

The IMIA WG1 Database on Health and Medical Informatics

Programs and Courses: A Call for Participation

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Abstract: Working Group 1 on health and medical informatics education of the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) has established a WWW site (<http://ix.urz.uni-heidelberg.de/~d16>) to provide up to date information about its work. The core of the site is an underlying database providing information on health and medical informatics (HMI) programs and courses worldwide. In addition a mailing list was installed to facilitate communication between all persons interested in HMI education. To be able to have a database of high quality and value we encourage all teachers and institutions to submit information about courses and programs on HMI education offered and to set pointers to their own WWW sites.

In addition a mailing list was installed to facilitate communication between all persons interested in HMI education. For subscription a message has to be sent to "listserv@listserv.net". The body of the message should read "SUBSCRIBE IMIA-WG1". Messages to the IMIA WG1 list have to be sent to "imia-wg1@urzinfo.urz.uni-heidelberg.de".

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Introduction

Working Group 1 (WG 1) of the International Medical Informatics Association (IMIA) deals with education in health and medical informatics [1]. In its meeting during Medinfo 95 in Vancouver the members of WG1 decided to establish a database providing information about programs and courses in Health and Medical Informatics (HMI) worldwide which should be concise and easily accessible. Basically its purpose is to serve teachers and students searching for information about programs and courses in HMI.

World-wide web site

In previous work carried out at University of Maryland at Baltimore and University of Victoria a database accessible through Gopher was established and some data were collected [2]. Most of the data is now outdated or has been replaced by links to Gopher sites of the respective programs, i.e. are not available in a structured way in a database.

As the world-wide web is establishing itself as the prime medium for dissemination and exchange of information IMIA WG1 decided to establish its own WWW site at University of Heidelberg. The main goal was to give easy access to a new version of the database but also to provide information about results and ongoing activities of the working group as well as information about the group's members. The IMIA WG1 WWW site can be accessed through the URL

<http://ix.urz.uni-heidelberg.de/~d16>

Structure of the Database

Acknowledging the diversity of programs and courses in existence a simple database scheme was developed (see fig. 1) which hopefully is sufficient to accommodate the programs and courses encountered in practice. The attributes of the three components of the database are listed in tables 1 through 3.

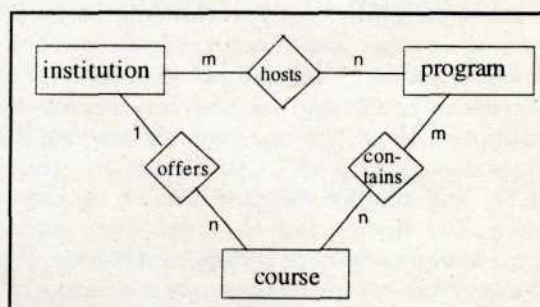


Figure 1: Structure of the IMIA WG1 database on HMI programs and courses.

Institution
Name of Institution
Faculty/School
Department
Contact Person
Street
City
State
Postal code
Country
Phone number
Fax number
E-Mail address
WWW address
Date of last update

Table 1: Database attributes for an institution.

Program
Name of Program
Institution(s)
Type of Program
Duration of Program (years)
Degree/Qualification awarded
Year created
Language of Instruction
of Full-time Faculty
of Part-time Faculty
Application Requirements
Application deadline(s)
Enrollment/year
of Students currently enrolled
of Graduates
Program Description / Remarks
WWW address
Date of last update

Table 2: Database attributes for a program.

Course
Name of Course
Course Number
Institution
Program
Credit Hours
Level
Instructor
E-Mail address of Instructor
WWW address
Course Description / Syllabus
Date of last update

Table 3: Database attributes for a course.

Usually a certain institution will offer certain courses on HMI, e.g. for students of medicine, nursing or other health care professions. There are, however, several specialized programs granting degrees in health and medical informatics. At one institution more than one program may be offered, e.g. one granting a M.S. and another one granting a Ph.D., and require different sets of courses to be taken. We have tried to cover these situations encountered in practice within the database scheme. The attributes of the database were selected to form a minimum data set, especially providing key information relevant for searching for a course or program. More detailed information may be provided in the database links to WWW pages of the respective course or program.

Operations of the Database

One of the main problems with a database like this is being up-to-date and its content being controlled to assure a high quality of information. We therefore decided to proceed as follows:

The database is operated in a monitored mode. Information submitted to the database will be available for retrieval immediately but will also be checked for completeness and consistency during regular maintenance of the database. In case of problems we will try to get corrected information from the institution hosting the course resp. offering the program. Obviously nonsense data will be deleted from the database without notification. We will not allow the users to modify existing data through the WWW. Changes should be re-entered into the database with a note to the administrator to delete the old entries.

Searching for Information in the Database

Currently we allow searches in the database by keyword, country, language and program type. We will provide a more sophisticated means for searching, soon. However in most cases the options offered currently should suffice.

Mailing List

To provide a means for fast and easy communication between all persons interested in HMI educa-

tion an unmoderated mailing list has been installed at the University of Heidelberg.

For subscription a message has to be sent to

`listserv@listserv.net`

The body of the message should read

`SUBSCRIBE IMIA-WG1`

The listserver will then reply with a notification that the subscription has been accepted and some more information about additional services offered. Should there be any problems with the list, e.g. not being able to subscribe, the administrator of the WG1 list should be contacted at

`imia.wg1@urz.uni-heidelberg.de`

Messages to the IMIA WG1 list have to be sent to

`imia-wg1@
urzinfo.urz.uni-heidelberg.de`

Conclusions: Now it's up to YOU!

The IMIA WG1 database on courses and programs in health and medical informatics education is set up and running. It is obvious however that the database can only be useful if it is provided with sufficient input.

Now it is up to all people responsible for HMI programs and courses. We ask you to enter current information about your programs and courses. Add pointers to your own WWW sites! Keep the database alive!

REFERENCES

1. van Bommel, JH, McCray, AT (Eds.). *Yearbook of Medical Informatics '96, Chapter about IMIA Working Groups*. 1996. Stuttgart: Schattauer.
2. Ball, MJ, Protti, DJ, Douglas, JV. An International Health/Medical Informatics Programs Database. *Meth Inform Med* 1994; 33:327-9.

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