Overview and Goals

In-person reference transactions have been dropping steadily library-wide for years, while online reference has grown dramatically during the same time period. Although the overall volume is down, many librarians report that questions coming in are increasingly complex and difficult. The current model of staffing many separate physical reference service points, including two general reference desks (at the Main and Undergrad Libraries), is staff intensive and restricts the amount of time that librarians are able to spend investigating new models of reference service that situate library services staff and services within researchers' regular workflows, both online and in person. The primary goal of the team is to examine the current models of how reference services is delivered to users, recommend a revised model(s) for Library reference services, and develop a comprehensive assessment approach that results in the following:

- A consistent and improved level of reference services to the Library’s primary user populations;
- A flexible model that will inform and accommodate other current and future Library-wide reference services (e.g. chat reference) and define the relation of general reference services to subject-specialty reference services.
- A recognition that reference encompasses a broad range of activities that support the research process and extend the reach of reference services(e.g., website development, search tool development, services to mobile devices, embedded services, research support in the Scholarly Commons, etc.)
- Clearly defined leadership roles for all reference activities;
- A common methodology for library-wide reference service assessment;

The group will analyze and incorporate the recommendations of the 2009 Reference Retreat, including the definition of reference: “Reference is the act of using knowledge to connect users to what they need including the creation and management of information resources in physical and digital format. Reference service should not be dependent on time or place of the user.” The team will deliver a final report and recommendations to the University Librarian and Library Executive Committee by April 30, 2010.

Charge

The group will:

1. Define the relationship and workflow between general reference and subject specific reference; Recommend workflows connecting the two, such as a robust referral model that connects users to appropriate specialists with subject, technology, or other relevant expertise throughout the Library;
2. Make recommendations for optimal placement, function, and staffing of physical and virtual service points;

3. Consult with library stakeholders likely to be affected by changes in physical or virtual services, such as Central Access Services, the Scholarly Commons, User Education, and the Services Advisory Committee, as appropriate;

4. Consult with users and review existing data (IM, chat, and email transcripts, Library-wide surveys, Desk Tracker data) to identify key user needs, and possible impacts of changes to reference services;

5. Define a model for leadership, coordination and professional development of reference services throughout the Library;

6. Outline a plan for assessing the success of the proposed models, making adjustments based on the results of that assessment

7. Assess overlaps, gaps, and distinct reference services offered between RRGIS and UGL (and other libraries as appropriate); identify which of these need to be combined, enhanced, reduced, modified, or eliminated; As part of this work, a subgroup will:
   - Make recommendations on what current and future services currently offered by RRGIs and UGL should be offered as part of Library-wide reference services;
   - Identify and recommend areas of reference service where librarians in RRGIS and the Undergraduate Library can assume or continue a leadership role in designing, testing, innovating, and sharing knowledge of best practices for new methods of reference service;
   - Identify new services to be offered by RRGIS and the UGL that require more staff time than is currently allocated to them to be successful;
   - Assess current faculty and staff skills and interests, and recommend training needed to achieve all of the above;

Proposed Membership

Public Service Librarian from RRGIS

Public Service Librarian from Undergrad

Public Service Librarian from the Main Library

Public Service Librarian outside the Main Library
Librarian who does in-depth reference consultations

Embedded librarian

Public Service Librarian working with primary source materials

Public Service Librarian with extensive digital reference experience

Staff member providing direct patron service

Team Leaders: Kathleen Kern, Reference, Research and Government Information & David Ward, Undergraduate Library

Administrative Liaison: Scott Walter