

Main/UGL Reference Hub
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I. Unit Narrative

A. Major Activities and Accomplishments

One of 3 reference “hubs” created as per the recommendations of the Reference Services Implementation Team Final Report, the Main/UGL Reference Hub was launched in Fall 2012. The Main/UGL Reference Hub is the front line for on-demand reference support, making referrals as appropriate to the Physical Sciences and Engineering Hub based in Grainger, the Life Sciences Hub based in the Funk ACES Library and other units and subject specialists as appropriate. The Main/UGL Reference Hub brings together subject and functional specialists from the Main and Undergraduate Libraries to provide reference and research assistance at two central on-demand information service points: the “Ask-A-Librarian” chat/SMS service and the on-site Information Desk in the Main Library.

Specific accomplishments during our 2nd year of operation include:

- Planned for the Fall 2014 relocation of the “Virtual Reference desk” (for a separate, physical desk with primary responsibility for monitoring chat and SMS questions during the busiest periods) to a semi-enclosed space next to the Information Desk.
 - The VR Desk provides an ideal venue for working collaboratively; for mentoring GAs and new staff; and for ensuring that the research-intensive questions received via chat get the focused attention required to ensure the high level of service that has fueled the exceptionally high rate of use enjoyed by our chat service.
- Expanded the training program to include an optional professional development series to help ensure a consistently high level of service, better referrals and a more seamless user experience.
- Launched a Compass site to bring together training materials and began using Compass to create interactive learning modules and quizzes which reinforce classroom and on-the-job learning.
- Instituted iWonder chat software
- Hosted (with funds from AUL for User Services) a cider and donut appreciation drop-in social for Main/UGL Reference Hub contributors in November.
- Coordinated, with the AUL for User Services, a general meeting for all Main/UGL Reference Hub contributors in December. This was a joint meeting of the Main-UGL Reference Hub management team and the heads of units that are expected to contribute to hub staffing. We discussed the current state of hub staffing and training, and the prospects for the near- and mid-term future. The goal of this meeting was to move us closer to the vision of reference as a shared building-wide service, which emerged from various NSM implementation plans (Reference Services, Government Information Services, Literatures & Languages, SSHEL, International & Area Studies, Business Information Services).

B. Challenges

- Referrals are not as consistent or robust as they could be; referral database/contact information is not always clear or up-to-date, leading to a lack of confidence about making the appropriate referral.
- Not all public service librarians in Main/UGL participate. As a result, users have less immediate access to some areas of expertise. Non-participating specialists and those who don't accept and/or reply promptly to referrals may be creating negative publicity and reputation for the Library.
- Time commitment for training and scheduling reduces time available for other activities.
- The relatively large number of new GAs in FY15 meant there was a deficit in experienced people, making it challenging to schedule an experienced person for each shift.

- The configuration of furniture and location of the VR Desk in SSHEL made it difficult for reference providers to work collaboratively and to mentor one another. The location of the service in a particular unit was also less than ideal for a Library-wide service, thus a new arrangement was sought and the VR Desk will be relocated to 204 Main Library starting Fall 2014.

C. Significant Changes to Unit Operations, Personnel, Service Profile, or Service Programs

- Realigned the basis for target hours from a target based on GA allocations (3 hours of hub reference services per week for every 10 hours of GA allocation received to one based on a set number of hours per FTE public service librarian or Academic Professional (AP), with latitude given to unit heads to designate a GA or qualified staff member in the unit to contribute hours in lieu of the librarian/AP.
 - Librarian/AP-based contributions ensure more consistent staffing levels and that the equity of contributions from individuals with appointments in more than one unit.
 - This approach is in keeping with the Reference NSM proposal that “Reference services will be an enterprise shared by all Library faculty and staff with responsibility for providing [public] services” and that “librarians who provide information services directly to users, including subject specialists and generalist reference librarians, participate in providing reference services at their assigned hub.” As specified in the [Subject Specialist Task Force Report](#), reference services are a core responsibility for subject specialists, a responsibility which includes “Participat[ing] in reference service (both physical and virtual) throughout the Library.”

C. Ways In Which The Unit And/Or Its Staff Contributed To Library-Wide Programs

Information Services:

- The Main/UGL Hub brings subject expertise into central reference service points, and also strengthens referrals, enhances the overall quality and consistency of service, and serves as a nexus for training and professional development.
- The collaborative approach of the Main/UGL Hub has allowed us to meet rising demand for assistance with high-level research questions via virtual reference services, fluidly shift staff between various modes of service in response to changes in usage patterns and emerging user needs.
- The Main/UGL Hub has also provided flexible staffing for supporting reference services when and where the patrons are working.

Assessment

- Tracked hourly and seasonal patterns of use to help make strategic decisions about hours and mode of service.
- Analyzed reference activity trends by time of day, day of week, and semester in order to fine tune staffing levels across the Hub desks.
- Gathered feedback from all staff through in-person forums and paper and web-based surveys that were analyzed to inform, training topics and approaches.
- Discussed current assessment strategies and future directions for gathering statistics and evaluating ref hub services with the Assessment Coordinator.

