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ZOOM TRANSCRIPTION
Interviewer: Dr. Adela Grando
Interviewee: Dr. Scott McGrath

19:41:41 Welcome to another edition of for your informatics, a podcast where we explore the limitless world of medical informatics created and led by the women in AMIA.

19:41:55 We offer insights into career paths leadership and education. Thanks for joining us, as we highlight lives to inspire greatness inclusion and diversity in the field of informatics.

19:42:07 Welcome to the FYInformatics podcast. My name is Dr. Adela Grando, I am going to be your host today.

19:42:11 This podcast is sponsored by the 2020 women in AMIA leadership seed grants.

19:42:18 We want to say thank you to our sponsor. And thank you for joining us.

19:42:24 And today I have the pleasure of introducing an interviewing our guest, Dr. Scott McGrath is a clinical informatics Education Specialist at Providence, St. Joseph Health

19:42:43 And he's also the chair of the AMIA student working group. And today we will be discussing about his career path and his role as chair of the AMIA student working group.

19:42:51 Thank you so much for joining us.

19:42:56 Well, Shall we start with a brief introduction?

19:43:01 Could you give us a very high level synopsis of how you got to where you are now? Certainly. Well, thank you very much.

19:43:08 I'm actually have been a fan of the podcast for a while.

19:43:11 I am really excited to join you guys today actually recommended frequently others who are interested in learning more about AMIA. So, to get to your question.

19:43:22 My path has been a bit non traditional, in many ways, unlike my wife who's the original doctor McGrath in our household.

19:43:31 She had a very clear vision of what she wanted to do.

19:43:35 And I bounced around a little bit. So I got my bachelor's at Linfield College which is now Linfield University out in Oregon, biology, and I thought it was going to be falling with father's footsteps into dentistry.

19:43:51 However, I didn't really apply myself, to be honest. And I found that I didn't have the grades to be competitive.

19:43:58 As an applicant to dental school.

19:44:00 So after I graduated, I found myself in the semiconductor industry.

19:44:07 Obviously, so I ended up working at Intel and work there for a few years and my wife decided that she wanted to pursue her doctorate mechanics, out of Chapel Hill.

19:44:20 So, I stayed within the semiconductor industry, ended up working in a company called Cree out in North Carolina.

19:44:27 And when she finished her PhD. She actually accepted a position out at the university Nebraska Omaha teaching athletic training.

19:44:37 By the time we reached Omaha I was ready for a change. I was looking for something a little more different. And I kind of wrote my course through that and was looking to return to the sciences and so I was looking around for possible lab positions I could

19:44:51 apply for.
19:44:53 And that led me to interview with the dean at the College of Information Science, Dr. Ali early.
19:45:02 I got into that meeting thinking it was being like, maybe a lab position or some way to kind of help out and he looked over my resume and said that, you know, "Have you ever heard of Bioinformatics?", and I had not.
19:45:18 And so, he said, Given my background. That might be a good fit for me and suggested that I take an interest of biominformatics course that they were offering.
19:45:27 So, I enrolled in that class and it actually was taught by my eventual advisor, Dr. Bastola. And that's what led me to actually sign up for the computer science master's program specializing in bioinformatics.
19:45:44 While I was in the program, they actually rolled up a new degree. So it was a biomedical informatics with tracks in mathematics and health informatics and I quickly switch tracks to the health informatics area because that's what really was kind of speaking to me
19:46:02 and it was far more interesting.
19:46:05 And because they had that new offering. I continued on in their doctorate program too.
19:46:11 And so well. I was really impressed with by biomedical informatics. It was with the patient level of Biomedical Informatics that really, I had the deep passion for, in particular precision medicine that's really what I thought was fascinating and where
19:46:26 I wanted to kind of contribute.
19:46:29 So, like I said before, I think kind of non traditional paths and not following any obvious path. Once we finished my comprehensive exam and before I actually proposed my dissertation.
19:46:43 We moved to Missoula up here in Montana. And that's where my wife had taken a faculty position at the University of Montana. And I finished up my degree remotely.
19:46:53 So, that took a little longer than anticipated and it meant that I lost my stipends. So I started teaching informatics courses remotely, and keeping with the common trend of trailblazing through this path I defended my degree the zoom
19:47:12 in April of, 2018 and now I work in Providence remotely so it's it's kind of a circle of life. That's awesome. Thank you so much, very interesting. And now I wonder how did you have heard for first time about AMIA or even AMIA student working group,
19:47:29 and what made you say well I want to get involved, I want to become the chair. Certainly, yeah, I think that story kind of begins in the piece where I was talking about that I'm kind of a little bit of an outlier my lab.
19:47:43 And so all of my cohort beginning really were there for by bioinformatics, I ended up being the first student to graduate in the new Biomedical Informatics degree for both my masters and the doctors.
19:47:57 So what had happened was it was initially set up as a computer science program, and you get a specialty in bioinformatics, and as I was kind of working through my projects I, I really started you know I was initially really fascinated with Direct-to-Consumer Genetic
19:48:16 testing. And so I wanted to kind of explore that space.
19:48:20 And so I wanted to kind of explore that space. But what that meant was that I was often, you know, veering towards a patient in the

