Interview with Len Levin

Len Levin is the new Manager of Educational Programs for the Reference, Education, and Information Services Department of the Lamar Soutter Library. He spoke with SoutteReview recently about his new position and some of his goals.

SR: Congratulations on your new position, Len. Could you provide our readers with some background about your professional experience?

LL: Thanks. My first library job was with the Beth Israel Hospital Learning Center in Boston from 1994-1996. The Learning Center is a consumer health oriented library. I assisted in the planning aspects of the library and focused on library management issues, such as collection development and circulation policies. From there, I began a full-time position at the New England Baptist Hospital Library, where I had total responsibility for the library. I was a one-person operation! Teaching was one of my responsibilities. I began offering classes in a conference room for the clinicians of New England Baptist. I learned that, in a hospital noted for its emphasis on orthopedic specialties and where the Operating Room schedule would change from minute-to-minute, it was impossible to rely on scheduled large-group training sessions. My emphasis as a librarian and as a teacher shifted to more one-on-one and small group instruction.

SR: Tell us about coming to the University of Massachusetts Medical School Library.

LL: One of the reasons that I wanted to come to UMass Med was to get back into teaching larger groups of patrons at a more structured level. I also knew that I wanted to work in an academic library setting in my library career. I was impressed with the philosophy and work of LSL Director Elaine Martin and was delighted when the position of Assistant Director of HealthNet opened here. I began this new position in April, 2003.

SR: What were some of your duties and accomplishments as Health Net Coordinator?

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Open Access Update

“Scientific research benefits us all; it must be easily accessible.” Open Access publishing is making that possible. This was the message noted cell biologist Marc Kirschner, Ph.D., of Harvard Medical School, conveyed to the audience of faculty, researchers, students and librarians during his presentation on April 8th to address the question “Is Open Access Publishing the Answer to the Crisis in Scholarly Communication?” While the goal of scientists is to share research widely and promptly, thus encouraging feedback and further research, Kirschner asserted that the current model of for-profit commercial publishers restricts the flow of knowledge and creates a world of disparities in access: the “Haves” and the “Have Nots.” Scientists in developing countries or small domestic colleges do not have ready access to the world’s research, and, conversely, their research is not easily accessible to the rest of the world.

As electronic access to full text articles becomes more prevalent, it could provide a solution to the “Have/Have Not” disparities. In theory, e-access makes research from all corners of the world equally accessible; research in obscure, specialized, so-called “low-prestige” journals has been catapulted to prominence by the search capabilities of the Internet. However, e-access to research published by for-profit commercial publishers can be prohibitively expensive.
when publication decisions are made based on expected return on investment. Kirschner asserted that for research to be most beneficial, it must be easily accessible—thus the push for open access.

In 1999, then-director of the NIH Harold Varmus pledged support to “free and open access to the scientific research” and, in early 2000, founded PubMed Central (PMC) in order to provide a publishing site that would provide barrier-free access to the peer-reviewed and pre-peer-reviewed life sciences literature. The goal of PMC was to serve as a repository for already-published articles, thus encouraging commercial, for-profit publishers to deposit and report its findings into the life sciences into its central online system after a certain period of time had passed after publication—typically 6 to 12 months. Initially, publishers opposed the venture and there were threats to cut off funding for PMC.

In late 2000, Harold Varmus launched the Public Library of Science (PLoS), “a non-profit organization of scientists and physicians committed to making the world’s scientific and medical literature a freely available public resource.” (http://www.plos.org) PLoS circulated a letter again encouraging “scientific publishers to make their scientific literature available for distribution through free online public libraries of science such as PubMed Central.” The 30,000+ signatories worldwide pledged to boycott journals that did not join PMC. The boycott failed because there were no alternatives to the “reader pays” subscription model of the for-profit commercial publishers.

In the last 3 or 4 years, the publishing world has begun to change as new publishing models have developed. (Please consult Open Access for more information at http://www.createanopenaccessresource.org/OPAA MANUAL.pdf) Created in 2000, BioMedCentral is a “commercial publisher which offers immediate free access to peer-reviewed biomedical research”; the entire contents of its 110 Open Access journals are freely accessible through its website and via PubMed Central. (http://www.biomedcentral.com) BMC offers peer review, manuscript tracking, quick publication, article promotion, high visibility, inclusion in PubMed, statistics about the number of “viewings” and “downloads,” and author-retained copyright. This is possible because BMC has developed a business model based on “levying article-processing charges, which are payable by the authors, the authors’ institution, or their funding body.”

BMC encourages groups of researchers to start new Open Access journals or convert existing journals to Open Access. Editorial control remains with the researchers who serve as editors, while BMC provides a complete publishing system free of charge.

In 2001, after seeing little progress from commercial publishers, PLoS concluded that “the only way forward” was to develop plans for launching high-quality, high-profile, open-access PLoS journals to serve as a model for open access publication. In November 2002, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation awarded PLoS a $9 million grant to launch its non-profit scientific publishing venture, controlled and operated by scientists for the benefit of science and the public. PLoS also treats the costs of publication as the final integral step of the funding of a research project and applies publication charges to accepted articles, while authors retain copyright. In October 2003, its first journal, PLoS Biology was launched online and in print as an open-access alternative to the existing for-profit commercial biology journals. The second journal, PLoS Medicine plans to publish its first issue in Fall 2004.

