

MLA Rising Star Rachel Stark reflects on creation, presentation of proposal



Rachel Keiko Stark is a 2010-2011 Scholar currently working as a Health Sciences Librarian, at California State University, Sacramento. Rachel earned her BA from Willamette University and her MS from Drexel University. Rachel is a 2017-2018 MLA Rising Star and in this role recently created and presented a proposal on Just In Time Assessment at National Conference at the MLA 2018 Conference, held May 18-23 in Atlanta, GA. She has worked as a youth services librarian, a clinical medical librarian, and as a hospital library manager. Here, she shares with us her journey into medical librarianship, her challenges and successes so far as an MLA Rising

Star, and her MLA 2018 Conference experience.

When I applied to the Spectrum Scholar program, I thought I wanted to be an archivist. I had a background in history and enjoyed the work I was undertaking as an intern at a local archive. As I continued to work in a medical library as a library assistant, I realized that I loved the metadata structure for health sciences information. It was elegant, it was concise, and it made my geeky little heart happy. I still admire archivists and I still get a bit wide eyed over rare books, but my heart was in the health sciences. I joined the Medical Library Association (MLA) (<http://www.mlanet.org/>) as soon as I realized I wanted to become a Medical or Health Sciences Librarian. I was encouraged to do so before I completed my degree by my mentor, the fabulous Rebecca Davis. She had also encouraged me to apply to the Spectrum Scholarship program, so I tend to follow her advice. The Medical Library Association is an organization with many dedicated members who care deeply about the medical/health sciences librarian profession and are often more than happy to share their experiences and wisdom if approached by new librarians. It is at the MLA annual meeting where I can interact with people who also work as Health Sciences Librarians, and I can gain new ideas from people who are practicing a similar kind of librarianship. When I first joined MLA, I mostly wanted to present at the annual meeting, which I did, and only later, again at the behest of my mentor, did I start trying to become involved with the committees.

I had been a member of MLA for three years before I applied for and was accepted into the Rising Star (<http://www.mlanet.org/page/rising-stars>) program. I chose to apply because I was frustrated with how difficult it was to become involved with the organization, and I wanted to contribute to the organization in a significant way. I wanted to understand how I could use this program to develop my skills and I wanted to make the organization more accessible to other new librarians.

The Rising Stars program is a MLA leadership program designed to provide leadership training to librarians new to the field with the goal of encouraging those librarians to move up through the ranks of MLA. The program is competitive, with an application process that includes a letter of support from the library

director/dean indicating their support of the applicant and a guarantee for support (not financial) for the applicants to not only attend two MLA annual meetings, but also attend monthly classes and to participate in a mentorship program.

I attended MLA annual last year to meet the previous year's Stars, to meet the people who would be part of the faculty, and to meet the leadership of MLA. After that MLA, we met with our faculty at least once a month, were assigned local mentors, and had guest speakers from various MLA groups and committees, including Brenda Linares, 2005-2006 Spectrum Scholar. My cohort was the first to experience the revamped program, which requires the cohort to work together on a single project proposal. After much work, feedback, and more work, we decided to move forward with a project proposal focused on providing just in time feedback for individual presenters, such as poster, paper, and lightning talk presenters, at MLA annual meetings. We felt that it would benefit MLA as an organization to have data submitted by conference attendees about the presentations they attended, and beneficial for the presenter to have feedback from their peers. Some of our faculty felt that this project was something that would make MLA members uncomfortable, but my cohort felt that it was worth pursuing as this kind of information can be incredibly important for librarians and other information professionals who want to improve their practice. We also pointed out that having feedback that highlighted the impact of your presentation on others in your profession could help MLA attendees demonstrate the value of their participation in the annual meeting to their employer.

This year's MLA was a whirlwind for me, as I presented multiple posters, taught a special content session, and participated in a Diversity Discussion Fishbowl, but the Rising Stars presentation was foremost on my mind. MLA tries to incorporate opportunities for local tours, committee and group events, and other social events after the conference, but I did not attend many this year as I was practicing with my cohort for our presentation. Once our presentation was completed, we were pleasantly surprised by the amount of interest it generated and we are currently moving forward with implementing our proposal for the 2019 MLA annual meeting. I learned that a well-crafted and strongly researched proposal will not only be well received, but if the right people are in the room and want to see it done, movement on the project starts quickly.

My experience as a Spectrum Scholar taught me the value of building a network and gave me important skills to start my career. It also provided me with an extended network. I am excited to find other Spectrum Scholars whenever I am in a group of librarians and feel very privileged to be a part of this group. My experience as a Rising Star taught me more than I ever thought I could learn about a volunteer run professional organization and built on many of the skills I learned at the Spectrum Institute. I strive to constantly gain many that will be useful as I move through my career and both of these experiences have shaped and will continue to shape my career in librarianship.

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