

# A Profession Without Limits: The Changing Role of Reference Librarians

**Elaine Sullo**, Coordinator for Information & Instructional Services; **Laura Abate**, Electronic Resources & Instructional Librarian; **Tom Harrod**, Reference/Instructional Librarian; **Gisela Butera**, Reference/Instructional Librarian; **Alexandra Gomes**, Associate Director for Education, Information and Technology Services; **Paul Levett**, Reference/Instructional Librarian  
Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library, The George Washington University

## BACKGROUND

Librarians have taken on new and evolving roles, many of which have come about based on a need that can be uniquely satisfied with a librarian's background and expertise. Some roles have simply been filled due to a librarian's availability and willingness to volunteer for something new. In considering how these roles will continue to evolve and affect our daily work, we've identified and categorized the changing roles and responsibilities of Himmelfarb health science librarians.

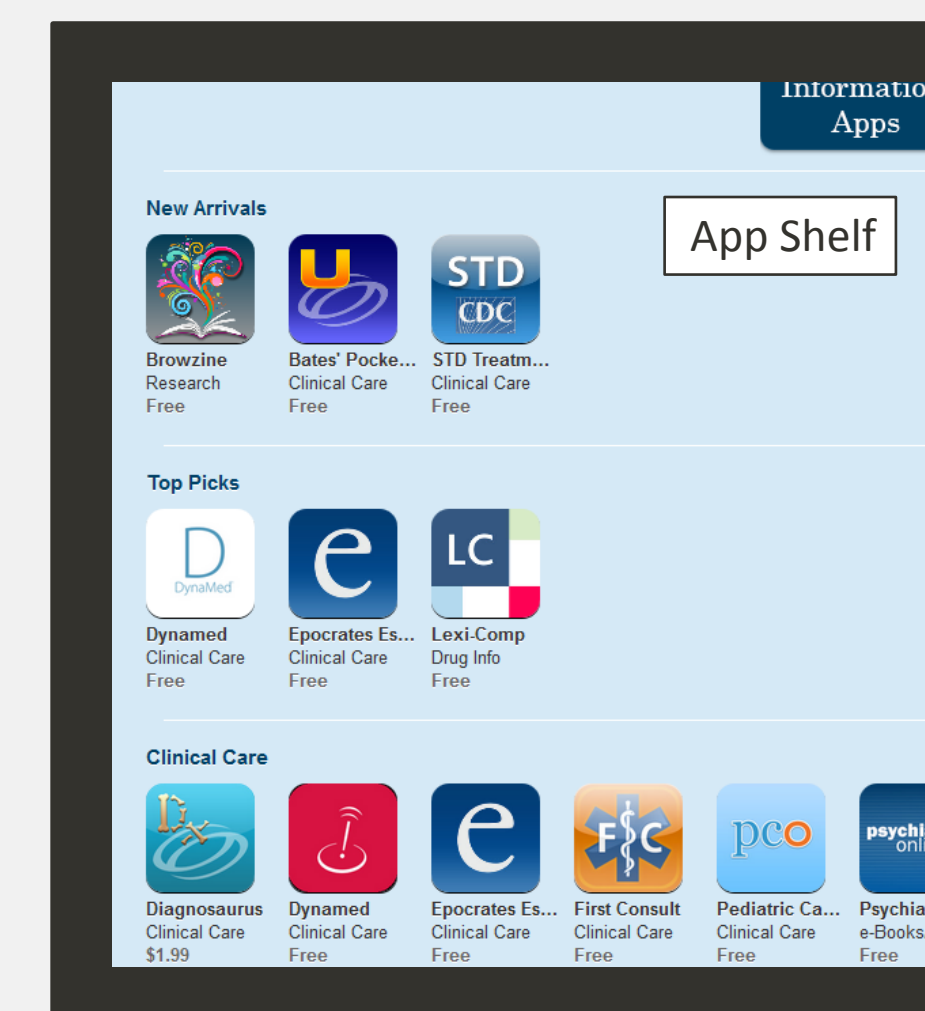
### EXPANDED OUTREACH INITIATIVES

#### Recent initiatives:

- Taught CME faculty development session: Searching, Organizing, Citing: PubMed & RefWorks; and Researcher's Toolbox
- Developed a social media policy for the library to use Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and the library's blog to promote library resources and events
- Co-developed panel discussions: "Strategies for Interdisciplinary Publishing Success and Writing" and "Publishing Case Reports: What's Involved and How Do I Get Started?"

#### Ongoing:

- Provide systematic review research support
- Deliver reference service at the Milken Institute School of Public Health and at the Department of Physical Therapy
- Stage the annual Himmelfarb Library Art Show, featuring artwork created by our users
- Provide remote reference service (from home) on University snow days



### TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

#### Mobile devices:

- Provide training and support on iPads (first year medical students, physician assistant students) and iPad minis (second year medical students)
- Created an "App Shelf" to highlight mobile database apps and productivity apps

#### Software:

- Provide support for the use of TurningPoint, NVivo, and Camtasia

#### Flipped classroom:

- Created LibGuide: "Active Learning Techniques and the Flipped Classroom"

