**My Summer with the Rural Medicina Academy Summer Scholars**

By Kelly O’Brien

I had a unique experience this summer assisting in the development of the Rural Medicina Academy’s Summer Scholars Program. The Rural Medicina Academy, part of the National Center for Rural Health Professions here in Rockford, aims to address gaps for rural Latino/Hispanic youth that wish to pursue a career in the health sciences. The Summer Scholars Program is a six-week internship program designed to expose Latino/Hispanic students to health career pathways and professional skills development. Students completed a research project during their internship that they presented to the campus community at a closing ceremony. My role was working with the students to develop their research and professional skills.

This summer was the first time the Summer Scholars program was offered. The program director, Natalia Suarez, asked me to collaborate with her on developing some of the curriculum related to professional and research skills. We decided that the students would have six workshops in the library. The first was a simple tour of the library where I not only showed them our layout, but also explained our purpose, who we serve, a little bit about the research process, and how each of the staff members helps the library run. The next five session topics were: Email Etiquette, Online Presence, Health Sciences Databases, PubMed, Google, and Resume Development.

My first challenging in developing this curriculum was understanding the audience. Not only were these students much different than the graduate students I usually teach, but they also varied quite a bit in age. There were 15 students total. Some were as young as middle school, most were in high school, and a few had even completed a year or two of their undergraduate education. My goal was to adjust my teaching for a younger audience, and to try and make it both understandable for the youngest students, while remaining interesting and engaging for the older ones.

Secondly, I was tackling some topics that I felt qualified to teach, but had never taught before, such as how to develop and manage an online presence, email etiquette, and resume skills. Though these two challenges may seem to be the most significant, I was
also worried about interacting with middle school and high school students, which is not something I have much experience with.

Fortunately, the process of creating the new curriculum for the students went smoothly. I had a lot of knowledge stored up about online presence, email etiquette, and resume building from my recent stint on the job market, and knew some great sources to rely on to help me build their workshops. When teaching, I decided that making sure the youngest of the group could understand the content while throwing in some examples that would be relevant and interesting to even the older students would be the best way to equalize. And as it turns out, my worries about interacting with the students were unfounded, as the students were very polite and professional.

We did encounter some roadblocks with the program at large, which is probably to be expected for the internship’s first time around. Not enough time had been allocated for the students to work on their research projects, and we had to cancel a few workshops in the library to allow them adequate research time. However, overall it was a quite a success.

I am grateful that Natalia allowed me to be a part of this project. As she recognized, librarians have a unique skill set, and those skills allowed me to not only help students with their research projects, but also to teach them about the professional world. It was very rewarding for me to interact with these intelligent young people who are so interested in their future, and it also allowed me to build my skills in teaching and curriculum development.

As for the students, they not only got the opportunity to learn hands-on what research is, but they also learned some valuable lessons about what they need to do to prepare for the professional world. Something important I believe and hope they also learned, is that librarians are trusted experts in research who they will now know to turn to for assistance as they begin to enter the world of higher education.

I would encourage anyone who is presented with an opportunity to stray from the routine of their daily work to take it. It was refreshing for me to work with a new audience, to answer new kinds of questions, to think about the things I teach in a new way, and to teach some of the skills I have that I do not always get to share with people.

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