Forum: What's in a Name – Renaming and Reorganization of the Department Formerly Known as "Reference"

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Discussion Summary Submitted by Diane Hunter, Head of Reference Services and Library Instruction, University Libraries, University of Missouri—Kansas City

Attendance:

- 76 Participants registered for the session
- 37 Different Institutions represented
- 13 Clusters represented (all academic library clusters)

Key points:

1. Few like the term "Reference." Many think we should change the name of the service. Few have made a change.
2. Some libraries have an Information Commons that combines traditional reference service with technical (hardware and/or software) support. Many others are considering similar arrangements or variations on the idea.
3. Libraries have fewer or no librarians staffing the reference desk. Some have combined service desks.

Next steps:
Possible presentation at next year's MOBIUS Conference

- Overview of topic in academic libraries nationwide
- Formal state-wide survey of current reference departments services of MOBIUS libraries

Summary of questions and responses:

- **Has the name of your reference department changed?**
  - **What was the impetus for the name change?**
  - **How was the new name decided?**
  - **How has the new name been marketed to the university community?**
  - **What are the measurements used to track the effect of the name change?**

- Question of whether "Reference" is a valid term anymore, but many still use.
- Some say definitely change the name – too old fashioned for young people.
- Question of whether the name of the Department has to be the same as the name of desk or as the virtual presence.
  - Marketing with the new service name is more important than the department name.

- Service name ideas:
    - Ask a Librarian
    - Customer Service
        - Many librarians hate the term “customer.” Is it meaningful to patrons?
    - Gotta question?
    - Help Desk
    - Help! Help! Help!
        - Help desk means tech help to students.
    - Information
        - Concern that people might think it’s IT.
    - Information and Research
    - Information Services and Reference (merged service desk)
        - Impetus – Circulation desk is where the students go.
        - Name implied more than just reference.
    - Information Services Team
        - Tech questions referred to computing lab.
        - Impetus – Change to team management system.
        - Marketing – Called Information Services/Reference at first.
    - Library Services (merged service desk)
    - “The Octagon”
        - Refers to big imposing desk
    - Outreach
    - Research/Research Help/Research Assistance
        - Term may indicate a more in-depth process and deter some students from asking.
        - One library has seen no change in use of service with change to use of “Research.”
        - Suggested by students at Truman State.
- No name changes, but signage:
    - Ask here for help
    - Information
    - Information Commons
- Patron confusion between Reference and Reserves.
- Marketing
    - Change brochures and other publications.
    - Through advisors to organizations.
    - LibGuides.
    - Faculty meeting involvement.

- **What changes have occurred with the reference department space?**
    - **What are changes, if any, to the physical collection?**
- Print reference collection slowly shrinking.
- Comparing online to print.
- Credo as impetus to weeding reference collection.
- Added books.

- Separated “ready reference” books from other books..
- Moved desk to nearer the reference books.
- Moved books further away from desk, because online resources more used.

  - **What are changes, if any, to the physical space?**
  - **What, if applicable, is the relationship between reference and the Information Commons?**
- Number of reference questions diminishing.
- Number of reference questions and instruction rising exponentially (embedded librarians).
- Merged services desk – Access Services/Circulation/Reserves/Reference.
  - Some successful, others less so.
  - Cross-training important.
  - May work better at smaller institutions.
- Learning/Information Commons with reference and electronics.
    - Red “sail” movable walls
      - Divide big study room.
      - White board for two groups.
    - Want white pod walls.
    - Want more study rooms because students like them.
    - Separate guest computers
- Separate PC Lab and reference also has PCs
    - Good to have PC lab close by reference, so librarians can help students.
    - Students want research help and IT help.
      - Good to have reference help and IT help as tag-team.
    - Call on IT to help with hardware and software.
    - Lots of copier/printer issues.
    - Lots of word processing questions from students.
- Added more computers – but never enough.
- “Library Commons” – information technology production for presentations.
- Some have and some would like to get rid of high reference desk.
    - Maybe one high part for walk-up questions and sit-down option.
- Sit down desk with student next to librarian.
- Dual monitors and keyboards.
- Need to change reference desk to accommodate librarian with physical disability.
- Consultation room or station nearby or in individual librarian office.
    - Librarians can reserve space.
- Television showing news channel.
    - Indicates the area is not a quiet floor.
- Food & drink okay.
- Soft furniture, including recliners.
- Cell phones are used by patrons for research collaboration.
- Twitter, Meebo.
- Writing center help in reference area.

- **What changes have occurred with the reference staff?**
    - **How is the reference desk staffed?**
    - **What are any new and/or additional duties to reference staff?**
    - **What are any new and/or additional duties to student assistant help?**
    - **How has the job description for professional reference librarians changed?**

- Librarian title ideas:
    - Many still use the term "Reference Librarian."
    - Research Librarian
    - Subject Librarian
    - Consulting Librarian
        - But perhaps not Consultation Service
- Part-time reference librarians/Adjunct librarians.
- No librarians at reference desk.
    - Student peers/assistants.
        - Student worker workshops during the summer to train the students on databases, services, information ethics, privacy, etc.
    - MLS students.
    - Librarians on call by walkie talkie.
        - Problem of students knowing when to make referrals to librarian.
    - Librarians available by appointment.
    - Circulation handles many reference questions.
- Change from double staffing to single staffing with back-up.
- Librarian staffs with student assistant.
- 4 ½ hour shifts at ref desk with option to call for back-up.
- Busy live web-based chat service
    - Staffed by student away from reference desk.
    - Covered at reference desk and considering move to separate location.
- Librarians choosing to work from home – telecommuting.
    - Technology limitations may impede this option.
    - Could do Meebo or email reference.
    - Project or committee work can be done from home.
    - Question of interruptions – more at home or at work?
- Reference librarians are doing much more than desk service.
    - Instruction.
    - Instructional design.
    - Student worker/paraprofessional supervision.
    - Web work/content.
    - Print/electronic collection development – more electronic resources.
    - Satellite instruction.
    - Traveling reference.
    - Technology/more tech savvy.

    - Marketing/promotion.
    - Program planning.
- Embedded librarians
    - Library instruction, then interact with students throughout the semester.
    - Offer different types of services to different courses
    - Maxed out on this capability.
    - Office in academic building – hallway, meeting, office hours
        - More use by faculty than students
- Clinical librarians – answers on the spot
- Reference librarians are separate from Instruction Liaison librarians.