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# The Academy of Health Information Professionals: a review of the first five years

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The Medical Library Association (MLA) has provided its members with a credentialing program since 1949. This article reports on a five-year review of the current program, the Academy of Health Information Professionals. The review included an analysis of the financial basis of the academy and the use of three different survey instruments designed to gather input from MLA members and other opinion leaders. A final report to the MLA Board of Directors set forth eight recommendations based on questions and concerns identified during the review process.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Medical Library Association (MLA) has provided its members with a credentialing program for nearly fifty years [1]. After considerable member debate and discussion, the association established the Academy of Health Information Professionals in 1989 as the latest iteration of formal credentialing with the following purposes:

1. to serve as a professional development and career recognition program to certify librarians on the basis of professional achievement; and
2. to reward the personal investment of time and effort required for exemplary professional performance and contributions to the profession.

Acting on its policy of reviewing association programs on a periodic basis, the MLA Board of Directors appointed a task force in 1995 to review the academy program, which had been operational for five years. This article describes the review process, the report and recommendations to the Board of Directors, and subsequent actions.

## BACKGROUND

The MLA Board of Directors asked five MLA members to complete a review of the Academy of Health Information Professionals with the assistance of various members of MLA's headquarters staff and a liaison to the board (see Appendix A for a list of task force members). The charge of the task force was to conduct

a general review, including but not limited to the following tasks:

1. assessing the stature of the academy within MLA and the larger profession;
2. reviewing the purpose of the program from the point of view of both MLA and academy members;
3. establishing a comprehensive review process with input from the MLA Board of directors;
4. reviewing the financial basis of the academy with assistance from MLA headquarters staff; and
5. presenting a review and recommendations to the MLA Board of Directors by the 1996 preconference board of directors meeting.

The task force met with MLA Executive Director Carla Funk and outgoing President Fred Roper at the association's annual meeting in May of 1995 to discuss the charge and potential approaches to fulfilling the tasks enumerated above. The group also discussed a number of specific questions and issues that it would be desirable to address in the review, such as:

- Can MLA Fellows be better integrated into the academy?
- Is the original purpose still what is needed? Is it being met?
- Is the financial base adequate for a five-year life cycle?
- Does the application and handling process work effectively? Is it efficient in the progression of steps and time commitments? Can it be moved from paper to electronic format?
- Should the academy governance be separated from

that of the association, and what would be the legal implications of such a change?

- Is there a way to resolve nomenclature problems involved with use of the terms "credentialing" and "certification"?
- Are there ways to address concerns raised by MLA members over time?

As a first step in fulfilling its charge, the task force prepared a plan of work which was approved by the MLA Board of Directors at its September 1995 meeting. The plan outlined steps for completing all aspects of the group's charge and for addressing as many of the related issues as possible. All of the task force's work was completed via electronic mail or telephone conversations, with the input and advice of members of the Credentialing Committee. Headquarters staff took responsibility for having major survey instruments typeset, reproduced, and mailed.

## METHODOLOGY

The task force prepared for its work by reviewing association documents related to the creation of the academy and its intended purposes. As the review progressed and it became apparent that a number of member concerns had been raised about not only the current but also some past versions of the credentialing program, Jo Ann Bell undertook a painstaking examination of the history of MLA's credentialing program since the adoption of the original Code for the Training and Certification of Medical Librarians in 1949 [2]. The perspective provided by this history was important in revealing the difficulty of supplying a complete solution to certain complex issues such as the balance between the cost and benefit of the program or the necessity of offering a program that can meet the needs of a very diverse association.

In order to address the first two points of its charge, the task force designed and administered three surveys. Appendix B contains the survey instrument used to gain input from former academy members who chose not to renew their membership. This survey was designed to gain information from a population whose credentialing needs appeared to be unmet by the program.

