Background

In Fall 2016, we surveyed 550 academic librarians who subscribed to the following ALA listservs: College Libraries (collib), Reference and User Services (rusa), ili (instruction section), ULS (University Library Services). Survey questions primarily focused on how librarians experience mental illness stigma in their workplace. We also collected data about librarian’s training in mental health. This poster is an exploration of the trainings librarians have received, the kinds of programs we have coordinated, and the ways we can make our communities less stigmatizing to those patrons seeking help.

Have you received training for dealing with (handling) a mentally ill patron or student?

What kinds of training did you receive?

Academic librarians indicated a variety of responses for the types of mental illness help related trainings they had received. The most common were:

- A) Recognizing students in distress
- B) Mental Health First Aid training
- C) Referring students to campus resources
- D) Dealing with “difficult” students
- E) Suicide prevention
- F) Behavioral threat management

Survey Response: “By working one-on-one with students, we likely encounter some who have mental illnesses that may or may not be evident to us. But, our commitment to treating all students with respect and regard for their academic success makes it possible for us to offer the kind of support that students with mental illness need without us being aware of their illness.”

Mental Health First Aid and Other Trainings

Mental Health First Aid is a popular 6 or 8 hour program that has been offered through the National Council on Mental Health. These kinds of trainings have been shown to significantly lower feelings of stigma in the short term. Other programs that can be offered include Stamp Out Stigma, an initiative from the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW), that aims to challenge and change the dialogue surrounding mental illness and addictions. Library specific programs run and have been run by many public libraries in the past, including the Enrich Free Library in Baltimore. Academic librarians may get training from outside of their departments, including student affairs and campus counseling, to help supplement their training in helping students.

From Training to Programming

Training helps us to become better listeners, and what better way to do what we’ve learned than by participating in and organizing our programs. Please think about offering any number of the programs listed on the left side to your repertoire. The brilliance of being a librarian is that we get to do programs for our patrons, from students, staff, and faculty as well as the general public. If you have not been specifically trained in reducing mental illness stigma and stigmatizing behaviors, you can still help by running a program. Programs that may help reduce mental illness stigma include book clubs on the topic. Greensboro has an excellent list that includes: Creek, a series of books that deal with addiction but are written in free-form poetry. Other programming options may include stress events. Book clubs and art therapy have also been shown to help with reducing feelings of stigma around other topics. Lastly, by actively creating something like a de-stress event (such as a meditation workshop or yoga workshop), you can find something new that they haven’t tried before and also reduce any feelings of anxiety that they might have in the short term.

References