Staff Training and Development

- Invited all staff to Hub training sessions. In FY2015, SSHEL GAs will attend all sessions. Funk-ACES and Grainger will continue to drop into selected sessions.
- Paired experienced staff with new staff and GAs on the VR Desk and the Information Desk and encouraged collaborative approaches, thus providing rich opportunities for mentoring and over-the-shoulder learning.

E. Goals for FY15 and beyond

- Relocate the VR desk to a semi-enclosed space in the NE corner of 204 Library near the Info Desk. Half glass panels will face the Info Desk. This will provide excellent site lines between the VR and the Info Desk and the location will make it easier to provide mentoring and supervision to both desks and facilitate cross-desk collaboration.

- The relocation of the VR desk has already allowed slight reductions in staffing levels by allowing us to schedule only one experienced person across both desks during quieter shifts. Going forward, the co-location of the desks should allow further staffing efficiencies.
- Coordinate with Library IT to develop reporting and data storage solutions for IWonder chat software.
- Expand participation in chat across all public service units; advocate for embedding widgets more widely in library webpages, Libguides, and databases; and advertising in campus sites (course management, student services pages, etc.).
- Support the launch of UGL Office Hours and provide the opportunity for all levels of staff to participate in term paper consultations by adding the UGL Office Hours as Hub location.
- Contribute to the development of stronger referral networks and continue to seek ways to make a more seamless connection between reference interactions and research support service/consultations with other subject specialists and departmental libraries.
 - Continue to encourage Reference Services Committee & Grainger to create an interface that unit heads and/or individual librarians can use to update the Referral Database. Having up to date information would encourage more frequent use of this resource; outdated information diminishes the usefulness of the database and undermines staff faith in its reliability/authority.
 - A ticketing system like that used by IT & Facilities might improve the ability to track referrals and ensure that patrons' requests don't fall through the cracks.
- Continue to work with the Coordinator for Assessment and the Reference Services Committee to evaluate trends in reference activity levels to determine optimal levels of staffing across the Main-UGL hub service points. Support library-wide adoption of READ by providing training in this tool to assess level of question difficulty. The data gathered through READ, although limited by the fact that not all reference service points use the scale, should help us understand the type of reference work happening across the Library to support informed decisions about the type and level of staffing needed at different places and times.
- Engage in focused conversation with other faculty, units, and reference hubs doing work in support of reference in order to strategically lead changes to research services that evolve to meet emerging researcher needs and to ensure a seamless experience for library users.
- Continue to improve training through adjustments based on feedback and assessment. Continue to seek ways to make training more hands-on, interactive, and develop ways to further reinforce concepts used in training through follow-up quizzes, on-desk discussion topics, etc.

II. Statistical Profile

1. Facilities

Number of hours open to the public per week:

- VR Desk & Info Desk inclusive hours: M-Th: 8:30am-12am; F: 8:30am-5:30pm; Sa: 11am-6pm; Su: 11am-12am
- Fall 2013: 91 hours
 - Spring 2014: 91 hours

2. Personnel

Librarians, GAs, and staff from most public service units in the Main and Undergraduate Library participate in cooperative reference services during the Fall and Spring semesters, based on a target number of hours per librarian or AP in each unit, though units can elect to send any qualified staff member, librarian or GA. During breaks, such as intersessions and summer sessions, Reference Research, and Scholarly Services staffs these service points, with assistance from the Undergraduate Library during Summer sessions.

Support for scheduling and ensuring coverage of all shifts in the case of unplanned absences is provided by the Senior Library Specialist (Wendy Gregory) in Reference, Research and Scholarly Services. The managers of the VR Desk (Kathleen Kern and David Ward) and Information Desk (Kathleen Kern) work closely with the Hub

Management Team on all aspects of management and administration of Main/UGL Hub Services including assessment, setting staffing levels based on activity levels, establishing and maintain service standards, and the administration of crucial infrastructure like chat and Desk Tracker software. Staff Training and Development provides staff support for scheduling the training program.

Weekly contributions by units:

Fall 2013: RRSS: 168 hours, UGL: 118 hours, all others units: 66 hours per week.

Spring 2014: RRSS: 190 hours, UGL: 118 hours, all others units: 63 hours per week

Contributions to Info & VR Desk Hours during Fall & Spring Semesters		
Unit	Percent of Total Desk Hours, FY13*	Percent of Total Desk Hours, FY14**
Business Information Services	2.4%	0.7%
Communications Library	0.7%	0.7%
Government Information Services	2.4%	0.7%
History, Philosophy & Newspaper	0.8%	1.4%
International & Area Studies Library	2.5%	4.3%
Literatures, Languages & Linguistics	1.7%	2.1%
Reference, Research & Scholarly Service	44.7%	49.5%
Social Science, Health & Education Library	5.9%	5.3%
Office of Services	2.5%	2.8%
Undergraduate Library	36.4%	32.6%

- *During the first year of operation, unit target hours were tied to GA allocations. In FY2014, target hours were based on librarian and AP FTEs. Reference Research and Scholarly Services and the Undergraduate Library provided additional hours beyond the required minimum both years.*

3. User Services

Reference & Directional Activity, Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 *

