Cornell University Library

Mentoring NextGen Librarians for Careers in eScience

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Background

Cornell University Library (CUL) is partnering with the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University (SU) to support their eScience Fellows Program with a mentorship program for enrolled students. The eScience Librarianship program, a specialized curriculum within SU's MS in Library and Information Science program, is designed to prepare students for professional roles supporting scientific practice and communication in eScience environments. Curriculum components include scientific data management, data and collaboration technologies, data services, workflows, and metadata for scientific data sets.

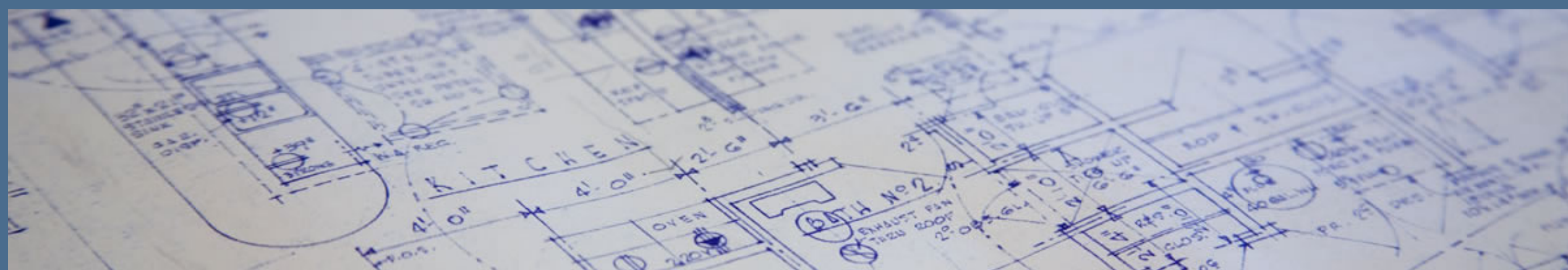The overarching goals of the mentorship program are to provide students with the opportunity to:

- gain exposure to the practice of science and eScience librarianship, and
- develop career skills and professional contacts.

eSLib
eScience Librarianship
eslib.ischool.syr.edu

Program design:

- Match each student with a librarian-mentor for one-on-one mentoring;
- Host in-person events at Syracuse and at Cornell;
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in the life of CUL at large via in-person and remote participation in CUL events and programming, and regular communication to students on issues of interest at CUL;
- Interact and collaborate virtually and support virtual participation in events at both institutions;
- Provide project and internship opportunities.

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Activities

Program launch (at Cornell):
- Lightning talks on VIVO, arXiv, librarianship & translational medicine, DataStaR, other projects
- Discussion of mentorship program ideas
- Speed networking session
- Mentor selection and pairing
- Tours of Mann Library and Weill Hall (new life sciences facility)
- Optional / unstructured time

Professional preparation and development activities:
- Participation in seminars and discussion groups
- Job shadowing
- Job preparedness and interview culture

Real world projects to meet course requirements:
- Assessment and marketing of multiple library services
- Comparative analysis of the data management requirements of research funders
- Digital repositories at the College of Veterinary Medicine

Internship advice and placements:
- VIVO
- Cornell Biological Field Station and Lake Ontario ecosystem evaluation
- Frank Lee Library at the Geneva Experiment Station

Mentors' visits to Syracuse:
- End of semester visit for student project reports
- Guest lectures by Cornell mentors
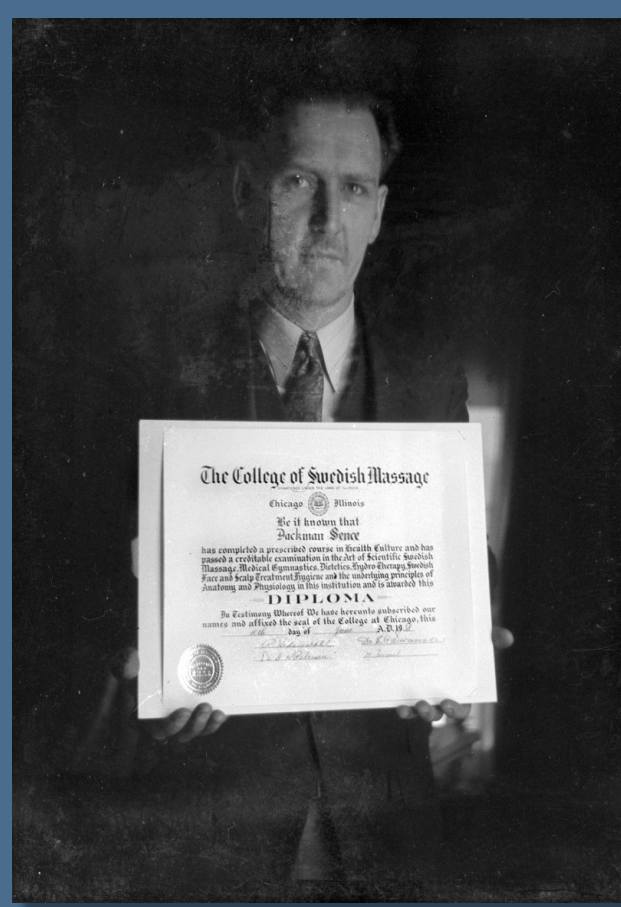
Program conclusion (at Cornell):
- Student reports on final projects
- Guest lecture by Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research (CISER) staff
- Tour of the Laboratory of Ornithology
- Exit survey
- Commencement ceremony

