



65 East Wacker Place • Suite 1900
Chicago, Illinois 60601-7246
PHONE 312.419.9094
FAX 312.419.8950
EMAIL info@mlahq.org
WEBSITE www.mlanet.org

June 15, 2010

Robert Rasmussen
Assistant Vice President for Systems Relations
LSU System Office
3810 W. Lakeshore Dr.
Room 104
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Sent via email: rrasmus@lsu.edu

Dear Mr. Rasmussen:

On behalf of the Medical Library Association (MLA), we are writing to express our concerns over the proposed closing of the Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Library and Information Science (SLIS). In this time of economic challenge, we recognize the financial constraints facing institutions, but also believe it is crucial to address the positive impact the School is making on behalf of the profession and the citizens of Louisiana.

We understand that LSU offers the only Master of Library and Information Science degree in the entire state, and is one of only twenty-five library schools that has full-time faculty members with a specialty interest in and regularly scheduled coursework on issues of medical librarianship. The June 9, 2010 online issue of *U.S. News & World Report* ranks LSU's SLIS 22nd in its latest rankings of Library and Information Science Programs, maintaining its 2009 ranking in the second quartile (<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-library-information-science-programs/rankings/page+3>).

As an association of more than 4,000 health information professionals worldwide, MLA maintains that librarians are key to the success of the organizations and communities in which they serve. Programs such as LSU's SLIS equips medical librarians with the unique education, skills and expertise to ensure that health care professionals, educators, students, researchers, and the public have access to invaluable information and resources that support high quality patient care and safety, education, and research.

Historically, graduates of LSU's SLIS have made notable contributions to the profession of health sciences librarianship. LSU SLIS graduates are librarians throughout the state of Louisiana practicing at the LSU Health Sciences Centers in Shreveport and New Orleans, Tulane Health Sciences Center, the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine and all of the Louisiana universities with programs in nursing and the allied health disciplines, such as Our Lady of the Lake College. They serve Ochsner, the VA, LSU, Baton Rouge Woman's, Baton Rouge General Medical Center and other hospitals throughout the state as well as commercial firms like Albemarle, research institutes like the LSU Pennington Biomedical Research Center, and organizations like the American Cancer Society. We understand that a new medical school will be opening at Louisiana College in Pineville in a few years, and will require medical librarians to support the program. Clearly, the citizens of Louisiana and the state's educational, health, business, and cultural institutions benefit from the education and training that SLIS has invested in these professionals. Following are examples of information programs and services that LSU SLIS graduates provide to Louisiana's citizens:

- LSU's Health Sciences Library receives federal funding from the National Library of Medicine to support its healthlinks initiative (<http://www.healthlinks.org>), an online springboard to reliable high quality consumer health information.
- Ochsner Library received \$135,000 in funding for their special Katrina project: Medical Library Recovery for Southeastern Louisiana. Under this initiative, library e-stations were placed at various Ochsner and nonaffiliated sites so that displaced health care providers and patients can access National Library of Medicine resources. This project allowed the reopening of the St. Anne Hospital Library, Baptist Hospital Library, Summit Hospital Library, and Ochsner Kenner Hospital Library, and strengthened the Ochsner Westbank Hospital Library. The Ochsner Library provides electronic resources to over 8,000 health care professionals throughout Louisiana.

Over the years, many SLIS graduates have served in leadership roles as MLA presidents, members of the Board of Directors, and chairs of association committees, chapters and sections. The education they have received has positioned them well to become future leaders of the profession. If the SLIS closes, it would be a tremendous loss to the profession and association.

Several SLIS alumni have been recognized for their significant contributions to the profession. We have highlighted a few recent MLA award winners and addressed how their contributions also benefit the state of Louisiana.

- MLA's 2008/2009 President Mary L. Ryan is an LSU graduate and was recognized by the SLIS as a 2009 outstanding alumni. Ms. Ryan chaired the South Central Academic Medical Libraries Consortium (SCAMeL) that developed and presented

the 2006 Disaster Preparedness Symposium to help libraries be better prepared for future disasters. Following Hurricane Katrina, Ms. Ryan's medical library at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences provided free interlibrary loan service for one year to all libraries affected by the disaster.

- SLIS alumni Ethel Madden of the Medical Library and Archives, Ochsner Clinic Foundation, New Orleans, received MLA's 2007 Lois Ann Colaianni Award for Excellence and Achievement in Hospital Librarianship for transforming the library from one of modest resources to a library that serves as an integral part of the Ochsner healthcare system. Following Hurricane Katrina, Madden opened the doors of the library to all healthcare professionals, librarians, students, patients, and community members in the greater New Orleans area. She was instrumental in forming the Medical Library Recovery Project that supplied twenty-six sites around south Louisiana with computers and printers to help facilitate patient and professional access to health information.
- SLIS alumni Renee Bougard was a co-recipient of MLA's 2006 President's Award in recognition of her invaluable contributions in response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster. In the aftermath of the hurricane, Bougard responded to colleagues in affected libraries in need by fielding calls, serving as a clearing house for information about damage and destruction, and providing timely reports and updates. She helped coordinate and arrange funding to affected medical librarians as they prepared to rebuild their libraries and communities. Ms. Bougard was a lead presenter in MLA's 2008 elearning course, "Survival Tips and Stores: Expanding the Library's Services in Times of Disaster."
- SLIS alumni Marianne Comegys, Director of LSU's Health Sciences Library, currently serves on the association's board of directors. Ms. Comegys received MLA's 2009 Carla J. Funk Governmental Relations Award for her outstanding leadership in support of the association's public policy program. While serving as Chair of MLA's Governmental Relations Committee and the Joint MLA/AAHSL Legislative Task Force, Ms. Comegys testified before Congress on more than one occasion in support of health information funding. Ms. Comegys has been instrumental in securing federal funding for the library that provides outreach services to the citizens of Louisiana (e.g., healthelinks).
- Although not an alumni, SLIS faculty member Michelynn McKnight has served on MLA's Board of Directors, as Chair of the Medical Library Education Section of MLA, as a CE instructor, and often presents papers at MLA meetings. Dr. McKnight expertise in the area of research, is captured in *the Journal of the Medical Library Association* article, "The Research Imperative Connection: MLA Policy and the Curricula of Schools of Library and Information Science." Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and teaching skills inspire her students to pursue careers in health sciences librarianship.

In closing, we urge the Board of Supervisors not to close the School of Library and Information Services. In this time when health professionals and the public have access to an overabundant amount of information through the Internet, it imperative that they have access to the skills of professional librarians to help them gain access to high quality, relevant, and accurate information that supports their health information needs. LSU's School of Library and Information Science has a proven track record of educating excellent library professionals who are serving the State of Louisiana exceptionally well. Closing the school would be a disservice to the state's citizens.

Sincerely,



Ruth Holst, AHIP, FMLA
President
Medical Library Association



Carla J. Funk, CAE
Executive Director
Medical Library Association