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Internet skills: an analysis of position advertisements 1991–1995

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet is quickly becoming an essential tool in many health sciences libraries, in both public service and technical service departments. A literature search revealed that most of the available material dealing with the Internet and the health sciences library focuses on the use of this tool and instruction in its use. In comparison, few studies focus on the impact of the Internet on the health sciences library.

To explore the Internet's impact on health sciences libraries, position advertisements in *MLA News* were examined. This study examined the demand for Internet skills in health sciences library positions and related it to Internet use within health sciences libraries. The methodology, which began to appear in library science literature in the 1980s, has been used in similar studies to examine the use of new technologies in the profession [1, 2].
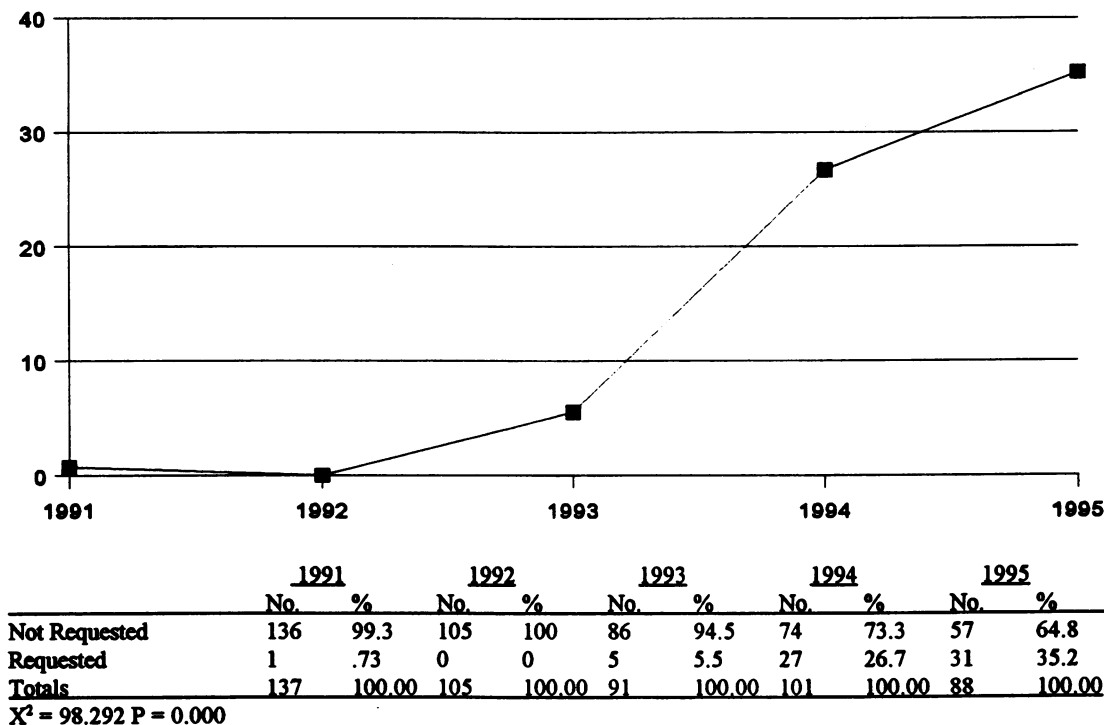
METHODOLOGY

Position advertisements placed in *MLA News* between 1991 and 1995 were examined. *MLA News* was selected as the data source because it is a recognized location for advertising health sciences library positions. Positions outside academically or clinically oriented health sciences libraries were eliminated. Duplicate and non-U.S. advertisements were also eliminated.

Each position was coded for Internet skills and library type. Interest in Internet skills was indicated as present only when a direct reference was made to the Internet or an Internet tool (e-mail, File Transfer Protocol, telnet, Gopher, World Wide Web, etc.) A note was made to indicate whether the library advertising the position was academic or clinical in nature. Systat [3] software was used to tabulate the data.

