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Re-thinking Our Professional Identity in Light of New Responsibilities

Elaine R. Martin
University of Massachusetts Medical School

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putting the pieces together: theory and practice

Editorial

Re-thinking Our Professional Identity in Light of New Responsibilities

Elaine R. Martin, DA, Director of Library Services

University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, USA

The practice of embedding librarians in a research team has given rise to many questions of late, especially expressions of uncertainty over what this new role will mean for the professional identity of librarians. Whereas *professionalism* implies a quality of behavior, professional *identity* speaks to the core of who we are as librarians and the values we hold dear. Recent discussion in blog posts and webinars suggest concerns that embedded librarians, as they steadily move outside the library and into research teams, may be neither "fish nor fowl." Is the embedded librarian's professional identity allied with the library or with the team? What are the potential effects of such role modifications? Will the embedded librarian somehow achieve more autonomy over their time and work if they are identified more closely with their research team than with their home library? Do you need a library to be a librarian? Where is the professional home for the embedded librarian?

It might be wise to begin by acknowledging that even researchers feel constrained by their roles. The grass is not always greener! When I talk to research and clinical faculty about their own sense of empowerment, they bemoan their own lack of professional autonomy. Researchers are concerned about their lack of time to focus on the science and their need to focus more on compliance issues and grantsmanship. Re-

searchers are on a constant quest for funding for their lab; the type of work they do is based on where they can find funds. Clinicians long for more time to spend with patients. They are concerned about RVUs and balancing their academic, administrative, and clinical responsibilities. Money is an important driver in their choice of work and how they spend their time.

Librarians have always held dear the value of equal access to information for all. If we dissociate our professional identities from the library to the research team, are we willing to question, and possibly rethink and reconfigure that value? Who will assure equal access to information for the rest of our communities? Will we be able to provide the free information access, such as ILL, to all our colleagues? Will we serve only those departments that have money to pay us? Must we reject our core values in order to transform our profession? Can we expand our professional identity rather than swapping out older values for new ones?

I don't have the answers to all of these questions. But I think the answers may lie in the concept of the "blended professional." Librarianship has traditionally been a "Bounded" profession: bounded by the reference desk schedule and the library as place. Faculty and researchers have been "Unbounded" professionals; more autono-

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Correspondence to Elaine Martin: elaine.martin@umassmed.edu

mous in their workplace and type of work they do. Being an embedded librarian, I think, allows us to blend what is core to the library to that which is core to the research enterprise. It is time to create a new professional identify that blends the best of both worlds. Although embedded librarians may express this dilemma as "being in the middle," I think it is time to embrace the middle, be comfortable in that middle space, and define that space as "blended."

What would a blended professional do or what would those activities look like? This list is by no means exhaustive but my musings to further the conversation. The embedded librarian as a blended professional would:

- Be a member of an interprofessional/ multidisciplinary team.

- Encourage the professions to learn with and from each other; hold appreciation for the differences among the professions including the information scientist.

- Respect the contributions of each professional including the information scientist.

- Form partnerships and collaborations.

- Is committed to service not servitude; values the services information scientists bring to the table but redefines the service model.

- Foster collaborative practice.

- Embrace the commitment to service that values access to information.

- Embrace entrepreneurship and change.

- Is willing to take risks and be creative.

- Is an independent thinker and willing to participate in and promulgate a culture of research.

- Take pride in the unique contributions of information science/librarianship to the team.

It is time for the embedded librarian to push boundaries and move from a bounded professional to a blended professional. In doing so, we will redefine our professional identify and redefine our professional home not as a place but as an identity. The Journal of eScience Librarianship welcomes the opportunity to publish your stories of how we can further develop and articulate the work of the embedded librarian as the blended professional. We are interested in your thoughts and contributions to furthering this discussion.