

RefWorks

Texas Medical Center Library

From Managing Citations to Advancing Collaboration



How **RefWorks** Enables Librarians at the Texas Medical Center Library Do What They Do: Help People



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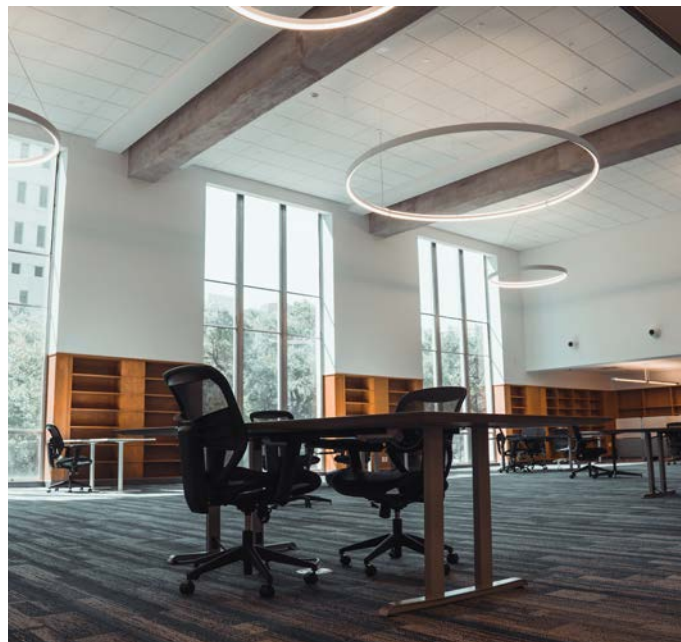
“RefWorks wins people over, with its more user-friendly interface that is easier to navigate and requires fewer clicks.”

Emma Silva, TMC liaison librarian

About the Texas Medical Center Library

Unique to medical and research libraries across the country, The Texas Medical Center Library (TMC Library) is a private, stand-alone, and not-for-profit organization independent from any university or research institution. It delivers biomedical information to its member institutions for the advancement of medical education, research and practice. The TMC Library serves 50 medicine-related institutions, including 21 hospitals and two specialty institutions, two medical schools, six nursing schools, and schools of dentistry, public health, and pharmacy.

The library serves all other TMC member institutions and provides electronic resources and workflow tools to support students, faculty and researchers. Among these tools, library users have access to RefWorks, a web-based service designed to simplify the process of research, collaboration, data organization, and writing by providing an easy-to-use tool for citation, bibliography, and reference management.



Liaison librarians are assigned to each member institution of the TMC to help meet their educational and research needs. Liaison librarians provide such services as:

- Provides instruction on accessing library resources and updates when new services and resources become available
- Works with students on their information needs and advocates for them in the library
- Consults on literature search strategies and systematic reviews
- Consultation on systematic reviews
- Instructs on database searches, citation management, evidence-based practice, and other knowledge management skills

We recently spoke to two of TMC's liaison librarians, Emma Silva and Kelsey Koym, about their work and how RefWorks helps them support the students, researchers and faculty they serve. Silva works with McGovern Medical School along with the School of Biomedical Informatics, and Koym liaises with the UTHealth School of Public Health and Texas Southern University, College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. TMC has been a champion of RefWorks since the early 2000s and supported thousands of students in the transition from legacy RefWorks to the sleeker current version.

"For creating bibliographies alone, students love RefWorks because it saves them so much time. And they are excited about new features that are always coming out."

Kelsey Koym, TMC liaison librarian

Advocating for RefWorks with students and researchers

Both Silva and Koym began using RefWorks as students themselves, first as undergraduate students and later while pursuing their graduate degrees. Before using RefWorks, they each manually compiled bibliographic information for their work, a tedious and time-consuming process that can take a day or more to complete for a single research paper. Their positive experiences with RefWorks led them to become staunch advocates of RefWorks among their library users.