RESULTS

The contents of 522 position advertisements were coded. Overall, the number of positions advertised per year declined. In 1991, there were 137 positions,

Figure 1
Percentage of positions requesting Internet skills by year

	1991		1992		1993		1994		1995	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Not Requested	136	99.3	105	100	86	94.5	74	73.3	57	64.8
Requested	1	.73	0	0	5	5.5	27	26.7	31	35.2
Totals	137	100.00	105	100.00	91	100.00	101	100.00	88	100.00

$X^2 = 98.292$ $P = 0.000$

whereas in 1995 there were 88. The clinical positions accounted for only 64 (12.3%) of the 522 positions.

The chi-square test revealed significant differences in the number of advertisements requesting Internet skills from year to year (Figure 1). In 1991 only one advertisement of 137 requested Internet skills. By 1995, thirty-one (35.2%) of the positions required such skills. Internet skills were not requested at all in the 1992 advertisements. The sharpest increase in the demand for Internet skills occurred between 1993 and 1994.

A significant difference ($x^2 = 7.846$, $P = .005$) was found between the number of academic positions and the number of clinical positions requesting Internet skills. Over the five-year period, 14.2% of the academic advertisements indicated a need for Internet skills. For clinical positions, only 4% of advertisements indicated a need for Internet skills.

DISCUSSION

The percentage of positions requiring Internet skills increased during the five-year period, reflecting the growing importance of these skills within health sciences libraries. The data suggest that the number of libraries with Internet access increased during this period. As additional libraries gain access to the Internet

and place increased importance on its use, a growing number of library positions will require Internet skills.

Not surprisingly, the data revealed that the earliest advertisement requesting Internet skills specifically requested knowledge of e-mail. The 1991 advertisement sought applicants with the ability to use e-mail in the context of an interlibrary loan department. E-mail was among the earliest uses of the Internet among special librarians in the early 1990s [4]. The sharp increase in the number of positions requesting Internet skills between 1993 and 1994 probably reflects the wide availability of the World Wide Web browser Mosaic. In 1993, Mosaic helped popularize the Internet by introducing a user-friendly interface with multimedia capabilities [5].

The proportion of academic library positions requiring Internet skills was higher than the proportion of clinical library positions requiring the same skills. The difference coincides with the findings of a Medical Library Association (MLA) survey conducted in the fall of 1993. In the MLA survey, 72% of the responding academic libraries had Internet access, while only 24% of the responding clinical libraries had Internet access [6]. Universities were among the earliest players in the development of the Internet, increasing the likelihood that academic health sciences libraries would have

greater Internet access than clinical health sciences libraries.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed one aspect of the Internet's impact on health sciences libraries: changes in the desired qualifications of prospective personnel. Although insightful, this study was limited. An analysis of advertised positions examining Internet use in libraries cannot account for employed personnel already using the technology. Furthermore, the study relied on the advertising library's proper identification of the job skills needed for the position open. Further studies are needed to provide a complete picture of the changes the Internet is provoking in health sciences libraries.

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Electronic "library without walls" in a hospital library*

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INTRODUCTION

The continuing decrease in the cost of computer technology and increase in functionality, coupled with the rapid emergence of the Internet as a rich information resource, have made possible the development and use of online systems in a hospital library setting. These systems were previously possible only in larger, academic settings, and were often sponsored by the Integrated Advanced Information Management Systems (IAIMS) projects underwritten by grants from the National Library of Medicine. The "Library without Walls" project of the Health Sciences Library (HSL) of Maricopa Health System in Phoenix, Arizona, uses new technological capabilities to better accomplish its mission of facilitating access to knowledge-based information. The emphasis in this paper is not on hardware and software but on the planning and execution of a hospital-based technology project from the viewpoint of the library administrator. With the emphasis in hospitals changing to providing access centers for knowledge-based information, it is crucial for hospital libraries to develop information centers that increase access to and use of information throughout the hospital. The project reviewed in this paper may serve as a model to encourage other hospital libraries to develop integrated knowledge-based access centers.

BACKGROUND

The automation of hospital libraries is relatively new. Rankin noted in 1995 that "[m]any hospital libraries have been experimenting with automation projects, particularly those involving automation of specific functions. However, there are few successful models of integrated library systems in hospitals, and literature on the subject is sparse" [1]. Fuller discussed the role of hospital librarians in facilitating access to and use of Internet connectivity as information professionals.