
EDUCATION FOR HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE PHILIPPINES: HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract

This paper presents the history and development of health sciences librarianship education in the Philippines through document analysis. A special focus on the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies is provided, being the first library school to offer a formal course on health sciences librarianship. Recommendations for future development of health sciences librarianship education and training are proposed.

Keywords: education for health sciences librarianship, education for medical librarianship, Philippines, University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies, medical librarians, health sciences librarians

Introduction

This paper presents the history, development, and current state of education for health sciences librarianship in the Philippines. Emphasis was given to the development of health sciences librarianship education in the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS), since it was the first library school in the country which established formal courses and a diploma program focusing on health sciences librarianship. Curricular proposals, policies, guidelines, and other documents related to the development and implementation of the curriculum for library and information science programs in the Philippines and UP SLIS were sought and examined as data for this paper.

Health Sciences Librarianship: An Overview

Health sciences librarianship is a specialization of the librarianship profession, which focuses

on the knowledge base of the disciplines in the health sciences and providing information services in the health care setting. In the literature, medical librarianship and health sciences librarianship are used interchangeably. However, the term “health sciences librarianship” is preferred because it “...encompasses the broader field of health care and biomedical research where health sciences librarianship is practiced” (Shedlock, 2014, p. 4). Among the other specializations of librarianship, what distinguishes health sciences librarianship is best exemplified by the statement of J. Michael Homan, former director of Mayo Clinic Libraries:

Health sciences librarians are unique because they are motivated by the excitement and promise of the health sciences. Health sciences librarians know that these subject domains promote health, save lives, and advance science; and that the librarian’s role is to provide systems, services, and resources that link critical information to clinical, scientific, and administrative decision making. Health sciences librarians are obsessive about the timeliness and authoritativeness of information because they know it makes a difference to current and future patients’ lives. (Shedlock, 2014, p. 10)

The history, development, and current status of formal education for health sciences librarianship in other countries has been documented in the past decades. In the United States, the first course dedicated for health sciences librarianship was offered in Columbia University in 1939, under the direction of Thomas P. Fleming (Brodman, 1954). Since then, at least 49 schools in the United States and Canada offer formal education in health sciences librarianship (Roper, 2006). In addition, the U.S. National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland offers an Associate Fellowship Program—a one-year postgraduate training fellowship for prospective health sciences librarians; while the University of Pittsburgh School of Information Sciences developed a post-masters online certification program in health sciences librarianship (Saghafi, Tannery, Epstein, Alman, & Tomer, 2012). In India, elective courses on health sciences librarianship are offered in library schools, and a post-graduate diploma in health sciences librarianship was started by the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences just recently (Joshi, 2014). Only two universities in Pakistan offering a master’s degree in library and information science have a course on health sciences librarianship (Anwar & Ullah, 2014). In Tanzania, while there is no formal education on health sciences librarianship yet, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is in the process of institutionalizing a 3-year diploma program in health information science (Haruna, 2015). Lastly, in Iran, the first master’s degree program in health sciences librarianship was established in 1977 at the Iran University of Medical Sciences (Zeraatkar & Ayatollahi, 2016).

Health Sciences Librarianship Education in the University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies

The University of the Philippines School of Library and Information Studies (UP SLIS) is the

first and oldest library school in the Philippines and in the region (Faderon, Aguirre, Buenrostro, & Cabbab, 2016). The first courses on library science were offered in the University of the Philippines under the College of Liberal Arts in 1914, and the first regular curriculum in library science was offered in academic year 1916–1917 (Damaso, 1966). Eventually, the four-year degree program on library science was offered under the Institute of Library Science established in 1961. The school was renamed to Institute of Library and Information Science in 2002, then again in 2007 under its present name. In 2015, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) declared UP SLIS as a Center of Excellence (COE) in library and information science education—a first in the history of the Philippines. To date, UP SLIS is the only COE, among higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country offering library and information science degrees, and is the sole member of iSchools from the Philippines. At present, it offers one undergraduate degree program (Bachelor of Library and Information Science [BLIS]), one graduate degree program (Master of Library and Information Science [MLIS]), and two diploma programs (Diploma in Health Sciences Librarianship, Diploma in Law Librarianship).