Working closely with incoming students, Silva and Koym introduce them to RefWorks and set the foundation for using the service to simplify research workflows throughout their academic careers. Once every semester, Koym teaches an hour-long, weekly seminar that is essentially an extended demo. Using real-world examples, she shows how to run a search in PubMed, export references and import them, then create folders to organize bibliographic information. These sessions are recorded and available to students for future reference.

According to Koym, first- and second-year medical students become enthusiastic adopters of using the software – especially first-timer users of APA style, including the TMC's many international students. "For creating bibliographies, alone, students love RefWorks because it saves them so much time. And they are excited about new features that are always coming out."

Koym and Silva are also proactive about communicating updates to students on an on-going basis via announcements in Canvas and the library newsletter, on the library website, in classes and through social media posts. Silva also presents regular "brown bag lunch" sessions to highlight the latest release information, such as new citation styles, preferences and issues that have been resolved.

Advocating RefWorks to third- and fourth-year medical students, as well as more advanced researchers including fellows and residents can be more challenging. They've often already established workflow habits using free reference management services discovered on their own. Learning a new system, even if it has advantages – free software simply doesn't automate formatting as well as RefWorks, nor update as frequently to offer as many citation styles – isn't a top priority.

But when consulting with these library users, Silva explained, she takes the time to share the benefits of RefWorks. For one, it's free for them to use, plus no installation is needed. When compared with the legacy version with which some of them are familiar, the current RefWorks "wins people over," she said, with its more user-friendly interface that is easier to navigate and requires fewer clicks.

"Students like two clicks or less," Silva said and Koym agreed: This gives RefWorks an edge over other reference management services.



“One of the greatest benefits for faculty using RefWorks would be making it easier for students to find the articles they’ve been assigned,”

Kelsey Koym, TMC liaison librarian

Simplifying research workflows, including systematic review

In addition to teaching students the benefits of using the software for in-text citations and compiling bibliographies, Silva and Koym also run tests in RefWorks to better support faculty and researchers. They often get requests to compare RefWorks to other reference management services and they proactively experiment with new features to gain a deeper understanding of how they might better support research and teaching workflows.

They also frequently solicit feedback from users and advocate on their behalf for improvements. For example, Silva and Koym consult with scholars on research strategies and the systematic review process. A formal systematic review conducted by an advanced researcher can take up to 18 months but beginning researchers are assigned semester-long systematic review projects to help them understand how they are done. Systematic review is a critical step at the beginning of the research process that requires searching at least three databases around a carefully crafted research question to uncover all relevant information.

Thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of records result from these searches and, as to be expected when searching multiple databases, many duplicate records are among them. Researchers depend on reference management services to sort out these duplicates, or de-dup the search results, quickly and efficiently. The challenge is that deduplication in RefWorks can take time and while waiting for results, users cannot use RefWorks for other purposes. This can be very frustrating for researchers who are crunched for time.

However, Koym and Silva and have been invited to work with the RefWorks UX team to improve deduplication which in turn will help the TMC Library better support their users in this step, which is central to the systematic review process.

Encouraging faculty use of additional features

Another area of improvement Silva and Koym are eager to explore is in advocating RefWorks to faculty. They agreed that many of the software features that support communication and collaboration are underutilized. “I would like faculty to work more with RefWorks because it would be a useful tool for them to share files and reading list with students,” Koym said.

When sharing reading lists, she explained, faculty sometimes only include the title of an article and students struggle to find the full text. The “Projects” feature in RefWorks could help with this challenge. A “project” is a shared workspace within RefWorks that allows all designated members of a class or research team to add, delete and edit references, folders and documents.

Silva and Koym also discussed how this feature would benefit collaboration among researchers – and particularly how it could have been useful in the realm of public health during a global pandemic. “Sharing reference data in RefWorks would support communication among researchers around the country and around the world who are studying a novel virus. It would advance collaboration in medical research.”

This is among the many reasons both librarians will continue stressing the advantages of using RefWorks among all of their users. “We’re excited about RefWorks because it helps,” Koym concluded.

“And that’s why we do what we do: we like helping people.”

[**Learn more about RefWorks**](#)

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