



## Science Libraries Want You!

Are you looking for a career change? Would you like to explore a field that needs people with your background, provides room for advancement, has openings across the world, and allows you to combine Cell Biology with new skills? If so, you might be interested in learning more about science librarianship.

There is a growing need for librarians who have subject specialties in science. In fact, libraries often find hiring librarians with strong science backgrounds difficult. With a Ph.D. and/or research background in Cell Biology, you will stand out when applying for jobs in academic, corporate, and government libraries whose patrons have scientific information needs.

### The Science Librarian's Role

"I do believe science backgrounds will be very valuable, especially for librarians who work closely with researchers," says Jean Shipman, Associate University Librarian, VCU Libraries, Virginia Commonwealth University, and President of the Medical Library Association (MLA). "As more and more data is produced by research, the need for organizing this massive volume of data can be met by the skills offered

by a librarian. Having the science knowledge base to be able to understand the data will be critical in order to properly organize it."

In a university setting, science librarians often serve as liaisons with science departments. Take the example of Michele Tennant, Bioinformatics Librarian with the University of Florida's (UF) Health Science Center Libraries and the UF Genetics Institute. Tennant received her Ph.D. in Biology and then earned a Master of Library Science (MLS) degree from library school at UCLA. She is a liaison to the most "genetic" of the College of Medicine's (COM) basic science departments (Molecular Genetics and Microbiology, Physiology and Functional Genomics, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, and Anatomy and Cell Biology), as well as the COM's Interdisciplinary (Ph.D.) Program in Biomedical Sciences.

"Much of my time is spent teaching the libraries' clients how to use genetics and molecular biology fact-based databases, such as GenBank and BLAST," she explains. "I teach in the first year medical student curriculum, a Ph.D.-level Bioinformatics course, and undergraduate classes in Biophysical Chemistry and general Genetics. I am responsible for collection development and determine which new resources to purchase in the basic sciences. I provide in-person, phone, and email reference and consultation services related to genetics/bioinformatics resources, serve on the UF Genetics Institute's Executive Committee, run its seminar series and lead its web page development team, and serve on the curriculum committee for the university's fledgling Genetics Ph.D. program."

### Accelerated Need, Good Opportunity

Informatics—the organization, analysis, management, and use of information in health care—is a growing area of information science as well. "The need [for librarians with science backgrounds] is accelerating with bioinformatics and biocomputational efforts. The need is also prevalent within the pharmaceutical research and development areas," says MLA's Shipman. "The combination of a science background and information discovery and retrieval skills constitutes the skill set of a research 'informationist.'"

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Often, library jobs provide long-term security, potential for promotion, and excellent benefits. Academic librarians typically are placed on a tenure track, and are expected to conduct research, teach, and provide community service. Salaries are typically at least as much as or higher than postdoc stipends. The number of job opportunities in the field is growing.

If you've read this far and are still interested in starting a career as a science librarian, it is likely that the only thing standing between you and your dream library job is the MLS degree that many (but not all) library jobs require. There are 56 American Library Association-accredited library schools in the U.S. Several of them offer the degree online. Many programs have jobs for graduate assistants that pay a stipend and cover tuition costs. You can finish your degree in as little as a year, although two years is the norm.

The library field needs people like you to provide high-quality services to its science communities. "The knowledge I gained through my biology Ph.D. program, coupled with the MLS degree, has allowed me to develop fruitful collaborations with research faculty, postdocs, and graduate and undergraduate students," Tennant emphasizes. If you pursue a career in science librarianship, your background in science will be highly valued by your employer, and you will use your science background and knowledge to help others find the information they need to succeed. ■

—Cindy Boeke  
Assistant Curator, ASCB Image & Video Library

For more information on science librarian careers, ASCB Annual Meeting attendees can speak with Boeke at the WICB Career Lunch on December 11, 2006, in San Diego.

## Resources

American Library Association: <http://ala.org/>. Click on Education and Careers to access job boards for ALA as well as the Association of College and Research Libraries.