Appendix C contains the survey instrument used to gain input from a random subset of the MLA general membership. In December 1995 draft questionnaires were mailed to 125 health information professionals in Colorado to test the design of the lengthy instrument. There were thirty-two usable pilot surveys returned for a response rate of 25.6%, and data were compiled into a preliminary analysis. When the analysis showed that the instrument was largely successful but that certain questions appeared confusing or otherwise flawed, refinements were made before a revised instrument was distributed to approximately 750 indi-

viduals randomly selected from the association's membership database. The methodology for this second survey followed the general approach used by the MLA Knowledge and Skills Task Force in 1991 [3], with minor changes based on advice from the Research Service of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Library and Information Science. The Knowledge and Skills survey sample had been stratified by geographic area and by institutional setting in an attempt to obtain representative and balanced data from the United States and Canada and from both academic and hospital librarians. For the academy survey the sample was not stratified in any regard when it became clear that a purely random sample of 750 member records resulted in adequate records from all geographic areas and from various work settings.

Appendix D contains the survey instrument designed to assess how the academy was perceived by thirty-five library school deans, leaders of sister organizations, and prominent information professionals. The thirty-five individuals on this list were purposely selected according to their elected or appointed position, their national visibility and reputation, and the expectation that they would be familiar with MLA's credentialing program. The list included individuals from the American Library Association, American Association of Law Libraries, Association of Research Libraries, National Commission on Library and Information Science, Special Libraries Association, and other organizations.

Data from the survey instrument sent to the MLA general membership were analyzed with Epi Info (version 6.0), a software program developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Global Programme on AIDS, and the World Health Organization.

Frequencies of response were calculated for all survey questions except for one open-ended question. Cross-tabulations explored a number of possible correlations. For example, the number of years of professional experience were found to correlate with membership in the academy at various levels, preference as to the stringency of academy requirements, and willingness to pay a higher membership fee. Differences in response between hospital and academic librarians were analyzed for all questions and found to be negligible for most.

MLA Headquarters staff performed a retrospective study of the revenues and expenditures for the academy, and made projections regarding the size of the academy membership and the financial implications of all these data.

## SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Non-renewer feedback

In September 1995 surveys were mailed to 301 individuals who had not renewed their academy member-

ship. There were 125 usable surveys returned for a response rate of 42.5%. Respondents indicated that

- 60% were active in the medical library profession at the time of the survey; and
- 30% thought the academy fulfilled its purpose; 40% disagreed; and 30% did not respond to this question or added a written comment such as "not sure."

The five most common reasons for not renewing were that

- an excessive amount of time was required to prepare and submit applications (56%);
- there was a lack of tangible benefits (51%);
- the respondent's employer did not value academy benefits (46%);
- the credentialing fee was too high (36%); and
- the respondent had experienced a change in employment status (28%).

Extensive written comments were received from twenty-seven respondents. While some of the comments were unique, others were made by more than a few individuals. The repeated points formed clusters regarding

- elaborations on concerns about cost (ten respondents);
- the renewal decision being influenced by career changes (seven);
- burdensome elements of renewal process (seven);
- concerns about credit for activities (seven);
- the assertion that the academy favors academic over hospital librarians (six);
- elaborations on employers not valuing benefits (four);
- approval of the certification examination concept (three); and
- the opinion that headquarters should keep and provide records of activities (two).

The task force was pleased with both the return rate of the non-renewer survey and the number of respondents who took the time to write their comments. The task force concluded from the return rate and the comments that this population was very interested in the credentialing program and believed their input would be influential in future decisions about the academy. It is worth noting that 40% of the respondents were no longer active in the field, and it seems possible that a significant number of these respondents chose not to renew their academy membership because they were no longer in the field of health sciences librarianship.

### General member feedback

Responses to the pilot survey closely matched the results of the larger sampling, suggesting that this or other small populations could be used in the future to obtain member feedback quickly on specific issues. However, because some survey questions were modified for the larger population study, the data from the

pilot survey were not completely comparable to those from the final version.

Of 750 revised questionnaires distributed, 210 usable responses were received, for a rate of return of 28%. Six late responses were not included in the final data input, but appeared to be consistent with the overall picture of members' feedback. Questions on the survey were grouped into five broad topics, with demographic information being the fifth section of the instrument. For the purposes of discussion, however, it is helpful to begin with a recap of demographic data.

