in the curricula of medical and nursing schools. As new Internet technology tools are introduced, educators in health-related disciplines have the opportunity to incorporate these new tools into the curriculum to enhance instruction and the learning process. Wikis, blogs, and other social networking tools may all be used both to augment the educational method and to increase its efficacy.

Concomitantly, the increased use of Web 2.0 tools in the curricula of medical and nursing schools creates an exciting opportunity for increased collaboration between medical librarians and faculty. First, librarians, by virtue of their related training and experience, are perfectly situated to train faculty in the use of Web 2.0 tools. In addition, librarians can help faculty incorporate this new technology into the curriculum.

BACKGROUND

During the Web 1.0 years, a small number of web developers created web pages for a large number of readers. Web pages were “read only” and were written in hypertext markup language (HTML). In contrast, recent developments have changed the “read only” web to a “read/write” web, which in many cases allows users to add content to the web page. The specific technologies and tools of these new developments are collectively known by the name “Web 2.0” and include blogs, podcasts, wikis, photo-sharing, social bookmarking, collaborative document tools, instant messaging, mash-ups, and really simple syndication (RSS), among others.

A useful feature of Web 2.0 technology is that it makes online collaboration possible. Users themselves (instead of the web page author) are able to edit, comment, create, and share content with other users. This collaborative feature of Web 2.0 comes along at a propitious time, because many sources are increasingly considering collaboration to be an important factor in the success of educational, social, and technological endeavors, especially those pertaining to the web.

To illustrate, the Environmental Scan: Pattern Recognition (2003), produced by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), deems the most effective solutions to be collaborative ones [1]. Similarly, Boulos and Wheeler find collaborative activity to be “an important component for success in web-based environments” [2]. Furthermore, Bender states that collaboration enhances learning by helping students “understand questions, develop arguments, and share meaning and conclusions among a community of learners” [3].

Turning their attention to potential advantages of Web 2.0 tools for education, Boulos, Maramba, and Wheeler state that Web 2.0 tools allow “anytime anywhere” learning, which is especially useful to “students and clinicians in remote and rural areas” [4]. In a study examining the impact of Web 2.0 tools on teaching information literacy, Brown and Bussert conclude that student learning will increase due to
“personal engagement, use of preferred learning-styles, and application to daily life” [5].

In foreshadowing a possible role for medical librarians, Sandars and Schroter (in a survey of 3,000 medical students and 3,000 medical practitioners) find a high awareness of Web 2.0 technologies but a lower indication of actual use [6]. Respondents are interested in using the tools for educational purposes but note a need for training in the use of these technologies.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Given the possibilities for using Web 2.0 tools in higher education, the authors of the present study investigated the actual use of Web 2.0 tools in the medical and nursing curriculum in an effort to ascertain whether or not use of these tools has increased, thereby creating a potential role for medical librarians, as discussed above.

METHODS

To determine the extent of use of social networking tools in the curricula of medical and nursing schools, a questionnaire was developed using Survey Monkey (Appendix, online). The questionnaire was sent to the DR-ED email list (for medical educators, with 1,383 subscribers when survey was conducted), the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Instructional Leadership Network email list (with approximately 150 subscribers), and the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) email list (with a total of 146 AAHSL members), asking the AAHSL participants to forward the survey to those responsible for the curriculum at their institutions. Thirty-six responses were received from medical school educators and 19 from nursing school educators.

Results from the questionnaire were analyzed to determine the extent of the use of Web 2.0 tools in the curricula of health sciences schools, using descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

- Medical and nursing schools make greatest use of Web 2.0 tools in campus-based courses and mixed online/campus-based courses. Respondents from nursing schools also report using the tools in online courses.
- While nursing schools use Web 2.0 tools mainly in leadership and graduate courses, medical schools use them both in preclinical and clinical courses.
- Fifty-eight percent of nursing schools plan to implement Web 2.0 tools in their curricula during the upcoming year, compared to 50% of medical schools.
  - In nursing schools, the breakdown for the different ways in which Web 2.0 tools are to be used in the curriculum is as follows: 43% podcasts, 43% academic support, and 14% videocasts.
  - In medical schools, the breakdown is as follows: 30% podcasts, 30% wikis, 20% blogs, 10% videocasts, and 10% Moodle.

Limitations

The total response rate to the two posted surveys was lower than anticipated. High response rates are less crucial when the goal of the study is to gain insight into an issue, as it was for this study. Nonetheless, the relatively small sample sizes of this study placed certain limitations on the ability to draw conclusions and to make inferences from the results.

Given the fact that only fifty-five people responded in total, it would be helpful to conduct the survey an additional time in an effort to obtain a larger sample size. Afterward, the findings from the second survey could be compared with results from the original survey to discern trends and, possibly, an increased use of Web 2.0 tools in the curriculum. With this adjustment, changes over time must be taken into consideration.

Because the questionnaires were completed anonymously, there is no way to determine any overlap in the institutions of the respondents. Neither is it...
possible to analyze the data by demographic factors or by program characteristics.

CONCLUSION

From the responses received to the surveys, it appears that Web 2.0 tools are slowly being introduced into the curricula of medical and nursing schools for a variety of uses. However, given the small sample size, it is difficult to predict whether the use of Web 2.0 tools portends a growing trend in education or merely represents a passing fad.

If the growing popularity of Web 2.0 tools in society transfers into the fields of medical and nursing education, then medical librarians will be faced with a golden opportunity to train faculty, students, and practitioners in the use of these tools. As noted earlier, a recent study indicated that medical students and practitioners desire more training to become proficient users of Web 2.0 tools [6]. Medical librarians are well situated to answer the call by training all involved in the use of these tools. This process may facilitate increased collaboration among librarians, faculty, students, and practitioners.

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AUTHORS’ AFFILIATIONS

Trey Lemley, MLIS, JD, lemley@jaguar1.usouthal.edu, Information Services Librarian and Evening Supervisor; Judy F. Burnham, MLS, AHIP, jburnham@jaguar1.usouthal.edu, Director; Biomedical Library, University of South Alabama, BLB 316, Mobile, AL 36688

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