clinical areas of informatics where everybody else was pretty much deeply focused on molecular biology. Our lab, it
19:48:36 has a lot of networking, that they were focusing on. And so it was hard for me to kind of connect both with my peers my lab. And also, whatever conferences we tended to go to.
19:48:50 They were always focused on Bioinformatics, and, you know, things would be interesting but I never connected with people and it was hard for me to get people excited about what I was working on.
19:49:03 So I started to started looking for a little bit more relevant conferences to my work, and also professional societies I might be able to join and that's how I found AMIA, and I was super excited to attend the 2015, AMIA annual symposium, which was called
19:49:22 out in Chicago that year.
19:49:24 And I ended up going solo is the only one in my lab that submitted anything.
19:49:29 My advisor wasn't able to attend with me. And so what I did was I took advantage of the student volunteer program that they offer.
19:49:38 And for those of you that aren't familiar with it, it basically is set up to wave registration fees, in order to assist with the conference, and so you kind of refer a little bit of a gopher for a new staff, you make sure that the sessions are starting
19:49:55 in time, if there's any tickets that were associated with signing up for the workshop, you're going to collect them, you know, just helping things run smoothly.
19:50:05 So in my very first session.
19:50:08 From my volunteer shift, I met Kate Fultz Holis who quickly recommended attending work group meetings and some other kind of showed me a few of the ropes for what I should do to get the most out of the conference.
19:50:25 And that's how I actually went to my first student working group meeting. And really, the whole conference itself was really transformational.
19:50:35 I've been to many of the conferences before but this is the first time I really felt at home.
19:50:39 I really felt like I found my tribe, if you will.
19:50:44 And these are people that I was fascinated by what they're working on. And they also showed an interest in my work for the first time, which was, you know, nice.
19:50:54 And I knew after that conference I really wanted to get more involved, wonderful and, you know, we don't get to talk every day to the chair of the AMIA student group so we wanted to take advantage to this opportunity to ask you what the group does for the AMIA
19:51:15 students. Could you give us more details about that? Yeah.
19:51:15 So, the formal definition is that we're multi disciplinary group of students who are looking to connect with other students and enhance our informatics search research skills, but I really like to think of it as kind of a Grand Central Station
19:51:30 for students that were kind of gathering points for students at a variety stages of their career.
19:51:35 So you might be a younger graduate student, who, you know, went straight from undergrad into your master's program, but you also might be an MD, who's starting their informatics training or an older student who's looking to, you know, pivot to new career