Despite initial resistance on the part of publishers to open-access archiving in PubMed Central, there are now 152 full-text journals in PMC, and more are expected to join. (See http://www.biomedcentral.com/)

These developments to induce major for-profit, commercial journals to make their research content available via Open Access have been bolstered by the argument that federally-funded research is a public resource. Its cost has already been paid for by citizens; they should not have to pay again to read it. Such research should be freely available via Open Access; legislation has been introduced in Congress to address this issue.

continued on page 3
This is a time of flux and transition in scholarly communication. The debate continues. But one thing is clear: in order to pursue whatever options become viable, it is important for the researchers to maintain control of their work by retaining copyright to articles they produce. This will allow the researcher to freely post or distribute their articles to students, colleagues, and researchers around the world. For more information on managing copyrights, please consult Create Change at http://www.createchange.org/faculty/issues/controlling.html.

For background information on scholarly publishing, please review “New Forces Affecting Scholarly Publishing” in Issue #22 of the SoutteReview: http://library.umassmed.edu/issue22.pdf

In its continuing efforts to inform the UMMS community about the important issues and changes in scholarly communications and to facilitate discussion, the LSL will continue to monitor developments and share information via the SoutteReview and the “What’s New” section of the LSL webpage. We thank the Graduate Student Professional Development Committee and the Program in Cell Dynamics Seminar Series for including LSL staff in presentations and discussions with representatives from PLoS and BioMed Central. Library staff members are available to discuss the background and issues with groups within the UMMS community. Please contact Barbara Ingrassia at 508-856-1041 or Barbara.ingrasia@umassmed.edu for further information.

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Dose of Reading: Fathers and Sons

Each of the following is a memoir involving a medical theme or issue that profoundly affected, for good or ill, the bonds between a father and son. Titles without Lamar Soutter Library call numbers are available through Interlibrary Borrowing or the Virtual Catalog system.

Ackerley, J(oe) R(ansolph). My Father and Myself (1968). In this autobiography, Ackerley, who grew up in England during the first two decades of the twentieth century, explores psychological influences that accompanied his homosexual development.


Edmonds, Walter Dumaux. Tales My Father Never Told (1995). The life of this novelist (best known for Drums Along the Mohawk (1936)) spanned all but a handful of years of the twentieth century. Here, he recounts his traumatized years growing up in the shadow of an often angry and demanding father.


Kunhardt Jr., Philip. My Father’s House (1970). Several years after his father had suffered a fatal heart attack at age 62, the author survived a cardiac event of his own, at age 40. During his convalescence, Kunhardt discovers various personal effects in his father’s desk that trigger poignant memories of growing up in the family’s house in Morristown, New Jersey.

McKuen, Rod. Finding My Father: One Man’s Search for Identity (1976). A victim of childhood physical abuse by his stepfather, this poet and songwriter of the 1960s love generation tells of the difficult quest he embarked on to learn about his biological father, whom he never knew.

Martin, Lee. From Our House: A Memoir (2000). Raised in rural Illinois in the fifties and sixties, the author describes a childhood of beatings inflicted on him by his father, a farmer embittered by having lost both hands in an agricultural accident when Lee was only a year old. Martin has also authored an award-winning collec—continued on page 4
Dose of Reading continued from page 3

Pierce, Charles. Hard to Forget: An Alzheimer’s Story (2000). This freelance writer and National Public Radio commentator describes the onset of Alzheimer’s disease in his father—causing him to wander from his Massachusetts home into Vermont. Pierce also surveys the history of research on this illness.


Mehta, Ved. Daddyji (1972). The first autobiographical volume by this prolific writer covers his earliest years, growing up in India without eyesight. This memoir also is a compelling portrait of his father, who was a courageous Punjabi public health officer.

Morehead, Don. A Short Season: Story of a Montana Childhood (1998). At age 11, Morehead had to assume adult responsibilities on the family’s large sheep ranch, following his father’s death from a burst appendix.

Roth, Philip. Patrimony: A True Story (1991). Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, this powerful memoir tells of the famous novelist’s experience trying to care for his independent and feisty father, who suffered a debilitating brain tumor. (Call Number: PS 3568.0855 Z468 1996)

Selzer, Richard. Down from Troy: A Doctor Comes of Age (1992). Born during the Great Depression, surgeon, essayist, and fiction writer Selzer recreates his formative years along the Hudson River, during which time his physician father urged his son to follow in his career footsteps.

—JL

Interview with Len Levin continued from page 1

SR: Did you do any teaching in your role as the Health Net Coordinator?

LL: Yes. One of the major responsibilities of the Health Net Coordinator was to participate in the LSL’s many outreach programs. These programs included teaching several agencies in the expanded central Massachusetts community, to locate quality online health information.

SR: When did you begin your new duties as Manager of Education Programs and what are some of your immediate goals?

LL: I began my new job on March 1 of this year. My first major goal is to review our current library instruction initiatives and to identify new teaching opportunities for the library. I also want to broaden the scope of the instruction that we offer in the library, in order to best serve the needs of our school and clinical communities.

SR: Good luck and congratulations in your future endeavors.

—PJ