ASSESSING THE ROLE OF REFERENCE

Prioritizing Users and Emphasizing Critical Thinking in Collaborative Workflows
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Learning Outcomes

1. Describe the collaborative process of designing an assessment project across different library departments

2. Examine the issues surrounding reference questions' impact on Access Services and Subject Librarians
Session Outline

I. Background and History
II. Literature review overview
III. Methods
IV. Findings
V. Practical Implications
VI. Future Recommendations
George Mason University
Land Acknowledgement

https://native-land.ca/
Background Information

2016-2018 – Information Services

1. Moved to a single service point
2. Information Services team created to answer reference questions
3. Desk staffed by Information Services and Access Services, still two different departments
4. Eliminated the traditional reference desk

2018 to Present – Access Services

1. Library restructuring moved the Information Services team to Teaching and Learning
2. Access Services solely staffed the Information desk
3. Reference services – consultation and virtual reference
LITERATURE REVIEW
Key Points from Literature Review

• Ford (1986) first proposed libraries restructure their reference services due to the anticipated changes in library users' behavior amid advancements in technology
• Gerlich & Berard (2007) introduced the Reference Effort Assessment Data (READ) scale, which established a baseline to evaluate qualitative statistics for academic reference services
• Many have experimented with different forms of reference services:
  • Merged desks/Single service points (Bunnett et. al., 2016; Frederiksen & Wilkinson, 2016)
  • Reorganized Access Services departments (Rodriguez et. al., 2017)
  • Peer reference models (Bodemer, 2014)
Fall 2019 Assessment Project

• Task force created – managers, subject librarians, and Access Services Staff

• Defined three different levels of questions: directional (Tier 1) reference, (Tier 2) and research consultations (Tier 3)

• 8 weeks of data collection via webform (at Info Desk) and community spreadsheet (for on-call librarians)

• Responses included level of question and referrals

• Open feedback sessions to hear from staff
FINDINGS
Data

- 1,901 total interactions logged by Fenwick Access Services staff (most of these were directional)
- 145 Information Desk interactions were referred to librarians on-call
- 56 interactions logged by librarians on-call
  - Of these, 17 were Tier Level 2 (about 30%) and 33 were Tier Level 3 (about 59%)
  - 61% drop off rate of patrons who were referred (89 in total) but did not follow up on the referral
  - 38% (21) of the on-call interactions were referred again to the appropriate subject librarian
- 88, or 4.6%, Information Desk interactions were unable to be referred (outside of reference on-call hours or VR)
Data

Information Desk: Number of Interactions by Time of Day

- 8am: 59
- 9am: 106
- 10am: 175
- 11am: 221
- 12pm: 212
- 1pm: 247
- 2pm: 194
- 3pm: 191
- 4pm: 125
- 5pm: 128
- 6pm: 87
- 7pm: 82
- 8pm: 24
- 9pm: 27
- 10pm: 14
- 11pm: 9
Data

On-Call: Number of Interactions by Time of Day

- 10am: 6
- 11am: 8
- 12pm: 7
- 1pm: 9
- 2pm: 8
- 3pm: 6
- 4pm: 5
- 5pm: 7
Librarian & Staff Feedback

- General consensus among librarians and library staff that the main library should provide some reference service
- Coverage and staffing of the reference on-call service difficult to manage
- No official venues of communication across Access Services staff and on-call librarians
- No central location for the service to be provided (some did their on-call hour in their offices, & traveling librarians had no sufficient workspace to provide the service)
Suggested Recommendations

• Make hours more strategic based on data from the Fall 2019 assessment.
• Create a central location where research consultations may take place.
• Define a communication workflow.
• Managers will continually monitor the implemented changes throughout the semester and facilitate cross-departmental conversations.
Initial On-Site Changes

- Moved hours to high-traffic times
- Designated reference on-call space
- Planned communication workflow between involved departments
- Began conversations on further assessment (changed Qualtrics forms for both Information Desk data and Public Services Interactions form for librarians)
COVID-19

- Initial interdepartmental meetings delayed
- Reference and instruction moved 100% online
- On-call librarian space closed
- Fraction of normal traffic
Resources


QUESTIONS

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