19:51:52 path like I was, and all of those students can find a home within the student working group.
19:51:58 We really want to be that first step for helping students find the direction of their informatics career and identify the peers who are also on a similar path.
19:52:07 So whether you're working on machine learning genomics, if you're into nursing informatics, or population health, making connections with your peers.
19:52:19 Early can make some really nice lifelong connections and pay dividends, over informatics career, wonderful you give us a very good idea of what the AMIA student group is about.
19:52:33 So, for women, women who are thinking about joining the group, how can they get more involved. I'm really happy you asked that because we have several ways you can get more involved, and I really encourage that you do.
19:52:47 So the first thing you want to do is join the student working group via the AMIA website.
19:52:52 So, how you do that is you just go to the AMIA website and search for the working groups and they'll help guide you on how to register.
19:53:02 Now, you're not automatically registered student working group that's something we'd like to try and have available in the future. But you'll find that not only is the student working group but there are many other working groups that are available for
19:53:15 you to sign up on.
19:53:17 We'd like to think that the you sign up first the student working group, but by no means do you have to, you might find that you're interested in genomics.
19:53:26 So Gen TBI is the group you'd want to look out there.
19:53:30 Now with the nursing informatics is very active and they're a great group to get involved with too.
19:53:37 So that's step one is that you want to kind of go in and do that.
19:53:44 The next thing that I recommend is find us on our other channels of communication so we have a Twitter account, which is a AMIASTWG.
19:53:56 And we also have a Slack channel, which is amiastudentwg.slack.com
19:54:06 And that is a little bit more of a social area where we're hoping that people get a chance to get to know each other.
19:54:14 I really like to call it our digital water cooler, where we can share good news. If you have like a quick question.
19:54:21 You can pop in and ask. And, you know, it's the actual AMIA conferences are perfect for getting a chance to meet your peers. But, you know, they only happened a couple times a year.
19:54:35 And this is a way we can kind of continue those conversations and get to know each other.
19:54:39 So that's another thing that I really want to call out and have people look to get involved there.
19:54:45 So, step three is really the sign up for the projects we sponsor. And so we have several of those that we do for the year and we put out announcements.

And so, by been in the website and been in the social channels you should be able to see those pop up a
19:55:04 bit more. And hopefully, apply for ones that you think are interesting. The final way is to self nominate for officer positions in the student work group.
19:55:11 So we have elections every year. And there are a variety of spots available, you could be a member at large. You could put in for the editor of our newsletter.
19:55:25 We have a social media account that you can manage, or you can even put it into the chair elect which is the path that you get to be chair. The following year,
19:55:32 even if you're not 100%. If you want to kind of do that, we are opening up our meetings, and you can join and just kind of sit in and get a sense for what leadership and what the student working group is working on.
19:55:46 So we'll post the links to those calls them once a month.
19:55:51 And it's a great way to kind of pop in, see what we're doing. And also we want to encourage people to do that just for a way to give us feedback because we're really here to help out the students.
19:56:04 And that came back from them is the way to know that we're doing things that you want us to be doing.
19:56:10 Excellent. Well I hope that after we release this podcast, you will have a lot more members enroll, I hope so do what leads me to my next question, what are some of the things, one might be able to do after joining the AMIA student working group, just as
19:56:28 something that I get real excited about because we have some really cool opportunities that students can participate in every year.
19:56:35 So, for example, we help contribute to the year review presentations performed at the AMIA informatics summit, and the annual symposium.
19:56:46 With the informatics summit year review we actually spend a couple months, going out there collecting manuscripts for the past year. scoring them, and actually can have a grading rubric for us to help with that.
19:57:00 And then we can compile a list that we share with the presenter that year.
19:57:05 So, this year and last year was Dr. Nicholas Tatonetti from Columbia University.
19:57:12 And so, it's a way to interact with established faculty from around the country on these various projects.
19:57:20 And we often have repeat volunteers in this project because it's an excellent way to see what's going on in bio informatics translational and the data science corner of informatics, and so we go out and we're looking kind of like looking over the past
19:57:36 year, which one's kind of fit the template for what we're talking about in this presentation.
19:57:43 And we'll crowdsource it together to kind of go through and said okay this is a, an awesome paper because they were really breaking new ground in informatics, or maybe will say, Oh, this paper, you know, that just be reusing the same off the shelf that
19:57:58 the knowledge is that we've seen elsewhere, so it's good but not one we really want to spotlight.

19:58:03 And so by compiling that list, it really helps out the presenter Dr. Tatonetti figure out which one he's going to highlight in a 30 seconds to a minute.

19:58:15 You know, basically a fire hose of information, but we're really fighting papers that are interesting and exciting in that hour and it's always been really well attended.

19:58:26 and it's very popular.

19:58:29 So, that's kind of one example.

19:58:33 Another thing that we've seen happen and this is something that spun out from last year's actual year in review was, we launched a YouTube channel.

19:58:45 And so there we did something called the C19 weekly which we were looking at actual interesting coven 19 papers that came out and kind of we stepped it down a little bit to make it a little bit easier and more relatable to the public.

19:59:02 And so, we had some people that watched last year's presentation and like it was really cool but we want some more. And we ended up doing eight episodes, kind of on that theme.

19:59:14 And so sometimes these projects get legs and you get other things that spin out.