### General respondent information

Survey respondents who were members of the academy accounted for 69.3% of all responses. Of these, 18.3% were Senior Members and 55.6% were Distinguished Members. Responses regarding work settings indicated that 35.4% of the respondents worked in a hospital setting, 45.0% in academia, 18.2% in "other" settings, and 1.4% in a society library. Fully 65.2% had fifteen or more years of professional service and 98.5% held an accredited M.L.S. degree. Since only 25% of MLA members belong to the academy, it is surprising that the majority of survey respondents held academy credentials. Considering the limited response rate, percentage of academy members responding, and years of professional experience, it seems likely that academy members who care about the academy took the time to answer while those less interested in MLA's credentialing program self-selected out of responding to this survey. It should be noted that the low general response rate and low return of non-academy-member responses may result in some bias in favor of active academy members.

The composite respondent could be characterized as a senior member of the profession with an accredited master's degree, academy membership in one of the two highest levels, considerable job experience, and employment in either a hospital or an academic library. This composite shares some but not all the characteristics of the general MLA membership, a fact which should be kept in mind when considering the data. One could say that the survey results represent the opinions of MLA's most experienced and accomplished members, those with the broadest perspective. Conversely, one could say the results fail to reflect the opinions of those new to the field and those who may perceive fewer program benefits due to the nature of their job setting.

Academy membership has little if any impact with employers. About 17% of employers encouraged membership in the academy, but only 3% had an explicit policy and fewer than 6% required membership for promotion or job retention. The response to the general survey echoes the high percentage of non-renewers

who indicated that the academy lacked tangible benefits and was not valued by employers. Mid-way through its work, the task force chose not to survey employers because it appeared that they were ignorant of the credentialing program and that, hence, no helpful data would be gained. This seems to be borne out by what MLA members said about the program's failure to have an impact on the job.

### **The purpose and philosophy of the academy**

The majority of respondents (86.1%) indicated that MLA should continue a credentialing program in some form. This is congruent with other responses regarding the original purposes of the academy: 81.3% agreed that it does serve as a professional development and career recognition program; 66.8% said it rewards personal investment of time and effort. It is not clear why more than 30% felt their investment of personal time and effort was not rewarded.

Academy membership was also clearly seen as demonstrating personal commitment to the profession, encouraging professional and personal growth, and conferring honor or status. Three benefits ranked highest:

- encouragement of structured professional development,
- professional prestige, and
- recognition by peers.

Nearly 90% said the program should either remain unchanged (53.4%) or be modified to achieve broader purposes. Respondents suggested that the most desirable additional purposes of a broader program would be certifying the professional competency of members applying for a job, followed by providing economic benefits. Neither of these factors was seen as a benefit of the academy in its current form.

### **Program costs**

The academy was originally intended to be fully self-supporting. Survey respondents were fairly evenly split on the issue of subsidization versus full cost recovery, with hospital librarians somewhat in favor of the former. Most members wanted the academy membership fee to remain at \$125, with some willing to pay \$150 and others \$200. Some members would be willing to pay a higher fee for more benefits, but would not expect the academy to have fee-based activities. The review of program costs indicated that a fee of \$180 was the point at which the program would break even if no changes were made to the current process for handling applications.

### **The academy application process**

As anticipated, members reported being discouraged by some aspects of the application process, most notably the time required for locating records of personal

accomplishments and assembling a portfolio. Members wanted MLA to keep track of all their continuing education courses, association service, and meeting attendance so that they would not have to document these activities.

Three-fourths of respondents were interested in an electronic portfolio and 88% had access to the Web, but this may well be a reflection of the atypical profile of respondents. Although there was no preponderant endorsement, members appeared to favor some streamlining and simplification of the review process. This would seem to be in conflict with the desire to have the academy serve the added purposes of certifying competency and bringing economic reward, both of which would probably require a more stringent set of controls in order to be realized.

### **Content of the academy program**

Respondents felt that the academy requirements were appropriate and that no higher level should be established. On the issues of Fellows and governance (questions 17 and 18), the respondents had mixed feelings or were not comfortable with their level of understanding of the issues.

### **SURVEY OF INFORMATION OPINION LEADERS**

In April 1996, thirty-five short surveys were mailed to a select list of influential and knowledgeable information professionals who were not members of MLA (Appendix D). Only four responses were received, perhaps indicating that MLA's credentialing program is not very visible or well understood by other branches of the library and information science field.

