

## **All about the Academy of Health Information Professionals: Fact or Fiction?**

Written by Tracy Powell, AHIP, Chair, MLA Credentialing Committee, 2008/09

The members of MLA's Credentialing Committee, the group that administers the Academy of Health Information Professionals (AHIP), find that there is often confusion about what the purpose of the academy is, how it works, and how it can help you. In 2006, an MLA chapter-wide survey was conducted to gather input on the academy, and we have used that input to explain facets of the program and to try to dispel some myths.

Test your academy knowledge! Are the following statements about the academy true or false?

### **MLA has long had a program for credentialing health sciences librarians and is a leader in this area among library organizations.**

*True.* MLA has had some form of credentialing program for health sciences librarians since 1949. The Academy of Health Information Professionals was established in 1993 as the latest credentialing program and replaced a certification testing procedure. For more information, see MLA's *Code for the Credentialing of Health Information Professionals* (<http://www.mlanet.org/academy/code.html>) and the following articles:

- Darling L. The view behind and ahead: implications of certification. *Bull Med Libr Assoc.* 1973 Oct;61(4):375–86.
- Bell JAH. History of the Medical Library Association's credentialing program. *Bull Med Libr Assoc.* 1996 Jul;84(3):320–33.

### **I've earned my master's of library science (MLS) degree, so the additional academy credential would be of limited benefit to me.**

*False.* The master's of library science (MLS) degree prepares you academically to work in the field of librarianship. However, membership in the academy demonstrates your commitment to ongoing professional development and health sciences librarianship. In a rapidly changing work environment, the academy also exhibits to your employer your achievements and professional growth.

### **Membership in the academy does not result in increased professional recognition or salary increases.**

*False.* The importance placed on academy membership varies widely from institution to institution, however, it is known to be a preferred job requirement in many employment settings, and a few library institutions require academy membership for employment. The academy is not the same as a professional certification that requires ongoing testing. However, many academy members cite an increase in recognition of professional skill as a benefit of membership. One member indicated that she received the same benefit of extra leave time as other credentialed professionals in her institution.

MLA continues to promote the value of academy membership to employers through notification letters of the employee's membership and the *Why Should You Hire AHIP-credentialed Librarians?* brochure.

### **I can join the academy even without an MLS, as long as I have a master's degree and I am working in the field of health sciences librarianship.**

*True.* You must have a master's degree, usually an MLS from an ALA-accredited program. In cases where a master's degree is not an ALA-accredited MLS or is in another field, you must document coursework in the seven Professional Competencies defined by MLA

(<http://www.mlanet.org/academy/competency.html>) to become a member of the academy. Once the core academic preparation is in place, you are ready to build on it with continuing professional development, using the academy program as a framework.

**Applying for the academy takes a great deal of time and effort.**

*False.* Of course, it does take some time to apply to the academy the first time around. All forms and academy information are located at [www.mlanet.org/academy](http://www.mlanet.org/academy). The portfolio for first-time applicants must document the baseline qualifications for entry into the academy, and any points claimed. Once in the academy, renewal at the same level requires minimal paperwork, while renewal at a higher level requires the documentation of activity for points. Organization is the key! Familiarize yourself with the requirements. Print a copy of the point index as a reference that lists all activities that earn points. Many academy members have also commented on how beneficial it is to go through the process with someone who is already a member of the academy. The Credentialing Committee, MLA headquarters staff, and your chapter academy liaison are also ready to answer your questions and make the process smoother.

**It is really difficult to keep up with all the documentation I need for academy membership.**

*False.* The easiest way to keep up with your professional development activities is to capture them as you complete them. Useful AHIP tools are located at [www.mlanet.org/academy/marketing](http://www.mlanet.org/academy/marketing). (Some people use a spreadsheet, others use a file, while others find the PDA-based points manager useful. Use whatever method works best for you! As you receive letters, certificates, programs, and other documentation of activities, put them in a file and record them right away. If you keep up with your activities on an ongoing basis, you can see in plenty of time what you need to accomplish to reach your academy goals at next renewal. This process can also help you as you update your CV and prepare for annual performance evaluations or tenure review.

