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The MLA Research Agenda: Appraising the Best Available Evidence

Overview

The Research Agenda Committee (“the Committee”) of the MLA Research Section (“the Section”) has completed a second Delphi study to create a new MLA Research Agenda. The full report appears in the July 2012 issue of *Journal of the Medical Library Association*. The Research Agenda is a list of “the most important and answerable questions facing the profession.” The Committee proposes that in order to begin the process of answering these questions that teams of librarian researchers be deployed to conduct systematic reviews. These systematic reviews be conducted following a standard protocol for conducting systematic reviews with results stored in a centralized database using bibliographic management software. Volunteer members of the Research Section will peer-review these systematic reviews prior to their submission for publication.

Team formation

The Chair of the Research Section will issue a call by December 2012 to recruit volunteers to work on the top fifteen questions identified by the Delphi study. An article in the Fall 2012 issue of *Hypothesis* will also summarize this proposal to alert Research Section members and others who might want to be involved with this project. Ideally, enough volunteers will emerge to place three members per team per research question. One member of each team will serve as the principal investigator (PI) for the team. The Research Agenda Committee will work with other Research Section leaders to assign teams and select PIs from volunteer applications. This application form should be brief and the selection process should be as efficient as possible.

Each team will be appointed a liaison from the Research Agenda Committee. This liaison will serve as a consultant and help formulate the search strategy. Those members of teams who fulfill the criteria for co-authorship will be listed as authors on the final published article and any open-access documentation of the process (Eldredge 2009; Eldredge 2010).

Systematic review development process

1 Development of search strategy

- a The team will meet several times to: 1) refine the research question, 2) select appropriate databases and other grey literature sources such as conference papers and posters; and 3) devise search strategies. At a bare minimum each team should search 3-5 sources that cover the information science and health sciences literature.
- b The search strategies will follow an iterative approach and the workload will be shared among members. Search strategies will need to be adapted to different databases or grey literature repositories.
- c The search strategies will be peer reviewed by the liaison to that team as well as by one other peer reviewer with demonstrated expertise in the respective area of research.
- d It is extremely important that search strategies be fully documented and widely accessible in their entirety so they are replicable.

2 Identification of best evidence

- a We expect that there will be few high-quality studies for full systematic reviews and meta-analyses on these topics.
- b Teams must document the search process using the PRISMA flow chart template.
- c After running the searches and coming up with initial search results the three-member team will identify potentially relevant studies by reading abstracts or subject headings linked to already identified references.
- d Teams will employ explicit eligibility criteria for inclusion and exclusion of reviewed studies. The Committee recommends that the teams not only submit their search strategies for peer review but also have peer reviewers lend oversight to their inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3 Creation of literature database

- a Teams will work using tools that members agree upon with the recommendation by the Committee that they use collaborative

- tools to streamline the process and aid in development of a database of evidence/studies relative to the MLA Research Agenda.
- b The Committee proposes that each team use Mendeley because it is collaborative and open and thus not tied to one institution. Details of input will be forthcoming.

Resources:

Eldredge J. The research mentor: authorship part one: defining the article author. *Hypothesis* 2009 Fall; 21 (3): 11-14.

Eldredge J. The research mentor: authorship part two: order of authors. *Hypothesis* 2010 Spring; 22 (1): 8-11.

Harris MR. The librarian's roles in the systematic review process: a case study. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*. 2005 Jan;93(1):81-7.

Higgins JPT, Green S (editors). *Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of Interventions* Version 5.1.0 [updated March 2011]. The Cochrane Collaboration, 2011. Available from www.cochrane-handbook.org.

Liberati A, Altman DG, Tetzlaff J, Mulrow C, Gøtzsche PC, et al. (2009) The PRISMA Statement for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of studies that evaluate health care interventions: explanation and elaboration. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 151(4); See also: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

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Respectfully submitted,

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