Health Sciences Librarianship Elective Courses in the Master's Level

The first course instituted which focuses on health sciences librarianship is *Information Sources and Systems in the Health Sciences* (LS 244). It was instituted during the 688th meeting of the Executive Council of UP Diliman on September 13, 1978. The topics covered in the course are the various information sources and services provided in health sciences libraries, including health information retrieval tools and systems. Before students can enlist the course, they must have already finished its pre-requisite course, which is Reference and Information Services (LS 240), or secure the consent of instructor (COI).

Another course on health sciences librarianship was instituted during the 21st meeting of the University Council of UP Diliman on December 9, 1989, which is *Health Sciences Library Management* (LS 254). Aside from the concepts and principles on the administration and organization of various types of health sciences libraries (e.g., academic health sciences library, hospital library) and its services, the course also includes discussions on the history and development of the health sciences library environment, and the selection, organization, and utilization of health sciences information resources. Unlike LS 244, the course can be taken by students without any pre-requisite course.

A number of health sciences librarians in the country work in health care institutions (e.g., hospitals), not only as librarians, but as records managers or records officers in the medical records department. Thus, the UP SLIS proposed the institution of a course on health records management, titled *Health Sciences Records Management* (LIS 219). Topics on the course include the technology and systems used in the administration and organization of health records. The proposal for the institutionalization of the course was approved during the 116th meeting of the UP Diliman University Council on December 3, 2010.

Diploma in Health Sciences Librarianship

According to the Medical and Health Librarians Association of the Philippines (MAHLAP) and the Philippine Group of Law Librarians (PGLL), there is a need for qualified and professionally trained librarians in the field of health sciences librarianship and law librarianship (Faderon et al., 2016). This led to the proposal of UP SLIS (then the Institute of Library Science) to establish two formal training programs on health sciences librarianship and law librarianship. Termed as the *Diploma in Librarianship*, it is a one-year post-baccalaureate program, which aims to produce librarians with the required knowledge and skills to manage a health sciences or law library. The program was approved by the UP Diliman University Council on its 21st meeting on December 9, 1989, and by the UP Board of Regents on August 30, 1990.

The *Diploma in Health Sciences Librarianship* program consists of a total of 24 units. The 24 units are distributed as follows: 18 units for major courses on general and health sciences librarianship; 3 units for an elective course; and 3 units for a practicum course in a health sciences library / information center. Table 1 presents the summary of courses for the said diploma program.

Table 1

Diploma in Health Sciences Librarianship Summary of Courses

Course Code	Course Title	No. of Units
LIS 201	Foundations of Library and Information Science	3
LIS 231	Organization of Information Resources I	3
LIS 244	Information Sources and Systems in the Health Sciences	3
LIS 254	Health Sciences Library Management	3
LIS 260	Introduction to Information Science	3
LIS 263	Information Systems Analysis and Design	3
LIS 282	Practicum in the Health Sciences Library and Information Services	3
Elective course		3
Total Units		24

Health Sciences Librarianship Track in the Undergraduate Level

At present, two elective courses on health sciences librarianship are offered by UP SLIS for its BLIS program, which constitutes the health sciences / medical librarianship track. These are: *Health Sciences Literature* (LIS 140), and *Introduction to Methods in Medical Information Research* (LIS 141). LIS 140 introduces the literature on health sciences, including medical informatics. LIS 141 involves the methods and techniques in the retrieval of health information sources, with emphasis on online health information searching. Both courses were instituted during the 77th meeting of the UP Diliman University Council on April 16, 2002, and approved by the president of the UP System on May 9, 2002.