ALA List of Accredited MLS programs: [www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/lisdirb/Alphaaccred.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/lisdirb/Alphaaccred.htm)

Association of Research Libraries Annual Salary Survey: [www.arl.org/stats/pubpdf/ss04.pdf](http://www.arl.org/stats/pubpdf/ss04.pdf)

American Medical Informatics Society: [www.amia.org/index.asp](http://www.amia.org/index.asp); For jobs: [www.amia.org/inside/jobex/joblist.asp](http://www.amia.org/inside/jobex/joblist.asp)

Biofeedback. Newsletter from Biomedical and Life Sciences Division, Special Libraries Association: [www.sla.org/division/dbio/Biofeedback/index.htm](http://www.sla.org/division/dbio/Biofeedback/index.htm)

Biomedical and Life Sciences Division, Special Libraries Association: <http://units.sla.org/division/dbio/> (Note: Join the listserv to receive job postings from around the U.S.: <http://units.sla.org/division/dbio/listserv.htm>)

Informationist/Information Specialist in Context Concept: [www.mlanet.org/research/informationist/](http://www.mlanet.org/research/informationist/)

Journal of the Medical Library Association focus issue on building the role of medical libraries in bioinformatics: [www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/tocrender.fcgi?id=133339](http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/tocrender.fcgi?id=133339)

Medical Library Association: <http://mlanet.org>. For jobs: [www.mlanet.org/jobs/jobs.html](http://www.mlanet.org/jobs/jobs.html)

Medical Library Association: Medical Informatics Section: [www.medinfo.mlanet.org/](http://www.medinfo.mlanet.org/)

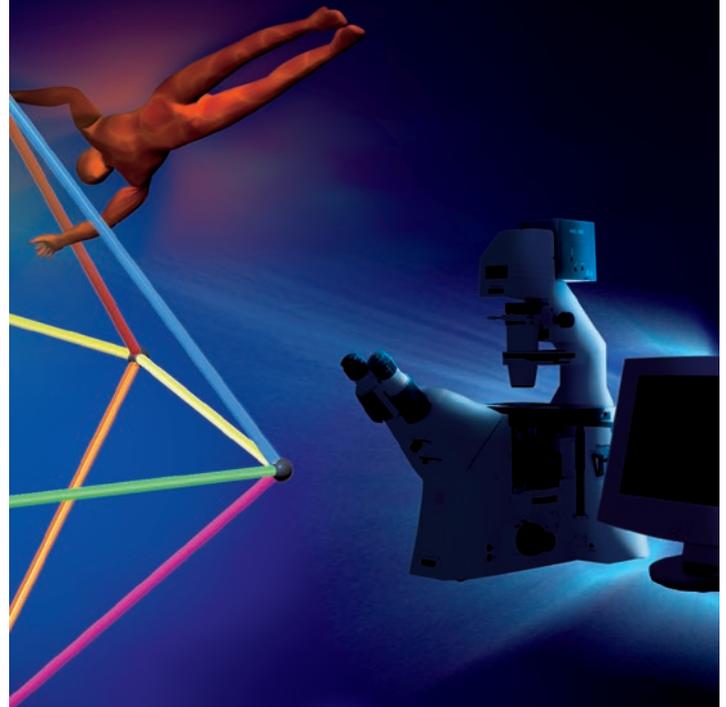
Medical Library Association: Section web sites: [www.mlanet.org/sections/sections.html](http://www.mlanet.org/sections/sections.html)

Special Libraries Association: [/www.sla.org/](http://www.sla.org/). Click on Careers to view jobs at corporate, government, and other special libraries.

Todd Gilman columns in the Chronicle.com (document the transition of an English Ph.D. into the realm of academic librarianship): [http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/archives/fp/authors/todd\\_gilman/fp\\_articles.html](http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/archives/fp/authors/todd_gilman/fp_articles.html)

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