

tions of the required Research Methods course at the University of Alabama library school, while also doing my dissertation. Since then, I have taught several continuing education courses on statistics and have continued using research methods and statistics in doing my own research and in serving on the editorial boards of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* and the *Annals of Family Medicine*.

I enjoy doing the column and am buoyed in knowing that people do read it. Obviously the column could be

improved by casting my net wider to cover LIS journals I do not see regularly and by systematically scanning the health sciences literature to see what is out there that would be relevant to our practice of health sciences librarianship. This could easily be accomplished by setting up a PubMed alert and by subscribing to an LIS table of contents service. Kris Alpi recommends the free version Arlene Eis' "Informed Librarian" as a source of table of contents for LIS journals. All this sounds like a fine retirement project for me in a few years.

## **THE RESEARCH MENTOR**

### **Jonathan Eldredge, MLS PhD AHIP**

#### **Finding Time for Research**

On a recurring basis colleagues have asked me: "How do you find time for research?" This brief article, the first for a new column on research mentoring, attempts to answer this pivotal question. Every researcher has his or her own individual strategies and tactics, but I have tried to offer my advice in as general terms as possible along with providing some specific examples.

#### ***The Daily Schedule Cycle***

The first step in finding time for research consists of comprehensively assessing your weekdays and weekends to identify blocks of underutilized time. These blocks might occur in brief or in longer spans of time.

Do you commute by public transit? Do you have childcare responsibilities? Do you wait for your children at skate parks or at other athletic activities? Sit with your children while they finish their homework? Find yourself waiting in hair salons or outside health care providers' offices with time to spare? While waiting for dinner to cook? Do you eat any of your meals alone at times? Do you wake a little earlier or stay up a little later than other members of your household? Beyond the daily cycle of activities, do you occasionally find yourself waiting to board trains, buses, or aircraft when traveling any distance? How about during those times when you are traveling by air or train and possibly quite bored? Incidentally, this entire article was written while traveling by air between the Fourth International Evidence Based Library and Information

Practice Conference (EBLIP4) in North Carolina and my home in New Mexico.

I have found that all of these types of time slots can be useful for research-related activities. The observation about childcare or children's homework above might seem strange, but I have found that my children have been content simply to have me present at the kitchen table during homework periods or sitting nearby at a park while they play.

Perhaps surprisingly, I have come to realize that the daily cycle at work is particularly *non-conducive* for research. There are too many distractions at work requiring too much of my undivided attention.

A lot of research consists of reviewing a relevant literature when designing a research study, reviewing or classifying lots of the raw material, and reading to make sense of the results of your already completed research. All of these short-term activities can be channeled into the many brief time slots that occur during the daily cycle. When engaging in any high-level analysis or writing a manuscript, I usually have to devote at least two hours, even if on a weekend, to these more focused activities, however. Much of the time spent on other types of research activities, therefore, still can be completed in brief segments.

#### ***The Daily Physiological Cycle***

Now that you have identified the times, whether long or short during your daily cycle, reflect next on how

you feel at these times of the day. When do you feel like you are in an information-absorption mode such as reading? When are you most likely to feel like analyzing fairly complex content material? We all feel a combination of both tiredness and alertness in different proportions during the day so determine when you feel most awake or tired. In the morning I find it best simply to drink tea and absorb information by reading whereas later in the day and evening I am wide awake and ready for managing more active tasks. Generally speaking, I do not drink any alcoholic beverages whatsoever if I am going to be engaged in research since it tends to contribute to any experienced fatigue. I also never engage in any research activities within an hour of bedtime since high-level mental activity can be hard to “turn-off” in one’s mind late at night.

Regardless of my schedule or my physiology, research questions occur to me throughout the daily cycle. I found it prudent to capture these questions at the moments they occur so I can recall the basic themes later when I have the time to reflect. It helps to keep a paper and pen ready, even when walking the dog at night. Of course, for every 30 or so questions I generate I might actually pursue only one question. For a more in-depth discussion of formulating research questions, please see a related article.<sup>1</sup>

### ***A Balanced Life***

Throughout my career I have found it impossible to conduct research or prepare publications during regular work hours due to the many concurrent distractions. When I graduated from my professional degree program I vowed to pursue the lifelong learning goal of publishing an article at the rate of one per year. It should be noted as a disclaimer that while my early publications might have contained some elements of research in them, they really were professional communications that served to familiarize me with the publication process. At first I struggled with trying to prepare manuscripts during work hours. Finally, I realized that workplaces and research activity were fundamentally incompatible for me. I then looked for time outside the workday for my research and publication pursuits.