Implementation of a National Standard Curriculum for the Undergraduate Program

In 2005, CHED promulgated the policies and standards for the BLIS program, through CHED

memorandum order (CMO) number 8, series of 2005. According to the said policies and standards, the 4-year BLIS program should comprise of a minimum of 153 units to be eligible for graduation. Among the 153 units, 63 units are for general education courses, and 90 units for professional courses. The 90 units of professional courses comprise of 60 units for basic professional courses (e.g., cataloging and classification, reference and information services, library management), 18 units for area of specialization, and 12 units for electives in the domain of education (e.g., principles of teaching, social dimensions of education). Minimum specifications for the 60 basic professional courses (e.g., course outline, number of units, course prerequisites, required references) are provided. Requirements for the administration of the program are also prescribed in the aforementioned CMO (i.e., qualifications and responsibilities of the dean, qualifications of the faculty, requirements for the establishment of the library for the BLIS program, facilities and equipment, admission and retention policies). With its release, all HEIs in the Philippines currently offering the BLIS program at that time, as well as those who intend to offer the said program, were required to implement it in their respective institutions effective academic year 2005–2006, initially for incoming freshmen. By academic year 2008–2009, the effectivity of CMO no. 8, series of 2005 is for all year levels.

As mentioned earlier, CMO no. 8, series of 2005 provides for accomplishing 18 course units in a particular area of specialization. There are seven areas of specialization identified: 1) academic librarianship; 2) school librarianship; 3) public librarianship; 4) corporate librarianship; 5) law librarianship; 6) medical librarianship; and 7) government agency librarianship. For the specialization medical librarianship, the following are the prescribed courses: 1) collection management in medical libraries; 2) organization of information sources in medical libraries; 3) information sources and services in medical libraries; 4) library and information management in medical libraries; 5) indexing and abstracting in medical libraries; and 6) information technology in medical libraries. HEIs offering the BLIS program may institute one or more of the aforementioned areas of specialization in their course offerings.

With the move towards developing competency-based standards / outcomes-based education, CHED in August 3, 2015, adopted and promulgated CMO no. 24, series of 2015—the revised policies, standards and guidelines for the 4-year BLIS program. As with the previous CMO, HEIs are to comply with the requirements of the new CMO within two years after its effectivity. By academic year 2016–2017, students enrolling in the BLIS program are to be covered by the new CMO.

Although the intent of both the old and new CMO is to prepare its graduates to become health sciences librarians, along with other library positions (e.g., academic librarian, teacher librarian, database librarian), the 18-unit area of specialization provided for in CMO no. 8, series of 2005 was removed from CMO no. 24, series of 2015. Instead, CHED provided the minimum number of units for the following areas: 54 units, general education course; 39 units, core courses; 6 units, library practice (i.e., internship); 18 units, ICT courses (e.g., fundamentals in programming, database design for libraries); and 21 units, special topics (e.g., foreign language, educational technology, preservation of

information resources). However, as stated in the same CMO, HEIs can add courses in their BLIS program of study, such as those related to health sciences librarianship. Provided, that HEIs include the required minimum total number of credit units in their BLIS program.

Current Developments and Future Directions

In the past years, courses on health sciences librarianship in UP SLIS for both the BLIS and MLIS programs have been regularly available every academic year, especially in the BLIS program. LIS 140 is offered every first semester. LIS 141 is offered for the second semester. While there have been no enrollees for the Diploma on Health Sciences Librarianship, its courses focusing on health sciences librarianship (i.e., LIS 244, LIS 254) are still taken by students as elective courses in the MLIS program (Faderon et al., 2016).

