Predicting the future is fraught with pitfalls, but by looking at statistical trends, consulting with front line staff, listening to leaders of the profession, and paying attention to patrons, one can make reasonable assumptions about how the librarians at LHS will be engaged in future years.

Statistics collected by Information Services over the past years have shown that patrons are less likely to ask in-depth reference questions of librarians seated at the reference desk. Instead patrons prefer one-on-one consultation either in their offices or in the library when they need specific help on a project. Hence we can expect to see librarians spending less of their time providing traditional reference desk duty for the general population and more time working with specific groups who need more intense help. Librarians will continue to be more customer-centric and less library-centric.

Librarians who teach are increasingly aware that one size does not fit all. Busy professional students prefer online classes that are available when they are able to access them, or when they need the specific help. Librarians will improve their knowledge of teaching methods and curricular design, use Web 2.0 technologies to provide virtual education, and develop their technical skills to implement electronic learning. They will explore creative uses of technology to reach out to students to meet their educational needs. Invitations from faculty from various disciplines to collaborate in teaching semester long classes will increase as librarians discover what they can offer beyond conventional “how to search” workshops.

Leaders of health sciences librarianship have not been silent on the subject of the future of the profession. The call for librarians to be more involved in the clinical area has been a difficult one for librarians to meet for a number of reasons, including their lack of subject knowledge and available training programs. UIC librarians have worked with College of Medicine colleagues in developing evidence-based medicine skills and preparing librarians for work in the clinical area. As clinicians and residents experience the value of having immediate answers to the questions that arise during morning rounds, librarians will increasingly serve in that area.
The introduction of the clinical and translational research mandate to the university offers an opportunity for librarians to work with teams of clinicians and researchers. In order to succeed, librarians will constantly update their skills; they will do this through formal education such as earning a second master’s degree or a doctorate, through meetings and certificates, and through keeping in contact with other professionals through blogs, cyberspace and other social networking systems.

In sum, Information Services will be composed of specialists, not generalists. Some will specialize in developing education modules, some will focus on working with researchers in areas they themselves have mastered, some will be found with clinicians at the bedside, and some will be working more closely with informatics professionals. Outreach work will continue. Librarians will be innovative, trying new roles some of which will fail and some of which will succeed.

In the end, Information Services librarians will flourish when they keep in mind their basic mission, which is to connect people to knowledge so new knowledge can be created, patients better served and the future of society improved. Ultimately all of this will be accomplished through librarians improving their skills, offering services that patrons value, and through relationship building.

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