

Healthy Futures: A Collaborative Virtual Internship Program

Eileen G. Harrington, The Universities at Shady Grove

Background

In the 2013 fall semester, the Priddy Library at the Universities at Shady Grove (USG), the National Library of Medicine (NLM), and the College of Information Studies (iSchool) at the University of Maryland, College Park launched a virtual internship program focused on health librarianship. The semester-long internships are open to any USG student and students of the iSchool. To date, four interns have participated, and two just started this fall semester.



Why Virtual Internships?

Many USG and iSchool students are juggling classes, work and families. Virtual internships allow them to fit a field experience into their already busy lives.

Increasingly networked world and current technologies make it easy to connect to resources and collaborate with others.

Teleworking and virtual workers on the rise¹ so virtual internships provide an opportunity for students to gain professional experience in this type of environment.

Why Health Librarianship?

Only a few ALA-accredited library schools in the US now offer master's degrees or specializations in health informatics; opportunities for students interested in health librarianship remain limited in the majority of programs.²

"With new challenges facing academic health sciences libraries in the 21st century, the profession needs to develop a workforce capable of integrating more directly into the campus organization, the research enterprise, and the clinical setting."³

Way to address expected shortage of qualified health librarians.⁴

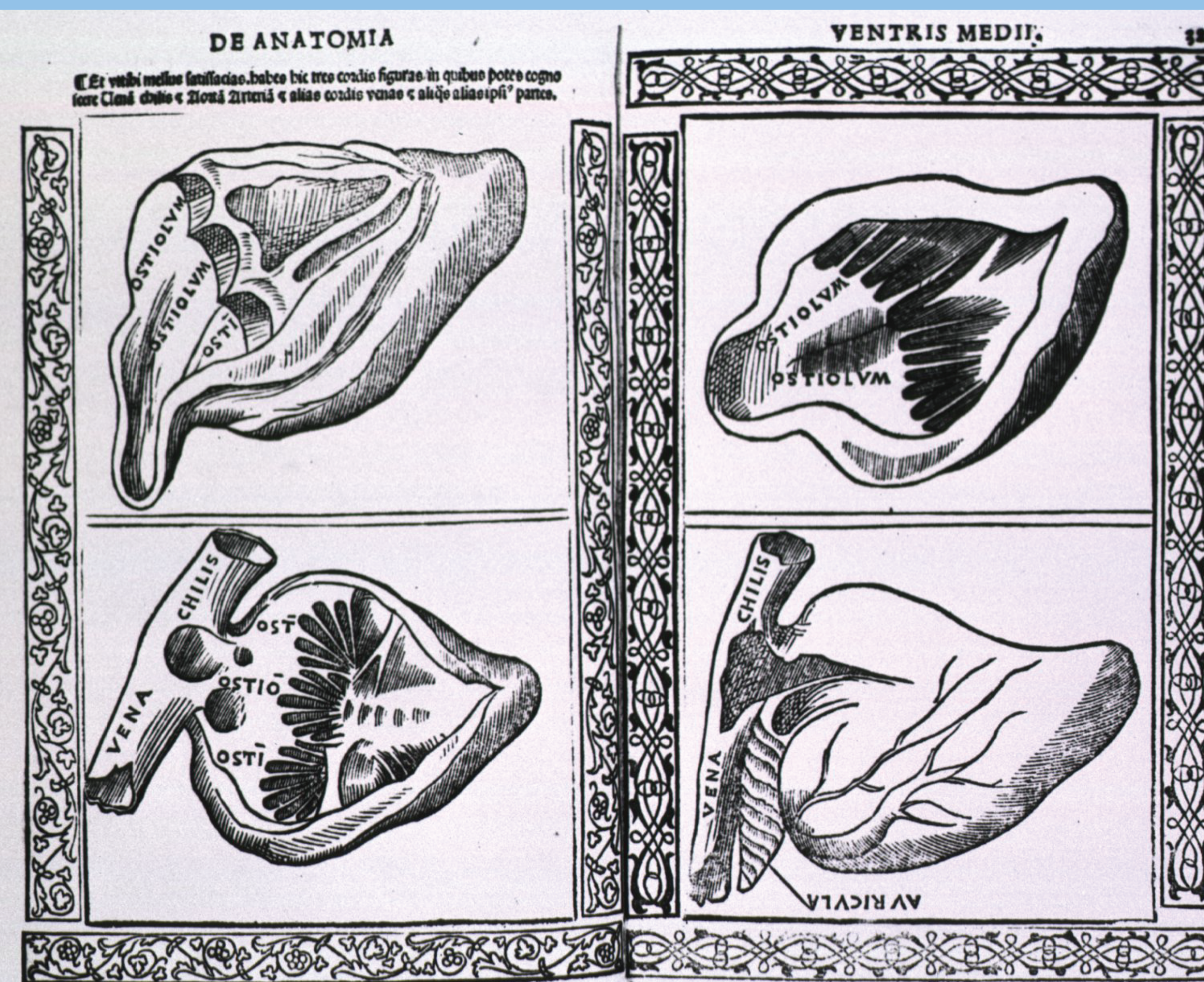
Goals of the Program

Foster the development of future health information professionals.

Provide students with real-world experiences in the field of health informatics.

Develop leadership and project management skills in students.

"Doing the work virtually makes it totally positive—not having to battle traffic, get dressed and all that. You don't have to spend time getting used to an office's culture. It's great to keep the focus on what you're actually doing for the internship instead. You put your hands to it and do it!"⁵



Examples of Projects

Researching and creating a report of recommendations on how NLM can effectively use social media to provide health information to the public.

Updating and augmenting resource links for NLM's Genetics Home Reference website.

Identifying and promoting content from the collections of NLM's History of Medicine Division that could be used by students for National History Day.

Challenges Faced

Managing expectations.

Ensuring that interns feel like they are part of the institution.

Lack of learning about organizational culture and professionalism skills in a library setting.

Time management.

Key Recommendations

Hold on-site kick-off event each semester with interns and supervisors—chance to meet in person, see organization in person and make connections.

Incorporate evaluation of students, supervisors and internship program in general.

Set clear expectations and guidelines from outset.

Be flexible.

Future Possibilities

Expand program to include other institutes at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Replicate program in other ALA-accredited library schools possibly through collaborations with NLM's National Network of Libraries of Medicine and/or local governmental or non-governmental health-related agencies

Conduct evaluation of the longer-term effects of program on job performance, retention in field of health librarianship and increase in members of underrepresented groups in the health information field.



Notes

1. "Latest Telecommuting Statistics," Global Workplace Analytics, accessed September 15, 2014, <http://www.globalworkplaceanalytics.com/telecommuting-statistics>.
2. "Library Schools with Courses in Health Sciences Librarianship," Medical Library Association, last modified August 2010, <https://www.mlanet.org/education/libschools/index.html>.
3. Becky J. Lyon, Kathel Dunn, and Sally Sinn, "Leveraging Partnerships to Develop a Strong and Diverse Workforce," *Journal of Library Administration* 51, no. 2 (2011): 231–41. doi:10.1080/01930826.2011.540554.
4. Ellen G. Detlefsen, "The Pipeline Problem: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 95, no. 2 (2007): 115–16. doi:10.3163/1536-5050.95.2.115.
5. Melanie Modlin, "NLM Virtual Internships: A Great Learning Experience and No Commute!" National Library of Medicine, last modified June 26, 2014, <http://infocus.nlm.nih.gov/2014/06/nlm-virtual-internships-a-grea.html>.

For More Information

Eileen Harrington - eharring@umd.edu

<http://libguides.shadygrove.umd.edu/nlmvirtual>