**If I renew at the same level, there is very little paperwork involved.**

*True.* When you renew your academy membership at the same level, you need to complete only two forms: FORM BIO and FORM LEDGER; additional documentation is not required.

**I can't claim academy points for activities that are my primary job duties.**

*True.* The academy program does not directly reflect how well you perform your job, because its focus is on continuing professional development. For the purposes of the academy, an activity may earn points if it is something that you do for professional enrichment that is beyond the scope of your day-to-day job and is not listed in your job requirements. For many of us, ongoing professional development is an expectation of our employment, and our involvement in the profession is reflected in our performance evaluations.

**There is a limit on the number of academy credits I can claim for continuing education offerings.**

*True.* You can claim a total of fifty points for continuing education when you join or renew membership in the academy. With those minimum fifty points, you can enter the academy at the Member level or renew your membership at the previously attained level. You need activities in addition to continuing education (CE) (along with other specified requirements) when you want to move to the Senior or Distinguished level of the academy. Because the purpose of the academy is to provide a framework for continuing professional development, a wider variety of activities is required to move to higher levels in the program.

**I can't get academy credit for continuing education unless it is offered by MLA.**

*False.* You can claim academy credit for a variety of CE activities (see the Academy Point Index for details). CE courses that are offered by MLA and the other specified preapproved sponsors are developed and evaluated according to standards of the sponsoring organization. Courses from these providers, including MLA, are approved automatically, while others require the completion of an Individual Participant Request (IPR) form. The IPR form allows you to provide information on the content of the course and the benefits received through your participation in courses offered by other sponsors.

**I can get academy points for attending local, regional, and national meetings other than MLA.**

*True.* You can claim 3 academy points per year for attending meetings. No documentation is required for MLA or MLA chapter meetings. For other professional meetings, a copy of your registration is required for documentation.

**If I want to claim points for attending MLA and chapter meetings, I have to provide copies of my registration or other documentation.**

*False.* You do not have to document attendance at MLA or chapter annual meetings. Documentation is required for attendance at other conferences. You may claim a total of three points per year for conference attendance. Activities you are involved in at conferences, such as presentations, may also count for academy points; refer to the Point Index for more information.

**I am active in organizations other than MLA but I cannot count those points towards the academy.**

*False.* Because the academy is a program for ongoing professional development and commitment to the profession, any activity in a professional library organization will earn credit.

**All the academy points I accumulate while I am a Provisional Member count when I move up to the next academy level.**

*True.* Provisional members of the academy are required to complete 8 hours of CE each year of their Provisional membership. These activities, in addition to any other activities that are eligible for academy points, are then used to move up to the next level of academy membership. A provisional member may apply for a higher level of academy membership after five years of post-degree health sciences library experience, with fifty points for Member level or eighty points, five of which are for professional organization activities, for Senior level.

**In order to qualify for Distinguished membership in the academy, I have to have some MLA activity.**

*True.* One of the goals of the academy, as stated in the *Code for the Credentialing of Health Information Professionals*, is “contributions to the advancement of the Medical Library Association.” Membership at the Distinguished level requires at least five points of activity related to MLA or its chapters in the preceding five years. That does not mean you have to attend MLA or chapter meetings. Many of the activities are things you can do at work, such as serving as a mentor for a Provisional member of the academy, onsite coordinator of an MLA teleconference, or developer a CE program for MLA or an MLA chapter

**When it comes to navigating the academy program, I’m on my own.**

*False.* There are a variety of resources available to help you on your academy journey! Provisional members of the academy are assigned a mentor to help guide them as they work to build their strengths in self-identified areas. Colleagues who are members of the academy already can be invaluable mentors to you as you go through the process. The MLANET website [www.mlanet.org/academy](http://www.mlanet.org/academy) includes all the information and forms you need to navigate the academy. Your MLA chapter academy liaison is another great source of assistance, and the MLA Credentialing Committee and staff liaison stand ready to answer your questions as well.