The pivotal question for living a balanced life between

personal, work, and research time becomes then “At what times do I need (or simply want) to pay attention to someone or something else other than my research?” As mentioned already, my children have proven to me from their infancy to their teenage years that they are content to have me simply nearby without requiring much interaction. Nowadays my thirteen year-old daughter prefers that I simply sit with her at the kitchen table during evenings while she completes her Spanish literature homework. I also have to complete my own “homework” that consists of reading for my research projects at the table, interrupted occasionally to offer her a translation or explanation when a dictionary will not suffice for her. The comedian Woody Allen has been credited with observing that “Eighty percent of success is showing up”<sup>2</sup> so perhaps the same can be said of much of our involvement in some of our multitasked activities? I tend to be the last to bed and up early in my household so I clear the kitchen table of everything except my research when no one else happens to be awake. Otherwise, my work remains in piles or in cardboard boxes stored in an unoccupied bedroom. I do try to keep an article or two handy-- just in case I find a spare moment or two to read.

You actually cannot be an effective researcher, in my opinion, if you do not lead a balanced life.

Why? Because, instead of focusing on your research when you have the time, you will expend psychic energy fighting your desire to pursue recreation since you will feel deprived of fun and relaxation. As professionals we all recognize the importance of producing relevant research to support decision making. If you are fighting with yourself, however, I doubt you can garner the necessary focus to be effective in your research. I have been fairly athletic over the years: skiing, surfing, boogie boarding, mountain biking, skateboarding, soccer, volleyball, baseball, hiking, and taking long walks. I have found it impossible to sit at a table trying to pursue any research-related activity when these sports have been beckoning to me. Social psychology research appears to confirm this observation on perceptions of the work/leisure balance and role ambiguity.<sup>3 4 5</sup>

So, I recommend that you set aside time for fun in your schedule while identifying those leftover times for research. This balanced approach reminds me a little of

baking cookies. The priority activities in life—spouse, children, family, work and fun—are the pieces of dough that we shape with cookie cutters into the cookies. The numerous small spare pieces of dough leftover can become the times that we can re-mold into useful times for research. If you do maintain such a balanced life, I have discovered, you just might possibly come to the point that you develop an intrinsic joy for conducting research and communicating your results.

### ***A Word About This New Column***

This new column will provide mentoring advice on how to conduct applied research. Some columns will resemble this first thematic one while others will feature interviews that include advice from prominent researchers. Please contact the author to participate in this column at [jeldredge@salud.unm.edu](mailto:jeldredge@salud.unm.edu). I would like to thank University of North Carolina School of Information and Library Science doctoral candidate Martha Ingrid Preddie from Trinidad for interviewing me on this subject, thereby motivating me to focus on answering this question in more comprehensive terms.

## **The DISSERTATION & THESES ROUND-UP**

### **Ellen Detlefsen, DLS**

Earlier iterations of this column appeared in 2003, 2004, and 2005, reporting on masters' theses and doctoral dissertations (as listed in the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT) database) that had appeared in those time periods. This list covers the period from 2005 to the mid-year of 2008. The keyword search used truncated forms of the words "librar?" and "inform?" and "medic?" and "healt?". I have only included dissertations in biomedical informatics that are related in some way to libraries or to information behaviors. The list includes work done world-wide, and thus includes a number of papers done in universities outside North America.

To obtain copies of any of these works or to see the citation/abstract or the 24-page preview sample from a dissertation or thesis, simply search the PQDT database with the AAT number or the name of the researcher to retrieve the citation. In the special case of the masters' papers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel

### **References**

1. Eldredge JD. Evidence-Based Librarianship: The EBL Process. *Library Hi Tech* 2006; 24 (3): 341-354.
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3. Juniu S, Tedrick T, Boyd R. Leisure or work? Amateur and professional musicians' perception of rehearsal and performance. *Journal of Leisure Research* 1996; 28 (1): 44-56.
4. Tang TL, Baumeister FR. Effects of personal values, perceived surveillance, and task labels on task preference: the ideology of turning play into work. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 1984 Feb; 69 (1): 99-105.
5. Elloy DF, Terpening W, Kohls J. A causal model of burnout among self-managed work team members. *Journal of Psychology* 2001 May; 135 (3): 321-34.

Hill (the citations are marked with an \*), consult the index available at <http://sils.unc.edu/itrc/mpi/> where links to the PDFs of these theses are usually available.

The sorting and classifying of the retrieval is entirely and arbitrarily mine, as are the choices of topical areas under which to list these publications. The order within any subject cluster is reverse chronological.

As was the case in the past, there were far fewer theses or dissertations with a purely library focus. Many of the universities whose students are represented here do not have graduate programs in either Library/Information Science or in Medical Informatics. Apparently, graduate students in other disciplines have found problems in medical or health information to be of research interest. For example, there are three dissertations from the