



MLA Podcast 002 - Emily Hurst Interviews Amy Blevins and Hannah Craven about COVID-19

Emily Hurst 0:07

My name is Emily Hurst and I am the Deputy Director at the VCU Libraries Tompkins-McCaw library for the Health Sciences located in Richmond, Virginia.

Amy Blevins 0:16

Hi, I'm Amy Blevins. I'm the Associate Director for public services at the Ruth Lilly Medical Library at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis.

Hannah Craven 0:28

Hello, my name is Hannah Craven and I'm the research and scholarly communications librarian at the Ruth Lilly Medical Library with Amy.

Emily Hurst 0:36

Alright, Amy and Hannah, thank you for joining us today. I am so glad that you're able to be on our podcast. I want to start off by thanking you for joining us during this time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Could you tell me a little bit about how you are coping with COVID-19 at your library?

Amy Blevins 0:57

Thanks Emily. We are happy to be here.

So really what we've been doing is having all of our staff and librarians work from home. One of the things that we're really happy we've been able to do is keep all of our part time and student workers working by expanding our chat service to nights and weekends so that we can accommodate their normal hours when they would be staffing the desk. The other thing we've been doing is we have three staff or three people, Rick and Terry and Michael who are going into the library at different times to scan books to keep our ILL services or interlibrary services running. We've been getting a lot of demand for older print materials lately. And then the other thing that we've done is Laura Menard has worked really hard to get all of our classes online. So the classes that we teach our med students, so she did that really quickly when everything happened back in March, and then she's preemptively preparing materials for the fall.

Hannah Craven 1:57

Yeah, we've also been working on a lot of things projects. For instance, I have been in-putting faculty scholarly products into our institutional repository, Scholarworks. And already five coworkers have volunteered to help me with that, so I just trained them and they've already been helping me upload faculty's work. So that's been very exciting. I also know that our research metrics librarian, Marian Ramirez has been working with other librarians to put information into Wikidata about local Indiana hospitals with information like their location and how many hospital beds, they have and ICU beds they have.

Emily Hurst 2:43

Great, thank you. It sounds like your teams are really staying connected and engaged with your research community and those that are using the library resources. So COVID-19 is challenging health professionals and health professions. What are some ways health sciences librarians are providing support for research into COVID-19 at your institution or within your state.

Amy Blevins 3:08

So one of the main ways that we've been helping is by participating in a rapid review team or rapid response team for COVID-19, where we find evidence-based answers to questions that come from Indiana state leadership. So our librarians have been working with the Indiana Clinical and Translational Science Institute's Monon Collaborative, and the Family and Social Services Administration of Indiana. They have a new partnership called WISE, W.I.S.E., which stands for Well-being Informed by Science and Evidence in Indiana. So what we've been doing there is helping with three separate initiatives. One of them is to answer key questions from State Leadership, as I mentioned before, the other thing that we're doing is we're working with experts and public health, modeling and surveillance, legal and ethical issues, communication issues and clinical care to quickly find updates in the literature so on a daily basis so that they can summarize the key articles to help people keep up with this massive amount of information that's coming out there. And then the third thing that we're doing is working with a daily digest. So every single day, there's a daily digest that comes out that kind of pulls all of these resources together for Indiana's frontline responders. So it shows the number of cases, the number of deaths, the number of hospital beds in use and things like that. So Hannah and I are working with a team of five librarians. So the librarians on that team are Hannah, who everybody's already met. Rachel Hinrichs, who's a health sciences librarian at University Library, Chelsea Miskin, who's our emerging technologies librarian at Ruth Lilly Medical Library, Miriam Murphy, who is the director and Senior Lecturer in Law at the Ruth Lilly Law Library, and Caitlin Pike, who's a health studies librarian at University Library. So it's a multiple library initiative.

Emily Hurst 5:16

Thank you for that overview. It sounds like your team is very busy helping and providing support for researchers on COVID-19. Are your librarians doing anything to support education around topics related to COVID-19?