Given that there are only two courses on health sciences librarianship offered by UP SLIS in both the BLIS and MLIS programs, additional courses should be instituted to complete the 15-unit health sciences librarianship track in the undergraduate program, and complement the existing two courses in the graduate program. As of 2017, two courses for the BLIS program on health sciences librarianship were offered as special topics courses. The first course, *Health Information Services*, was offered in the second semester of academic year 2016–2017. The course primarily discussed on the principles and functions of various information services unique and essential in health sciences libraries and health care institutions. Topics include health information literacy, clinical librarian service model, and consumer health information service. The second course, *Organization of Information Resources in Health Sciences Libraries*, was offered in the first semester of academic year 2017–2018. Topics discussed in the course include the application of Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and the National Library of Medicine Classification. Additional courses related to health sciences librarianship (e.g., health informatics, consumer health information) are undergoing development and will be offered in the coming academic years.

Majority of practicing health sciences librarians in the Philippines today did not undergo formal education or training in health sciences librarianship (Arevalo, 2016). One of the reasons for this is the lack of library schools in the Philippines, which offer elective courses on health sciences librarianship. Especially at the undergraduate level, since the majority of practicing health sciences librarians are holders of BLIS degree (Arevalo, 2016). At present, there are only two library schools in the Philippines, specifically in the National Capital Region, which offer courses on health sciences librarianship—UP SLIS and the National Teachers College (Arevalo, 2016). In the absence of formal education and training, practicing health sciences librarians learn and improve their knowledge and skills on health sciences librarianship through the following: attendance in seminars and workshops; choice of on-the-job training / internship setting during their undergraduate studies (i.e. health sciences library); experience from their previous work in a health sciences library; and other continuing professional development activities, including self-study (Arevalo, 2016). Although there are existing opportunities for prospective and practicing health sciences to acquire and improve their knowledge

and skills on health sciences librarianship after earning their degree (BLIS or MLIS), it is recommended that said knowledge and skills are taught to LIS students in a formal learning setting. This may be in form of elective courses as part of the program of study in a BLIS or MLIS program, or a postgraduate program similar to UP SLIS' *Diploma in Health Sciences Librarianship*.

Arevalo (2016) also identified competency areas necessary for a health sciences librarian in the Philippines of today should possess. Using a survey questionnaire and focus group discussion, he gathered the viewpoint of currently practicing health sciences librarians working in academic health sciences libraries, hospital libraries, and special health sciences libraries in the Philippines regarding the needed technical competencies of a health sciences librarian. As a result of the study, the following are the competency areas, in order of priority: (1) Knowledge of health sciences, health care environment, and information policies; (2) Health sciences literacy skills and information services; (3) General management and information organization; (4) Health sciences resource management; and (5) Information systems and technology.

In addition, the Medical Library Association (2017) released a report on the required competencies for a health sciences librarian. There are six competencies identified by MLA, which are "...necessary for professional success that serve as the foundation for professional development, preprofessional academic preparation, and continuing education programs" (Medical Library Association, 2017, p. 3). The following are the said competencies: (1) Information services; (2) Information management; (3) Instruction and instructional design; (4) Leadership and management; (5) Evidence-based practice and research; and (6) Health information professionalism.

To respond to the identified competencies required for a health sciences librarian by Arevalo (2016) and the Medical Library Association (2017), library schools in the Philippines must offer courses on health sciences librarianship for both the BLIS and MLIS programs, which cover the essential knowledge and skills identified by the required competencies. As first suggested by Ellen Detlefsen (Alpi, 1999), such courses may include the following: medical terminology; basic anatomy; basic biology; drug information; health sciences resources; consumer and patient health information sources; survey of medical diseases; National Library of Medicine classification system; MeSH; and medical "jargon". BLIS and MLIS program administrators of library schools should design a study plan for students who wish to pursue a specialization in health sciences librarianship. Such plan must identify the required elective and cognate subjects for health sciences librarianship, including the setting for the 6-unit internship course in the BLIS program, which should be a health sciences library. Likewise, professional library associations, such as MAHLAP, should provide continuing professional development activities such as seminars, workshops, training programs, and other similar activities, which can enhance, update, or improve the knowledge and skills of practicing and prospective health sciences librarians in the Philippines.

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