Pam Shaw Receives NLM Informationist Fellowship

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Pam Shaw, the Galter Health Sciences Library's biosciences librarian, has been awarded an Informationist Fellowship from the National Library of Medicine (NLM). The fellowship award provides stipends to cover tuition and partial salary benefits for 2007 to 2009. In its program announcement for the Informationist Fellowship, NLM defines informationists as "information specialists who have received graduate training and practical experience that provides them with disciplinary background both in medical or biological sciences and in information sciences/informatics…. These fellowships are intended for health sciences librarians, scientists, health professionals and others who wish to broaden their existing scientific background by acquiring the additional disciplinary knowledge and experience to function as an informationist."

The NLM Informationist Fellowship consists of three components: formal coursework leading to an advanced degree, a practicum (or immersion experience), and research training. Pam's co-sponsors for her fellowship are Dr. Richard Longnecker, Professor, Department of Microbiology – Immunology and Director of the Integrated Graduate Program in the medical school, and James Shedlock, Director of the Galter Health Sciences Library. For her education component, Pam is working towards a masters' degree in computational biology and bioinformatics at Northwestern. In between class attendance and her half-time education and reference assignment in the Galter Library, Pam will begin her practicum working in Dr. Longnecker's laboratory. Pam will assist Dr. Longnecker in his investigations into the properties of glycoproteins essential for herpes virus entry and compare their structural and sequence similarities across species. The purpose of this type of protein investigation is to assist the laboratory in determining the structural and functional regions of these proteins in order to better determine the mechanisms of herpes virus infection. Pam's research training will consist of her lab experience, including the production of one and possibly two peer-reviewed papers with Dr. Longnecker, along with a research project assessing the information needs of bioscientists at the medical school. The outcome of this assessment phase will be an instructional plan for the basic sciences along with the development of appropriate instruction in the use of molecular biology analysis tools, their values and limits.

Pam earned her bachelor's degree in psychobiology from Oberlin College in 1986 and her master's degree in library/information science in 2005 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Pam has nearly 20 years of experience in laboratory science working as a research assistant and laboratory manager at Loyola University and here at the medical school. A two-year stint as a library assistant in Loyola's law school library convinced her to pursue her professional degree in librarianship.

At the conclusion of her fellowship, Pam will have expert knowledge and skills in bioinformatics to provide the leadership necessary to extend information services to the medical school's growing research programs. According to the NLM program announcement, "the informationist brings information science and knowledge management expertise to the place where information is being sought and applied. Additionally, the informationist has sufficient knowledge of the application domain to be an effective peer member in professional teams. Working side-by-by side with other professionals and scientists in the chosen setting, the informationist is in a unique position to improve approaches to knowledge integration and management, and thus to contribute to improved health and scientific advances."

Pam has the support and encouragement of her Galter colleagues as she pursues the challenges offered by this important fellowship. In some ways, Pam's fellowship marks the beginning of a new kind of librarianship at the medical school. The library's new liaison program follows some of the informationist model where librarians work closely with users in their research, education or clinical specialties to make sure information needs are met and users are trained and educated to incorporate scholarly information into their professional work. We congratulate Pam on receiving this important fellowship.

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