

Learning from Afar: Distance Education Degree Opportunities for the Working Health Sciences Paraprofessional

Purpose: To explore distance education options for working paraprofessionals by surveying the opportunities offered by United States ALA-accredited library schools, with an emphasis on those courses relevant to a career in the health sciences.

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Brief Description: Health sciences libraries can present great career opportunities, but a master's degree is required for all librarian positions. For paraprofessionals interested in advancement, this can be a major stumbling block. While they may wish to earn a master's, life's circumstances often prevent them leaving their position and relocating to attend library school. Fortunately, many schools in recent years have capitalized on technology to provide an alternative option: distance education. Programs range from once weekly "commuter" classes to completely online offerings. This poster presents an assessment of the nationwide opportunities available to provide library assistants with new options for their professional development.

Methods: A list of active library schools was compiled from the ALA list of accredited schools (n=56). Of those, distance education offerings were examined through departmental English language web pages (n=54). Any health sciences course offerings, specializations or dual degrees were noted. The literature was also assessed for reviews of these programs.

Results: While 44.4% of library school programs include some online courses, there are surprisingly few library schools that provide online degrees: only twelve programs can be completed with minimal residency requirements. Satellite sites, held in either physically remote locations (29.6%) or via video conferencing (27.8%) are also popular distance education options. Over one third of the schools (37.0%) offered no distance education options at all. (See Figure 1)

Several schools also offer health science specializations (11.1%) or related dual master's degrees (7.4%) relevant to the health sciences. Of those that do not, most still offer some science course offerings (74.1%). (See Figure 2)

A major problem with the data collection process was the varying information available on the web sites. While most schools provide distance education and course information, the pages rarely specify which classes are offered in the online format. With more time, personal communication with each school will fill in that missing data and supply a more complete picture of health sciences remote learning opportunities.

In addition, little literature exists on the programs being offered. What has been published tends to be self-generated and publicity oriented. Further objective comparison of these services would enable potential students to make a better informed decision.

Conclusions: There are several quality distance education programs currently offered nationwide (see back for program listings). Some offer opportunities specific to the working health sciences paraprofessional. By enrolling in these programs, ambitious library assistants can effectively pursue their career development while maintaining their current position.

Figure 1

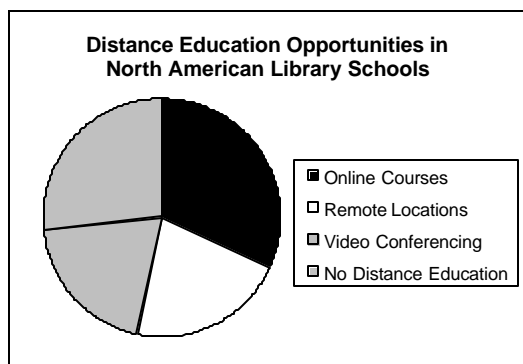
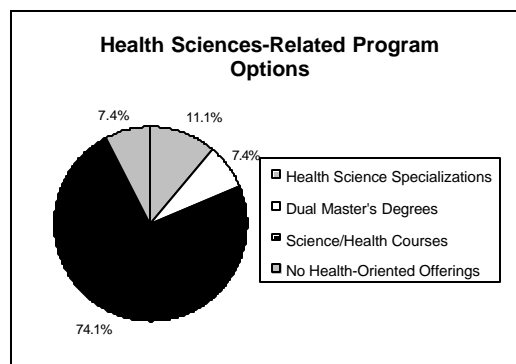


Figure 2



Online Library School Degree Opportunities

Clarion University of Pennsylvania Clarion, PA http:// www.clarion.edu/libsci	❖ University of Oklahoma Norman, OK http:// www.ou.edu/cas/slisc
● Drexel University Philadelphia, PA http:// www.cis.drexel.edu	❖ University of Pittsburgh Pittsburgh, PA http:// www.sis.pitt.edu
North Carolina Central University Durham, NC http:// www.nccuslis.org	University of Southern Mississippi Hattiesburg, MS http:// www.usm.edu/~slis
Syracuse University Syracuse, NY http:// www.istweb.syr.edu	University of Tennessee Knoxville, TN http:// www.sis.utk.edu
❖ Texas Woman's University Denton, TX http:// www.twu.edu/cope/slisc	University of Washington Seattle, WA http:// www.ischool.washington.edu
● University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Champaign, IL http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu	University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Milwaukee, WI http:// www.uwm.edu/Dept/SOIS

- Higher Curricular Emphasis on the Health Sciences (3+ classes in course catalog)
- ❖ Health Sciences Specializations or Dual Degrees Offered

Selected Resources

Tyler A. A survey of distance learning library and information science courses delivered via the Internet. *Education for Information*. 2001 Mar; 19(1):47-59.

Oder N. LIS Distance Ed moves ahead. *Library Journal*. 2001 Oct; 126(16):54-6.

Ardis SB. A tale of two classes: teaching science and technology reference sources both traditionally and through distance education. *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*. Spring 2003; (37). Available online at: <http://www.istl.org/03-spring/article7.html>.

Skhal KJ. Confessions of a Covert Library Student: Distance Education and the Working Paraprofessional. *Latitudes*. 2003 Jul/Aug; 12(4). Available online at: <http://nml.gov/psr/lat/v12n4/confessions.html>.