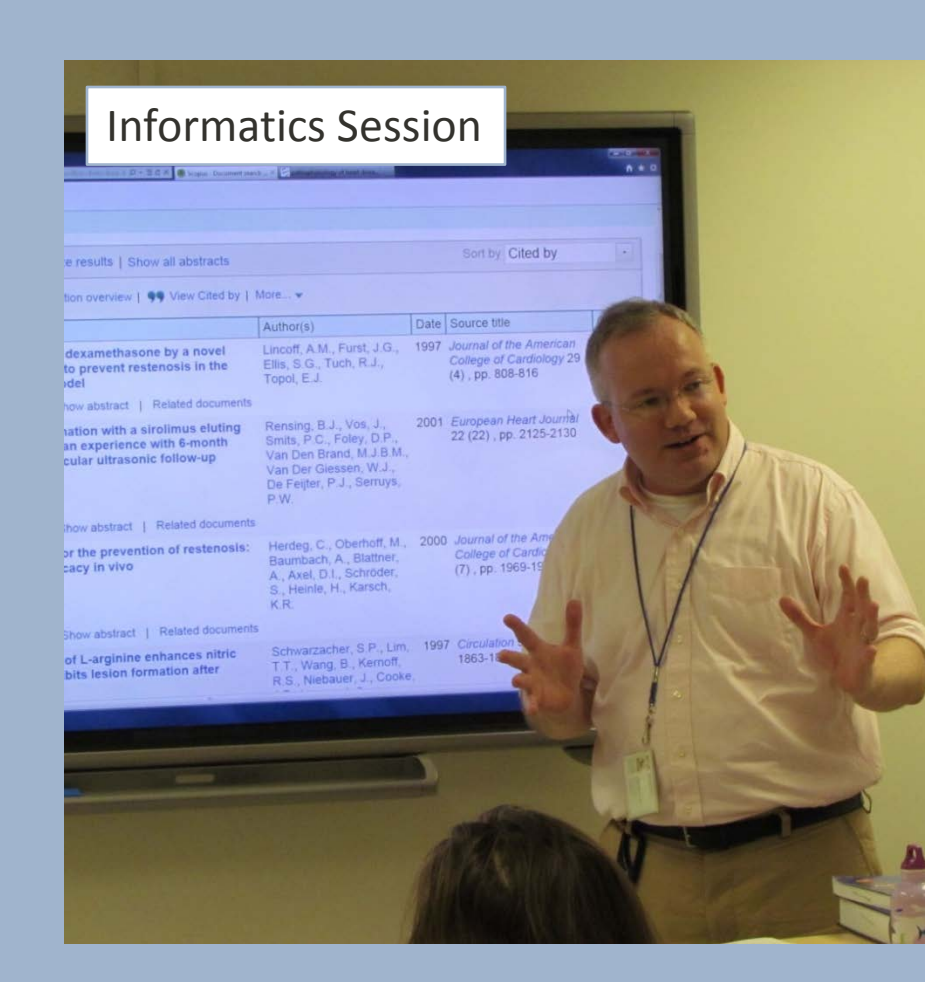
### TEACHING AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

#### Assist:

- Faculty with development of cases and case material for the Clinical Integration Sessions (CIS) of the Clinical Skills & Reasoning course (CSR), for MSIs and MSIs
- Residency directors in identifying readings to support curricular goals
  - Develop LibGuides for chosen readings
- Internal medicine residency's morning report, providing real-time research and information support

#### Develop and teach:

- Active learning informatics sessions for CIS as well as for Formative Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (FOSCEs), for MSIs
- Online classes for nursing distance education students on using Excel and creating infographics
- Collaborated with 2U to create a video tutorial on "How to Write a Literature Review" for public health distance education students
- Multiple Camtasia tutorials on conducting effective research



### COLLABORATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY AND BEYOND

#### University service participation:

- GW's Institutional Review Board
- Principal Investigator on IRB-approved social media study
- Interdisciplinary research team; awarded medical education grant
- Conduct admissions interviews for prospective medical students
- School of Medicine's Curriculum Management Group and Practice of Medicine Group

#### University support:

- Provide NIH Public Access Policy support
- Moderate medical student class listservs on behalf of the Dean's Office
- Moderate student elections via learning management system and tabulate election results

#### Outside GW:

- Consult with and provide professional development for medical librarians from Eritrea and Malawi
- Co-develop diploma program curricula for Tanzanian librarians
- Recruit community partners for Himmelfarb's Healthy Living initiative

## HOW DO WE DO IT?

Many of the responsibilities and roles require new knowledge and skills, some of which have been formally acquired, and others require "learning on the job," understanding and using new technology, and learning from mistakes. All of Himmelfarb's reference librarians have attended the University of Pittsburgh's Systematic Review Workshop. Additionally, all reference librarians have completed the Master Teacher Leadership Development Program, a certificate program in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at GW. New roles have allowed Himmelfarb librarians to broaden their skills and capabilities and change the way they view themselves – not just professionals providing service to patrons, but colleagues on a level playing field with faculty and clinicians.

## WHY DO WE DO IT?

The changing roles of reference librarians have created new and unique partnerships with faculty. In order to stay relevant and visible, librarians must be open to seizing new opportunities and going beyond the comfort zone of traditional librarian roles. By being available and engaged, librarians have been successful in these new roles; involvement in activities beyond the library allows librarians to interact and participate as peers with faculty. The role of the reference librarian will continue to evolve in ways that we cannot predict, but we can use the expertise and insight gained from current experiences to guide us in future endeavors.