculum in Fall 2017. As a result, students are now approaching me with ideas for how the library can improve the student experience. Additionally, after showing my MLA-RTI project survey results to my faculty and administration, they urged me to write-up and publish the results of my MLA-RTI project.

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As a result of my MLA-RTI project, I now have a rapport with key members of the preclinical curriculum. In Fall 2019, these faculty members agreed to let me meet with smaller groups of students for 15-and-30-minute sessions, which they can schedule in the Fall. The timing of these sessions is more applicable to when students could use the knowledge of how to search the literature and evaluate the study design, results, and publication types of articles. I am becoming the go-to librarian for students, faculty, and staff in the College of Medicine and Life Sciences and I am less hesitant to discuss potential grant and research ideas with faculty members. I would not be comfortable doing either of these, if I had not participated in the Medical Library Association-Research Training Institute experience. I strongly encourage everyone to give research a try and apply for a future MLA-RTI!

Acknowledgements