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putting the pieces together: theory and practice

Editorial

JESLIB: Evolution of eScience Librarianship in the New England Region and Beyond

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In June 2008, Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick signed a $1 billion Life Sciences Initiative for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Since the University of Massachusetts (UMass) was highlighted as a partner to continue developments in life science research, UMass established a Life Sciences Task Force charged with "creating a University-wide aspirant vision in the life sciences and promoting inter-campus collaboration" (UMass LSTF 2008). Subsequently, the five directors of the UMass campus libraries began meeting regularly to determine how the libraries could become involved in collaborative initiatives designed to support the life sciences, in particular the data management aspects. At the same time, the Lamar Soutter Library, the medical school library, was in the middle of its second five-year contract from the National Library of Medicine, to serve as the regional library for the six New England states and preparing its response to continue for another five years. The NN/LM NER, as the regional library is affectionately called, and its network members began brainstorming how it can assist its science and health sciences librarians address the life science data research needs on their respective campuses and health care institutions. The following questions were asked, "What role can the NN/LM NER play in eScience? What competencies do
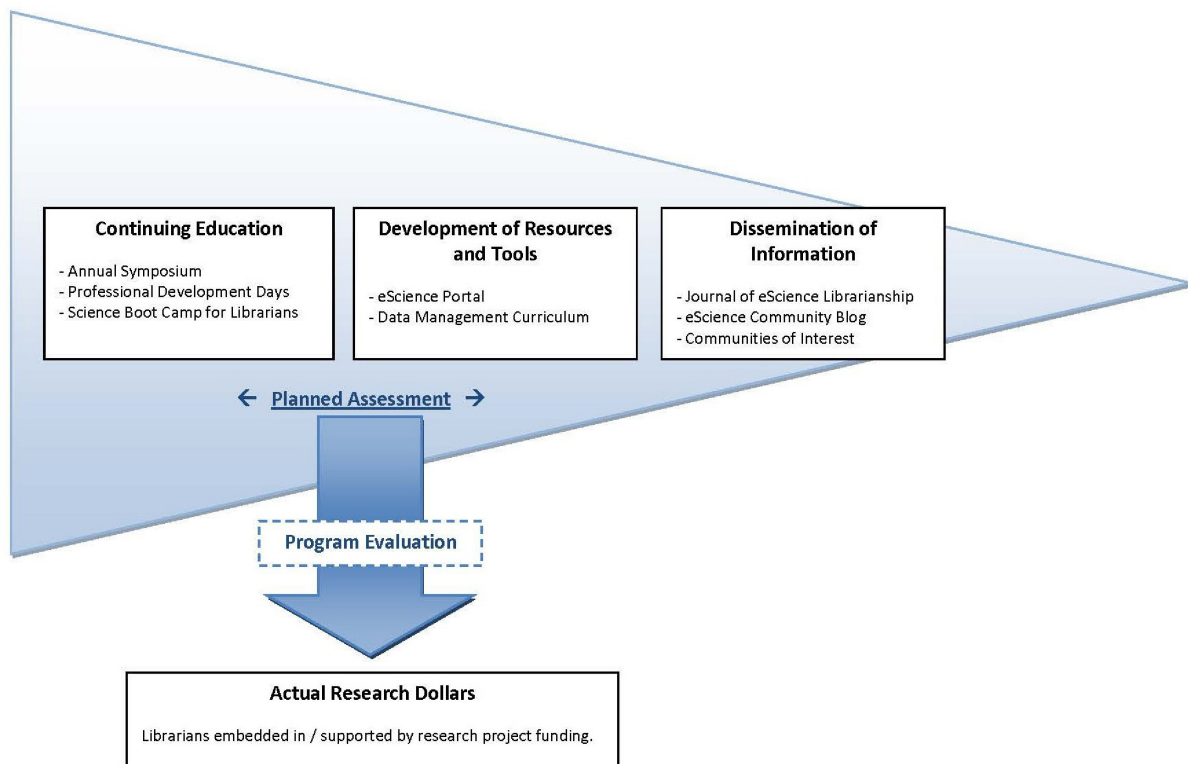
librarians in our region need to assist researchers with their data management and curation problems? What services and programs can we offer?"

With considerable input from librarians throughout New England, The Lamar Soutter Library, University of Massachusetts-Worcester has responded alone and with its partners (the other UMass campuses and others) by developing a strategic approach based on a multi-faceted model. Following a period of needs assessment and educational programming, resource tools and dissemination mechanisms were developed and offered over the past four years. A program evaluation is being planned for 2013. Following the evaluation, a revision of the model is anticipated.

The current model includes an education component, a tool based component, and a dissemination component. Figure 1 illustrates this approach.

With the development of this model of service and resource delivery, the New England Region (NER), under the leadership of the Lamar Soutter Library, is equipped with a new understanding of eScience and how it affects academic libraries and the science and health care institutions they serve. The

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Figure 1: Lamar Soutter Library eScience Model

NER is poised to participate in establishing a reinvention of science and health sciences librarianship in New England. The Lamar Soutter Library plans to continue to support eScience and the reinvention of science librarianship through further development of the educational programming, resource tools, and dissemination strategies depicted in this model. Subsequent editorials will outline in more detail these strategic initiatives.

The articles in this issue of JESLIB support the development of the NER approach. Steinhart and colleagues emphasize the uncertainty researchers have about how to meet the new NSF data management plan requirement. Librarians can play a role in assisting researchers to meet the requirement but need guidance. Johnston and her colleagues at the University of Minnesota stress the positive impact on the libraries when librarians connect with researchers

and campus entities like the Office of the Vice President for Research in order to deliver data management training. The Houston Symposium described by Joanne Romano and her colleagues identified emerging roles for librarians in data intensive science and the activities of another regional medical library in responding to the eScience needs of their network members. The California Digital Library -- like the regional medical library model -- focuses on building partnerships and collaborations among the University of California (UC) libraries in order to more effectively launch new services that meet the needs of UC researchers. Starr and colleagues describe the tools for data management services as well as the opportunities and challenges. The efforts by the regional medical library in Utah are similar to the other regions. And like the librarians in New England and Houston, the librarians in this region are concerned about the additional

competencies needed to work effectively with researchers. Creamer and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts Worcester report on their quest to answer this question. Their findings indicate librarians' uncertainty about their ability to assist researchers since most LIS data-related programs do not address scientific data management. The authors call upon the library schools to adapt their curriculum in order to help students and practicing librarians develop the knowledge and skills needed for scientific data curation and management.

These and other authors support librarians adopting new roles and engaging in data management practices. But how librarians can support the needs of researchers, how librarians can help researchers develop their data management plans, and how librarians can develop the skills necessary are the burning questions. Initiatives such as these described in this issue of JESLIB, as well as the efforts of the regional medical libraries in New England and elsewhere, are the first steps towards developing a strategic approach. Sharing these experiences in the Journal of eScience Librarianship will further encourage other libraries and librarians to take on these new and emerging roles.

References

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