### **COMPARISON AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

The charge of the task force suggested a number of key questions and issues that needed to be addressed, including the following:

**Is the original purpose of the academy still what is needed, and is it being realized?** Survey data from the general MLA membership indicated that the academy program is very successful in meeting its two intended purposes and also results in some additional benefits. Historically, the MLA credentialing program has focused on the attainment of minimum standards or measurable competencies. After much effort to define standards and certify competency, the association has elected to move away from this perilous goal and concentrate instead on the recognition of professional achievement. Some members continue to desire certification, however, and all members need to understand why the academy does not seek to guarantee competency. Likewise, not all members may be familiar with

MLA's very costly experience in developing and administering a certification examination.

**How do members feel about the cost of the program and what changes might be made to reduce cost or increase the value of benefits?** MLA members are quite price-sensitive in all regards, no less so regarding the academy. To date, the costs of the program have exceeded revenues. Association leaders must decide either to streamline the review process and thereby reduce costs, or to retain the current process and raise the price to \$200, the highest threshold acceptable to only 20% of the MLA membership. This fee level would probably result in a decrease in academy membership.

**To what extent do the application process and required paperwork discourage MLA members from applying to the academy and how might they be simplified?** The detailed instructions for assembling a professional portfolio, the amount of time necessary to gather records and the total amount of time required to complete the application were seen as significant barriers by respondents. These barriers were also the reason most commonly cited by those who chose not to renew. These impediments appear to argue strongly for simplifying the process for applicants by improving the detail of personal records in the association's membership database. Better records could reduce time spent by headquarters staff and the review panel, thus ameliorating a labor-intensive process.

**Are the criteria for the academy levels reasonable; what adjustment might be needed?** Respondents clearly wanted no changes in academy requirements or levels. Throughout the history of its credentialing program the association has engaged in debate about the specific requirements for the various tiers, suggesting that there is no final answer and that the concept of multiple levels is important to preserve.

**How should the Fellows relate to the academy?** Respondents appeared to have no firm opinions on how the Fellows should relate to the academy, and the survey process did not lend itself to addressing other issues related to the Fellows, such as selection criteria or benefits offered.

**Should the academy be separated from MLA as a self-governing body?** Again, respondents lacked full appreciation of the issues involved, especially the legal ramifications. The survey results suggested no direction regarding the separation of the academy from MLA.

**How do MLA members and other information professionals view the academy as a whole?** MLA mem-

bers have endorsed the program through their individual membership, their general endorsement of the need for a credentialing program, and their general agreement that the purposes of the academy are being fulfilled. The program does not and cannot meet the needs of every MLA member. Those who have changed fields or who, for other reasons, see little personal benefit in belonging to the academy seem to have opted out with varying degrees of acceptance or dissatisfaction.

## FINANCIAL ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

In August 1995 Raymond Naegele, MLA's director of financial and administrative services, prepared a financial summary of the credentialing cost center from 1987 through 1994.

### Original fiscal projections

When the Credentialing Committee made its 1987 recommendation to establish the Academy of Health Information Professionals, fiscal projections were prepared for the years 1987 through 1992 [4]. Those projections anticipated early losses leading to a modest net income. Early years were expected to demand significant hours of headquarters staff time, with the last three years needing very little of such central effort (only about 20% of a clerical plus minor time from the program director). The program also contained special pricing incentives at various points in order to encourage members to make the transition to the new credentialing program, and these expected "loss leaders" detracted from the income for the program. In approving the academy, the MLA Board of Directors intended that all costs would be fully recovered by appropriate fees so that no subsidy would be necessary from other sources.

### Actual expenses incurred

For most of its life, the academy has required much more headquarters staff time than was originally projected, thus resulting in much higher allocated expenses. Only during 1994, when the bulk of members were required to renew their five-year membership, did the program achieve a positive net revenue balance. These data indicate that the long-term viability of the program can be ensured by either raising fees to cover all costs or by reducing the allocated expenses (through drastically reducing the amount of time headquarters staff must contribute).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data suggest that the Academy of Health Information Professionals offers its members a number of

important benefits and is seen to have certain strengths, such as

- responding to the need for a credentialing program;
- providing a set of reasonable requirements for professional recognition in a tiered structure;
- achieving the original purposes for which it was devised; and
- lending prestige to the association within the larger profession.

