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LIS 662 Information Services for Diverse Client Groups

Assignment 3 - Term Project Product

Personal Librarian for URVM Students

Without useful feedback from the survey of students who are members of groups that are underrepresented in veterinary medicine (URVM), I have decided to move forward with establishing a Personal Librarian at the Veterinary Medicine Library (VML) for URVM students.

Alternate Products

Several alternate products were proposed as part of the survey, but were ruled out. Each of these have been anecdotally suggested by patrons in the past, but there has never been an organized effort to solicit this type of feedback, so it is unclear what level of support each one has.

- **Overnight & Early Morning Hours** - Patrons have often requested 24-hour access to the VML, or at least extended hours. Extending hours with VML staff (including student workers) would require a significant increase to the VML's wages budget. It might be possible to offer some sort of "unstaffed" access, either through use of a non-VML security guard or possibly remote monitoring software. Even in pre-pandemic times, patron use of the VML during existing morning (generally 7:00 am during the week) and nighttime (generally 11:00 pm during the week) was extremely low, and given the considerable complexity and cost of this option, it is not being pursued at this time.
- **Organized Study Sessions** - This would involve regularly scheduled study group events offered within the VML. They could be organized by specific courses (Veterinary Pathology I, Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery II) or more specific topics (The Spinal Nerves, ECG Interpretation). This would require significant input and participation from the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM), either officially by having them organized and facilitated by staff, or unofficially by having students, residents and interns act as peer facilitators. Due to this level of complexity, this option is not being pursued.
- **Social Events** - This option would involve casual, extracurricular events, planned and organized by VML staff. Potential ideas would include movie nights, craft/makerspace demonstrations (knitting, 3D design, etc), book groups, and more. Given the challenges of carrying out these activities during the pandemic,

this option is not being strongly pursued, but VML staff hopes to plan limited social events once indoor activities can return to more normal levels.

All these are potential future products, especially as we are able to get actionable feedback from URVM students.

Personal Librarian Concept

The product that will be moved forward is a Personal Librarian program, targeted specifically at URVM students. Originating in 1996 at the The Cushing/Whitney Medical Library at the Yale School of Medicine, the personal librarian concept provides each individual incoming student with a specific library professional (their Personal Librarian, or PL) to contact for any and all informational needs. The PL contacts the student several times during the year, as a reminder, and if they are contacted by one of their students, they either assist directly, or refer the student elsewhere within the library. A 2007 study looking at the results of the program over several years indicated that students are very satisfied with the responses they get from their PL, and it is not a significant additional workload for the librarians (Spak & Glover, 2007). This concept has since spread to many other college and university libraries across the country and the world. It has specifically been used to target students who identify as members of minority groups, with similar success (Melançon & Goebel, 2016).

NC State University already offers PL services to several types of patrons. First-year and transfer students are assigned a PL based on their college (NC State University, 2021), additionally, the VML has recently created a PL program for House Officers (the group of residents and interns at the CVM and the NC State Veterinary Hospital) that has not yet been formally assessed, but is returning good anecdotal results.

The PL program for URVM students will follow the same model. The additional challenge in this case will be identifying the students to be served. There would be several options, and appropriate groups and individuals will have to be consulted prior to making a decision. One option would be to use campus registration data to select students who have self-identified as Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian, or Pacific Islander. This is a simple solution and will include every student who self-identifies, but perhaps sends an undesired message that the College and the VML are monitoring these students in a way that might be unwelcome. A second option would be to announce the PL program to the College in general and allow students to opt-in if they would like to participate. Unfortunately this means that students that might need the most support would not participate, especially if they do not want others to know that they need help. Additionally, this would increase the chance that white students would object to the

narrow focus of the program. A third option would be to advertise the program only at events and meetings that are likely to have high attendance from URVM students, such as the two student groups that operate for the benefit of students of color and Latino students. This means that the program would be offered directly to students who can take advantage of it, but there may be URVM students who do not attend those events, for whatever reason.

A VML librarian will be assigned to each of the students (likely a single librarian for all participants). The VML does not currently have a librarian of color, though we do have a Black paraprofessional who serves as a PL for the House Officer PL program. In the discussions mentioned above, we can also discuss whether or not it is preferable to have a person of color serve as the PL. The PL will send an introductory email to all of the student participants, and then additional emails twice during the first semester of the program, with useful information or just as a reminder of the program.

For tracking and assessment purposes, we will monitor the program in several ways. First, using the email software that is currently used for the House Officer PL program, we can track the percentage of recipients that open each email, and the percentage that reply. We will also track the number of consultation appointments these students make with their PLs and referrals made to other staff. We don't need particularly high levels of these metrics to consider the program a success, any responses and consultations are ones that might not have existed otherwise, and are a net benefit for the users and the VML.

Summary

Especially given the lack of response to the initial survey, it will be crucial to engage with the community before rolling out this product. There are significant decisions still to be made, and ones that will greatly affect the way this project is viewed by URVM students, and it would be irresponsible to not consider their perspective before rolling it out. We may find that there are no suitable ways to resolve the question of how to identify and reach out to URVM students in a way that is appropriate, in which case we would need to reconsider the entire concept, but it is important to be willing to do that, if the project as designed will not be beneficial to the community.

References

- Melançon, J., & Goebel, N. (2016). Personal Librarian for Aboriginal Students: A Programmatic Assessment. *College & Research Libraries*, 77(2), 184–196.
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- Spak, J. M., & Glover, J. G. (2007). The Personal Librarian Program: An Evaluation of a Cushing/Whitney Medical Library Outreach Initiative. *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, 26(4), 15–25. https://doi.org/10.1300/J115v26n04_02