Amy Blevins 5:32

Well, I am so glad you asked Emily. Our medical school is offering three different courses related to COVID-19. One of them was an elective and one of our librarians, Laura Menard, who's our assistant director for medical education and Access Services has been participating in those efforts. The first course was an elective where students designed a course for COVID-19 so it's very meta. And then our COVID-19 course is for our clinical clerkship students, we believe it is the only one in the country that's required for all students. And we're the largest medical school in the country. So that means that there are approximately 600 students participating in that course. And then there's going to be another elective where students, in the required course, will have an opportunity to produce a scholarly product based on the work they did in the COVID-19 course. So that's been very exciting. And of course, a lot of our librarians are answering questions related to doing rapid reviews, and answering clinical questions related to the pandemic.

Emily Hurst 6:37

Great, thank you, Amy. It does sound like your team is very involved with the research and education aspects around COVID-19. I want to ask Hannah, if you have any insights that you'd like to share about being involved with such a high impact research team?

Hannah Craven 6:54

Yeah, um, so I guess I presume this is what it might feel like to be a hospital librarian. So for instance, I can no longer just run a search and send all the citations to the patron and they get to look through the articles. So now I have to pick the most relevant and high-quality articles and annotate them myself. So that's been quite a challenge. And also, we have a quick turnaround time for the rapid response team of

less than 24 hours or sometimes much shorter if it's extremely urgent. And so that's been stressful, but it also has helped in a way keep my perfectionist tendencies at bay. So I can still get the job done quickly at a high level of quality.

And for that reason, I'm very grateful that we are on a team and I have always been able to ask for help when I'm stuck or overwhelmed. I was also I guess; I don't know if I was surprised or excited, but I was able to use some of my skills from when I was a lab manager before I was a librarian. So when this whole thing started getting off the ground, I just instinctively worked on some data management stuff like file management, creating README files, and organizing things that way. And then also, I think the biggest win with that has been deciding to use Zotero to manage and share all the citations for all three projects that Amy talked about. And really exciting was we reached out to Zotero and told them we were doing COVID research and they gave us free storage for a year. And they can do that for anybody doing COVID research. So that was really impressive of Zotero. I think the most incredible part of supporting this impactful research is knowing that we have a direct impact on policies and decisions being made. And that's exciting to me, but also kind of frightening, puts the pressure on. But I realized when I was helping plan the Denver March for Science in 2017, one of the reasons I was so motivated to help then was I wanted policies to be evidence-based. And now I'm seeing that in action and contributing to it in a small way. So that's been really, really important to me.

Emily Hurst 9:22

Great, thank you, Hannah. That's a very impressive resume and overview of the work that you're doing. It's really interesting to hear how your previous experiences and your previous background and job experiences have really played into this aspect of your work and supporting the research for COVID-19. Thank you for sharing that with us. Amy, with so much work going on for your team, how do you keep this group motivated?

Amy Blevins 9:51

That is a fantastic question Emily. And it is something that I don't want to say it's kept me up at night, but it has been a challenge at times. Because on the one hand, I want to make sure that everybody has a healthy work life balance. And on the other hand, we're in the middle of a pandemic. And the questions that were being asked are really important to state leadership's and, you know, influencing decision making about reopening the state and things like that. So what I've tried to do is keep an open communication with everyone who's on the team, and try to balance out the workload, reduce burnout, and try to prevent people from having to answer back-to-back questions. So every time a question comes to the team, I look at this tracking spreadsheet. And I think about who had the last question, who had the last high priority question? Because sometimes we've answered questions in three to four hours, which is very intense. And then ask people individually if they're comfortable or have the time or the bandwidth to take on another question. So I think that's been helpful, although Hannah can tell you more if that's true or not. And then I will say we work really closely with Amy Gilbert's and Emily Hardwick, who are part of WISE, and a little bit with Sarah Wikki as well. And they have just expressed so much gratitude for the work that we're doing. In fact, I got a really nice email yesterday saying that the annotated bibliography that Chelsea Amiskus put together actually influenced one of the governor's press conferences, or the answers that were presented at the governor's press conference. So I thought that was really exciting. And I try to share the sense of pride that we all have in the work that we're doing with our team and with external stakeholders and other people in our library that might not be working on the team. So Hannah, what are your thoughts as a person that I've been trying to help keep motivated and not burned out?

Hannah Craven 11:52

Yeah, I agree with everything you just said. In the beginning, I really wanted to help but I was also really worried about burnout and I was open about that with Amy. And I think she's done a great job protecting our time as much as possible. So I really appreciate that. And I already said it, but I'm very grateful that we're on a team so that no one person has to do all COVID research all the time for 40 hours a week, because I do not have the emotional capacity to do that right now. So very grateful that it's spread out over a couple of us.