The data also suggest that the academy has certain shortcomings, such as

- not meeting the needs of all members;
- having little impact with employers, especially in terms of economic benefits;
- not serving as a mechanism to certify the competency of MLA members; and
- requiring a laborious application process, which is in need of simplification.

#### Recommendations to the MLA Board of Directors

The academy review task force offered eight recommendations based on its review of all financial data and survey results:

**1. After due consideration, share the information in this report widely within the association.** The task force believed that further dialogue will help members better understand the intent and realistic purposes of the academy, including the strengths and weaknesses of the program as seen from multiple perspectives. MLA should take some pride in the accomplishments and success of the academy rather than dwelling solely on member needs that cannot be met by the program.

**2. Headquarters staff should assume the burden of maintaining better personal records for MLA members, thus sparing them the burden of some aspects of portfolio preparation.** The association's member record system should track and provide details about MLA continuing education activities, service to the association, and attendance at meetings. Such information would also be useful to other MLA units, including awards juries. Consequently, the cost of tracking member activities should not be allocated to the academy, but rather should be seen as an ongoing operating cost supporting general membership. Headquarters staff should work with the MLANET Task Force or another appropriate body to this end.

**3. Set the fee for five-year membership in the academy at \$150.** The recommended fee represents a modest increase over the \$125 fee established in 1989, and survey data suggest that members would accept the higher fee. Reducing headquarters staff time through

a more comprehensive member activity tracking system (recommendation 2) and increasing the program fee should achieve self-sufficiency for the academy.

**4. Appoint a separate task force to deal with the complex issues relating to MLA Fellows.** In December 1995, Director of Professional Development Reneta Webb prepared a historical perspective on MLA's Fellows and Honorary Members [5]. This report identifies the complex issues that need resolution and that exceeded the scope of the academy review task force. The issues are complicated enough to merit the attention of another small working group.

**5. Ask the Credentialing Committee to review and recommend action on credit given for publishing activities.** MLA members have pointed out that the academy is intended to reward the investment of personal time above and beyond that required by one's job description, yet some academic librarians are expected to publish and are given at least some release time for this work. It seems this should be taken into consideration, just as those paid to teach cannot claim academy credit for their teaching activities.

**6. Consider the failure of the academy to have an impact with employers, then decide what action, if any, to take.** The survey data demonstrated that few employers had an explicit policy on academy membership (presumably because they are unaware of it or do not see it as valuable) or required it as a condition of employment. While about 20% of the respondents indicated that they experienced some encouragement to belong, that seemed not to translate into economic rewards. Likewise, the survey reported that the academy was not an effective agent for certifying professional competency or for screening entrants into the field. These applications in the workplace are complex and may be beyond the realistic scope of a credentialing program for the association, but it behooves the board to consider the issues and perhaps consult with various units in deciding whether action is needed.

Member concern about economic and employment benefits has been a theme often repeated in the history of MLA's credentialing program. As health care reform continues to drive the downsizing of institutions and their libraries, it may be very important that academy membership confer some advantages in the marketplace.

**7. Make no change to the governance of the academy.** A viable academy requires that ongoing costs be kept under tight control; the survey suggested that members do not wish to pay more for increased benefits. Establishing an independent governance structure would most likely guarantee increased costs. As long

as the program focuses on professional recognition and does not seek to certify competency, the academy confers a distinction similar to other honors and awards bestowed by MLA's members upon their peers and the program can remain unchanged under the general umbrella of professional development.

**8. Move the application and review process to an electronic format as soon as is feasible.** A large majority of general survey respondents indicated their ability and willingness to handle the academy application via electronic channels. As a profession intent on remaining at the forefront of information technology, MLA must demonstrate its ability to efficiently manage all types of information in an electronic environment. Other professional groups are establishing computer-based text or electronic residency applications, and MLA will bolster its credibility by moving in the same direction.