Challenges (and solutions)

Challenge: *Expertise.*
No single academic library has enough librarians working in eScience to provide every student with a mentor with significant experience in this area.

Solution: Set the expectation that the program's main focus is on professional development and networking, not technical training. Treat the mentorship program as a mentorship network as well as a collection of pairs, so that students may avail themselves of the experience of any mentor in the network, not only their own. Recognize opportunities for reverse mentoring.
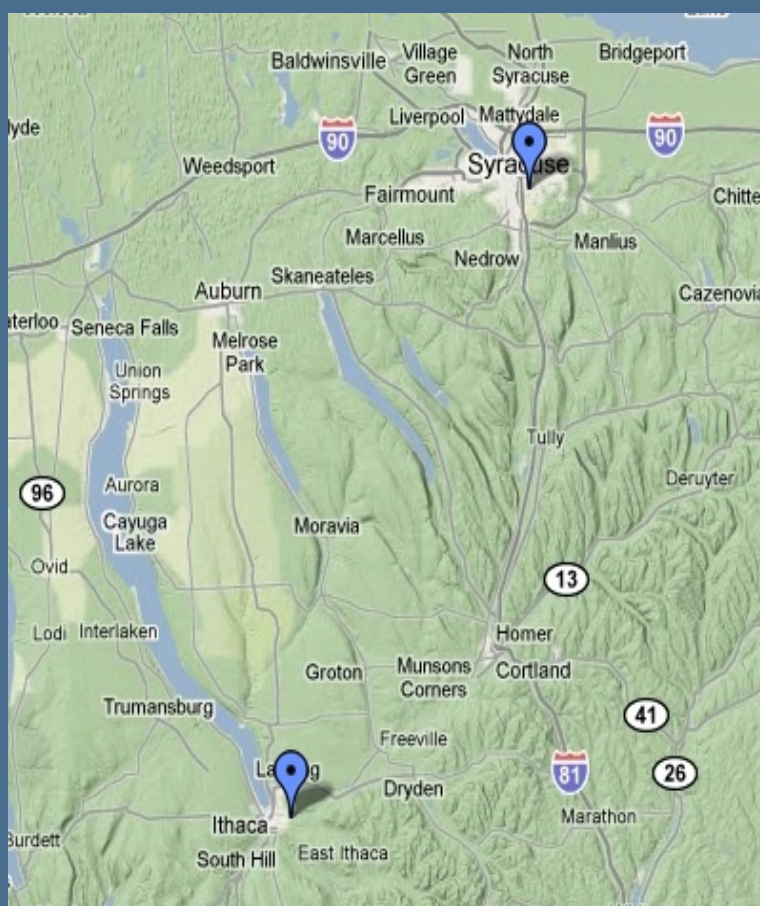
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Challenge: *Time.*
Students and mentors already have full-time work and educational commitments; the mentorship program has to fit in around their busy schedules.

Solution: Have mentor pairs agree on expectations for the relationship, agreeing on frequency, mode, and purpose of communication and interaction. Revisit those expectations as needed.

Challenge: *Distance.*
This is specific to the Syracuse-Cornell partnership, but an important factor. The institutions are about 55 miles apart.

Solution: Plan for and support at least 1-2 face-to-face events each year, as well as virtual interaction.

Feedback

Students value:
- having professional contacts beyond their school,
- news and advice from their mentors,
- opportunities to participate in CUL events,
- understanding the day-to-day work of science and eScience librarianship

Mentors value:
- interaction with students,
- opportunities for virtual participation in SU events,
- news from the program coordinator,
- opportunities to collaborate with students on projects.

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