Emily Hurst 12:33

Thank you, Amy and Hannah. And thank you, Hannah, for being so candid about the stress and the workload that this is for librarians. And Amy, thank you for keeping that in mind for your, your team really helping them not only stay motivated, but also stay mentally able to work on these questions and and feeling good with the support that they're getting from their library. It's really great to hear about the recognition of the work at the state level for your governor. And Amy, it's just great to hear that libraries are really making a difference in the way this topic is handled at the highest levels. Hannah, would you like to share a little bit more about some of the rewarding aspects of being involved in this research?

Hannah Craven 13:22

Yeah, of course. Um, so I think the first thing I noticed being on this research team is that it reduced my sense of ennui, which is like listlessness, or like no purpose in my work or something. So it really reduced that feeling I had and I'm extremely passionate about this work and knowing the impact that this research has helped reduce my stress and drive me to do this work. It's also interesting, normally our work does benefit the greater good by working with medical students and researchers and doctors, but this is more of a direct, immediate benefit to the greater community. So that's been really interesting. This is also kind of been like a PR move for librarianship. Like Amy said, all the people we're working with are super appreciative and now they know of all the amazing work librarians are capable of. So that also means our team takes more pride in the work we're doing. Lastly, I feel incredibly informed about the pandemic and COVID-19 and as a librarian, I think we can all agree that we think information is power. My friends and family now come to me with their coronavirus questions and I can give them an informed answer and help them either reduce their stress or maybe guide decisions they're trying to make, or even just tell them, there's not an answer for that yet. Because there's only so much news like my friends and family can handle and watch and myself included. So I'm happy to talk about what I've been learning with the people in my life who do not have a medical background.

Emily Hurst 15:06

Thank you, Hannah. That's a great point, just trying to help those that we know and that come to us with their questions deal with this information overload that's really happening during COVID-19. I'd like to ask you both about the Medical Library Association or MLA, and how some of the resources that MLA has created for COVID-19 might have been useful during your research or during this time.

Hannah Craven 15:34

Right off the bat, I think the search hedges have been really helpful. That was something we looked at immediately. And it was really nice to not have to create everything from scratch and have something to use or adapt from.

Amy Blevins 15:47

Yeah, I agree with Hannah. Having those search hedges is great. I also had the opportunity to participate in a webinar just a couple of days ago on critically appraising literature during the pandemic. And so it was nice to have the opportunity to chat with my colleagues but also to connect with my partners from CAIFL, the Critical Appraisal Institute for Librarians, because Marie Asher got that set up. And I got to work with Hank Wheeler and Rachel Panady. And we had some really great discussions about the way we feel about rapid reviews and preprints, in this time. I also want to give a shout out to Sally Gore and others who did the happy hour for the COVID-19 webinar series. That was really fun just to get a chance to relax and listen to some good music.

Emily Hurst 16:36

Great, thank you for everything from support for critical appraisal to search hedges and even a little levity in this time of COVID-19. Thank you so much for sharing with us everything that you've been engaged with related to COVID-19 from the Medical Library Association. Amy, can you tell me what being a member of MLA means to you?

Amy Blevins 17:00

So MLA is my professional home. I recently finished serving on the Board of Directors and serving on the Executive Board of Directors as the treasurer. I've had so many great experiences with networking, meeting Froleagues, to steal MJ Tooley's phrase, participating in caucuses and things like that. So anything from getting leadership experience in those smaller groups of MLA, and also with participating in continuing education and now teaching continuing education classes. All of that has been fantastic.

Emily Hurst 17:34

Great. And Hannah, how do you benefit from being part of MLA?

Hannah Craven 17:39

So I've been a librarian for almost two years, and in that time, I've taken several MLA's continuing education classes, and I've been able to attend MLA annual and a few regional MLA conferences as well. And I'm looking forward to virtually presenting in a couple months.

Emily Hurst 17:58

I want to thank you both for being on the podcast today and sharing with us your work with COVID-19. From research to education and everything in between. It's been really informative and enlightening to talk to you both. I am Emily Hurst and I am MLA.

Hannah Craven 18:17

I am Hannah Craven and I am MLA.

Amy Blevins 18:22

I am Amy Blevins and I am MLA.

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