#### **SUBSEQUENT DECISIONS AND ACTIONS**

The task force report and recommendations were considered by the MLA Board of Directors at its June and September 1996 meetings. Headquarters staff will explore options for maintaining more detailed personal records to track individual member activities. The board will work with the Credentialing Committee to disseminate the content and recommendations of the

task force review, and to further explore and resolve issues related to a number of the other recommendations. In response to the recommendation to raise the academy program fee, the board of directors voted to raise the fee to \$150 effective in 1997. In setting the new fee the board agreed that academy costs could be subsidized to a limited extent by general association dues. The board also established the Governance Task Force to make recommendations on the resolution of issues involving MLA Fellows. Development of the MLA Web site will continue, and electronic portfolio pages may be created.

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*Received March 1997; accepted May 1997*

#### **APPENDIX A**

##### **Medical Library Association Task Force to Review the Academy of Health Information Professionals**

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**APPENDIX B**

**Survey to MLA members who have not renewed membership in the Academy of Health Information Professionals of the Medical Library Association**

We are concerned that you decided not to renew your credentials in the Academy of Health Information Professionals. Would you please assist us by responding to the following questions? We have attached a stamped, addressed return envelope for your convenience.

1. Are you presently active in the medical library profession?     Yes     No    Comments:
2. The purpose of the MLA credentialing program is to recognize the personal investment of time and effort required for exemplary professional performance and contributions to the advancement of the Medical Library Association and the profession, from the entry level throughout one's professional career.  
     In your opinion does the AHIP program currently fulfill this purpose?     Yes     No    Comments:  
     If no, do you have suggestions for how the AHIP program can better fulfill your professional needs? Comments:
3. Specifically, why did you decide not to submit your credentials to AHIP? (*Check all that apply.*)  
      Credentialing fee to high  
      Change in employment or employment status  
      Time required to prepare and submit application is excessive  
      Lack of tangible benefits  
      Employer does not value benefits  
      Other:  
     Comments:
4. When were you scheduled to renew your membership in the Academy?  
      June 30, 1994                               September 30, 1994  
      March 31, 1995                             June 30, 1995

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. **Please return this page by September 22** to Reneta Webb, Ph.D., Director of Professional Development, Medical Library Association, Suite 300, Six North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60602-4805.

**APPENDIX C**

**Medical Library Association survey of members regarding the Academy of Health Information Professionals**

Section 1: Purpose & Philosophy of the Academy

The MLA Academy of Health Information Professionals was designed for two main purposes: as "a professional development and career recognition program" to "certify librarians on the basis of professional achievement" and to "reward the personal investment of time and effort required for exemplary professional performance and contributions to" the profession.

1. In your opinion, does the AHIP program currently fulfill the stated purposes?  
     • serves as a professional development and career recognition program                               yes     no  
     • rewards personal investment of time and effort     yes     no
- 2A. In your opinion, does the AHIP fulfill any of these additional purposes? (*check as many as apply*)  
      certifies professional competency when applying for a job                               encourages professional and personal growth  
      confers honor/status     provides economic benefits such as higher salary  
      controls quality of new entrants to the profession     recognizes equal contributions of other information professionals (non-librarians)  
      demonstrates personal commitment to the profession     other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2B. What do you consider to be the single most important benefit of belonging to the Academy? (*check only one*)  
      employer recognition     professional prestige  
      encourages structured professional development     recognition by my peers  
      important credential for pursuing other jobs     other: \_\_\_\_\_  
      positive impact on salary/fringe benefits
3. Do you believe the AHIP program should be . . . (*check only one*)  
      modified to achieve broader purposes     modified to achieve narrower purposes (*please skip to section 2*)  
      keep the same purposes it now has (*please skip to section 2*)
4. If you answered "modified to achieve BROADER purposes" to question 3, which of the following additional purposes should AHIP be specifically designed to serve? (*check as many as apply*)



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> certifies professional competency when applying for a job | <input type="checkbox"/> encourages professional and personal growth  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confers honor/status                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> provides economic benefits such as higher salary                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> controls quality of new entrants to the profession        | <input type="checkbox"/> recognizes equal contributions of other information professionals (non-librarians) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates personal commitment to the profession        | <input type="checkbox"/> other: (specify) _____   |