19:59:21 And another one that I like to highlight is our, our collaboration with IMIA, so the International Medical Informatics Association and they put on that info every two years which is a global informatics conference.

19:59:36 So, with that project students have the ability to assist in editing and preparation of the proceedings. And what's really cool about that is that we actually do have a small stipend, that we're able to support the student work and so it's not just a

19:59:53 volunteer, but you get to see the back end of the conference and kind of going through and getting all the papers lined up for the publication. And so it's also a unique experience that you get to see.

20:00:09 And that kind of runs with a theme is that we really, we try and find ways to collaborate with other working groups to kind of launch research projects.

20:00:17 And we've had success with that that people have come together, worked with people from another group, and we've had their work published in index journals.

20:00:29 So, for example, we have a team right now that's where he had a systematic review, in collaboration with the consumer and pervasive health working group.

20:00:37 And I'm always super impressed with what the student members, producing these projects and I, I really encourage people to keep an eye out for ways to contribute even if you're not 100% sure you're going to be able to help out.

20:00:50 You know we have room at the table for a lot of people, for example the year review even though we're really focusing on bioinformatics and translational papers.

20:01:00 And so that kind of area. We have students that are at different specialties that still contribute, you know they can help us find papers maybe they don't do the scoring as much but when we're doing that initial search, they can help on that way too.

20:01:17 Wow, amazing so many opportunities for students that we didn't know about. So now we know. So, Dr. Scott thank you so much for your time and for sharing your stories with us.

20:01:29 It's been wonderful to hear about the AMIA student working group, and also to know you better. And before we let you go. Do you have any last words, any advice for those who are thinking about joining the AMIA student group.

20:01:44 Actually yeah I think what I would offer kind of suggestions that I always hear people say, you know, when you go to conferences, make sure to network, like it's really some simple thing, and as a student that can be super intimidating to try and strike

20:02:01 up a conversation with somebody who's a paragon in our field you know what I just walked up to them and like hey, and I think people are you know really nervous and embarrassed.

20:02:12 And so it's it's advice that you know is well meaning but I don't think people really follow through with okay well how do I do that. And sometimes you might have an amazing advisor who's going to kind of take you under their wing and say, Hey, I come

20:02:26 with me. I want to introduce you to somebody, and they'll initiate the conversation for you and kind of get some of that awkwardness out of the way to get it rolling, and maybe you're finding yourself talking to some of those Paragons in informatics,

20:02:39 but I think a lot of people feel a little bit more comfortable hanging out with their lab mates or really don't push themselves you know put themselves out there.

20:02:47 And so I'd like to kind of give a couple bits of advice on that. And I think the first one is, you know, when you're at these conferences. Twitter is as a really great resource we have a lot of people who will live tweet the conference, and that's a simple

20:03:04 icebreaker right there is that you can kind of just look up at the hashtag for the conference it's well established for whatever you're at, and kind of watch the feed and if you see somebody talking about some things he thinks that interesting.

20:03:17 Believe me, they're going to be perfectly happy with you popping up and saying hey I saw your activity on Twitter. And I just wanted to introduce myself.

20:03:25 And you could talk about what they were, what they were discussing in a panel or presentation.

20:03:32 That's an easy one. But I really think the student working group can be a networking opportunity to meet other students from other programs, and so think of it as networking in easy mode.

20:03:43 I was able to complete my dissertation from people who have the expertise, I was lacking that I met at AMIA.

20:03:51 And so even early in my professional career I've seen dividends from the networking I've done.

20:03:58 There's been research and employment opportunities that popped up simply from working with other people.

20:04:04 While it student.

20:04:07 And I really consider AMIA my professional home because I respect and admire the people I've met there. But more importantly, these people, I consider friends, and I look forward to seeing them every year symposium.

20:04:20 And that's what I want to help it accomplished with my role as chair of the student group is that I want to help the students expand their own network, and help our, you know, informatics drive growth.

20:04:31 Well thank you so much, Dr. Scott, we really appreciate, we learn so much from you. And this is Dr. Adela Grando, concluding the podcast and interview to Dr.
20:04:43 Scott McGrath, Chair of the AMIA student working group.
20:04:52 Thank you for joining us for this edition of for your informatics, a podcast where we explore the limitless world of medical informatics, follow us on Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn at fly informatics, and never miss an episode.