Section 2: Program Costs

5. The AHIP program was intended to be fully self-supporting through cost recovery from those who choose to be members rather than being subsidized from general MLA income. In your opinion, should the program . . . *(check only one)*
- continue to be required to fully recover its costs  
 be partially subsidized from other MLA income
- 6A. The current AHIP fee is \$125 for a five year membership. This fee does not cover the cost of maintaining the program. What is the HIGHEST fee you would be willing to pay for this five year membership?
- \$125       \$150       \$175       \$200       \$225       \$250
- 6B. Alternatively, the AHIP membership fee might remain the same if program costs can be reduced. How important is it to maintain the \$125 fee set in 1989?
- very important       somewhat important       not important
7. Should AHIP have a set of fee-based activities which it carries out in addition to those conducted by MLA as a whole, such as special speakers, CE opportunities or other programs?       yes       no
8. If you answered "yes" to question 7, what special benefits/activities would you suggest?
9. If you answered "yes" to question 7, would you be willing to pay a higher membership fee for more benefits?  
 yes       no

Section 3: AHIP Application Process

- 10A. Do you believe that concerns about any of the following aspects of the application process discourage potential members from applying? Circle Y(es) or N(o).
- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| clarity of application instructions                     | Y | N |
| ease of understanding structure of the Academy          | Y | N |
| locating records of professional development activities | Y | N |
| overall assembling of portfolio                         | Y | N |
| received timely notification of membership expiration   | Y | N |
| time between submission and receipt of certificate      | Y | N |
| types of activities which required documentation        | Y | N |
- 10B. If you believe some types of professional activities should **not** be documented, for which types would you suggest **waiving** the documentation requirement? *(check as many as apply)*
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> MLA CE courses                              | <input type="checkbox"/> MLA service                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other CE courses                            | <input type="checkbox"/> other professional association service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> academic courses taken for credit           | <input type="checkbox"/> conference attendance                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> publications, editing, software development | <input type="checkbox"/> consultations                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teaching and course development             | <input type="checkbox"/> funded grants                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> presentations and speeches                  |   |
11. Would you be interested in accessing/updating your portfolio electronically?       yes       no
12. Do you currently have the ability to access World Wide Web pages?       yes       no       I don't know
13. The current application process requires initial screening of the portfolio by Headquarters staff plus careful review by three MLA members serving on the Professional Recognition Review Panel. The process could be streamlined by eliminating some levels of review, but this may result in some cases where applicants are not matched with the proper Academy designation. In your opinion, is such simplification . . .
- highly desirable       somewhat desirable  
 somewhat undesirable       highly undesirable
14. The process could also be simplified for applicants and reviewers by reducing or eliminating the documentation required as evidence of professional activities. Is such simplification . . .
- highly desirable       somewhat desirable  
 somewhat undesirable       highly undesirable

Section 4: Content of the AHIP Program

Membership requirements for the top three levels of the Academy are:

- *Member*: M.L.S. or equivalent postgraduate degree; 5 years' professional experience; 50 hours of professional activities in the last 5 years
- *Senior Member*: same as Member, except 80 hours of professional activities including at least 5 hours' participation in professional association activities (not necessarily in MLA)

- *Distinguished Member*: M.L.S. or equivalent postgraduate degree; 10 years' professional experience; 120 hours of professional activities including 10 hours of professional association activities; at least 5 hours must include MLA activities
15. Approximately 26% of all MLA members belong to the Academy. About 27.5% of AHIP participants are at the Member level; 32.5% are at the Senior Member level; and 30.5% are at the Distinguished Member level. Do you believe the requirements for each level are . . .
    - not stringent enough       about right       too stringent
  16. Should the Academy establish a new level above that of Distinguished Member with correspondingly higher requirements?     yes     no
  17. Individuals who are named as Fellows of the Association are also granted Distinguished Member level membership in the Academy. Should Fellows hold a unique status in the AHIP program rather than being named Distinguished Member?     yes     no
  18. Two standing MLA committees determine the broad criteria for AHIP membership and conduct the peer review of applicant portfolios. Should MLA disband these committees and have the Academy establish its own system of governance?
    - yes       probably       no       I need more information on this issue.

Section 5: Respondent Information

19. Are you currently a member of the MLA Academy of Health Information Professionals?
  - yes     no (if no, please skip to question 22 below)
20. If you responded "yes" to question 1, at what level do you belong to the Academy?
  - Provisional or Associate       Member
  - Senior Member       Distinguished
21. When does your Academy membership expire?
22. Type of library in which you work:
  - hospital       academic
  - society       other: (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
23. Do you live in . . .  Canada     U.S.     other: (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
24. Number of years of professional library/information experience:
  - 0-4     5-9     10-15     15+
25. Do you have a library degree from an ALA-accredited program?
  - yes     no
26. Does your employer . . .
  - require AHIP membership for promotion or job retention       yes       no
  - encourage AHIP membership as an option for promotion or job retention       yes       no
  - have an explicit policy on AHIP membership       yes       no
27. Do you feel MLA should continue a credentialing program of some form?
  - yes     no

Thank you for sharing your opinions!!! Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed return envelope BY APRIL 15 to Professional Development Department, Medical Library Association, Suite 300, Six North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60602-4805.

APPENDIX D

**Medical Library Association survey of selected opinion leaders regarding the Academy of Health Information Professionals**

Part 1: Purpose & Philosophy of the Academy

The MLA Academy of Health Information Professionals (AHIP) was designed for two main purposes: to serve as "a professional development and career recognition program" to "certify librarians on the basis of professional achievement," and to "reward the personal investment of time and effort required for exemplary professional performance and contributions to" the profession.

1. Were you previously aware of the existence of the Academy?
  - yes (Please continue with the survey.)       no (Please return the survey.)
2. In your opinion does the AHIP program currently fulfill the stated purposes?
  - serves as a professional development and career recognition program       yes       no
  - rewards personal investment of time and effort       yes       no
- 3.A. In your opinion does the Academy fulfill any of these additional purposes? (check as many as apply)

- certifies professional competency when applying for a job
  - confers honor/status
  - controls quality of new members entering the profession
  - demonstrates personal commitment to the profession
  - encourages professional and personal growth
  - provides economic benefits such as higher salary
  - recognizes equal contributions of other information professionals (non-librarians)
  - other: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3.B. What do you consider to be the single most important benefit for an individual belonging to the Academy? (*check only ONE*)
- employer recognition
  - encouragement of structured professional development
  - important credential for pursuing other jobs
  - positive impact on salary/benefits
  - professional prestige
  - recognition by peers
  - other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. In your opinion is the Academy of Health Information Professionals: (*check all that apply*)
- a model for other branches of librarianship
  - a program that employers should value
  - of importance primarily to the Medical Library Association
5. If you are an educator, do you make your students aware of the Medical Library Association and the Academy prior to their graduation?
- yes     no     not applicable (not an educator)

Part 2: Structure of the Academy

The Academy of Health Information Professionals provides for provisional recognition of entry level practitioners as well as for established professionals. Membership requirements for the top three levels of the Academy are:

- *Member*: M.L.S. or equivalent graduate degree; five years' professional experience; fifty points of professional activities in the last five years
  - *Senior Member*: same as Member, except eighty points of professional activities including at least five points of participation in professional association activities (not necessarily in MLA)
  - *Distinguished Member*: M.L.S. or equivalent graduate degree; ten years' professional experience; one hundred twenty points of professional activities including ten hours of professional association activities; at least five hours must include MLA activities
6. Approximately 27% of all MLA members belong to the Academy. About 27.5% of AHIP participants are at the Member level; 32.5% are at the Senior Member level; and 30.5% are at the Distinguished Member level. Do you believe the requirements for each level are:
- not stringent enough     about right     too stringent
7. Should the Academy establish a new level above that of Distinguished Member, with correspondingly higher requirements?     yes     no

Thank you for sharing your opinions!!! Please return this survey to AHIP Survey, Denison Memorial Library-A003, 4200 E. Ninth Avenue, Denver, CO 80262.