TYPE OF INTERACTION	Directional	Reference	Totals
InfoDesk	6,730	7,522	14,252
VR Desk	929	8,236	9,166
Totals	7,659	15,758	23,417
Increase/decrease since last year	-23%	3%	-7%

MODE OF INTERACTION	Chat	Phone	In-person	Email	SMS	Uncoded
InfoDesk	9.8%	19.1%	64.2%	5.6%	0.2%	1.1%
VR Desk	95.0%	0.1%	2.4%	0.2%	0.2%	2.1%

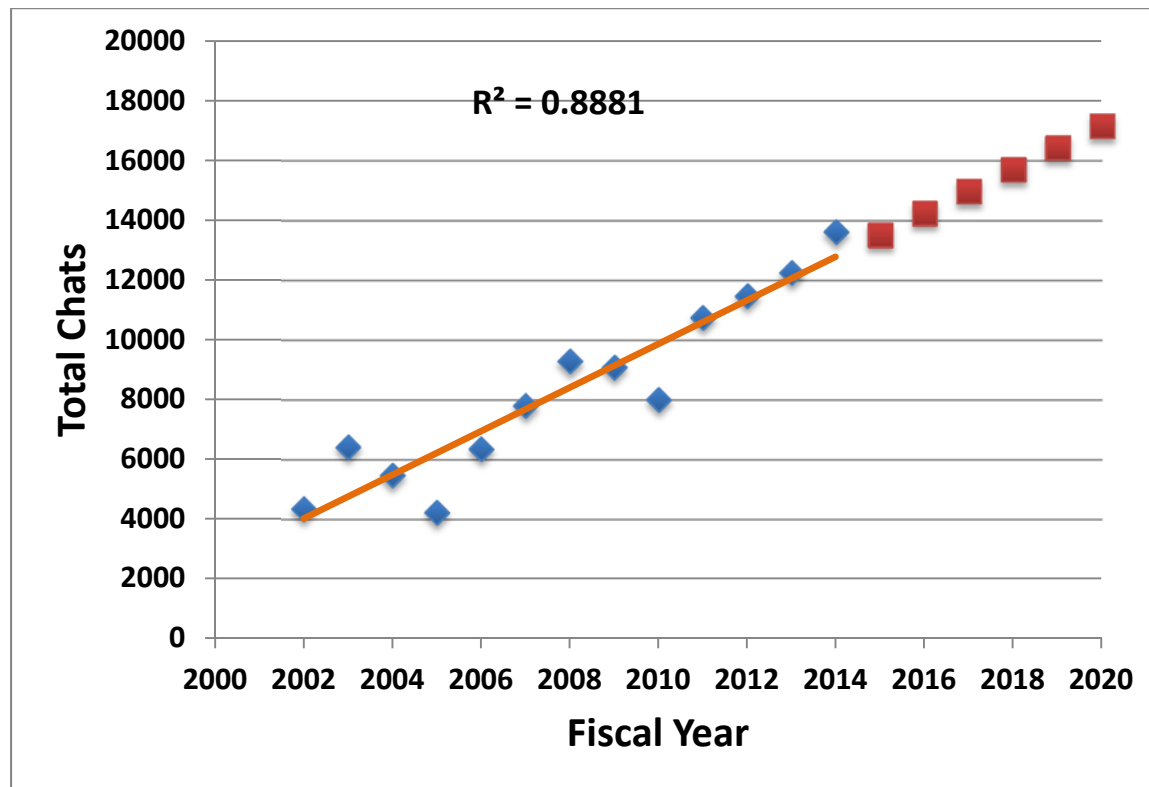
The statistics are for **fall and spring semesters only, since those are the times when these service points are staffed by the Hub. RRSS & UGL staff these service points during Summer II and RRSS provides staffing during breaks, holidays, interim sessions and Summer I.*

There was a notable decrease in directional questions and slight increase in reference questions, resulting in a

small decrease in activity overall. With the upcoming web redesign, a further decrease in directional questions can be expected, allowing more attention to more substantial reference inquiries and the provision of research assistance. Addition of way-finding signage in the Main Library would further fuel a decrease in directional questions.

Future trends

While directional questions will likely continue to decline, chat is likely to continue to be a growth area for the foreseeable future. Sweeps Week data show an 11% increase in chat reference activity across the Library in FY14. Looking at the trend of the data over the past 10 years, shown in the figure below, suggests this demand will continue to grow. (Note that FY14 increased slightly more than predicted by the regression analysis done last year, revising the trend line slightly upward).



4. Other statistics

Training sessions provided for Library staff:

The Main/UGL Hub organized 16 sessions, each offered 2 times every other week in the Fall and Spring semesters, for a total of 32 sessions each year. The fall sessions focused building expertise in core areas related to reference & customer service, as well as those subject or topics that generate the most chat reference questions, while the spring session focused on building deeper expertise, including a number of sessions by specialists in specific subject areas. The sessions are open to anyone in the Library, and attendees have included reference providers from Funk-ACES, SSHEL and elsewhere although the bulk of attendees are Main-UGL Reference Hub staff. 15-35 people attend each session (depending largely on whether it is required or just recommended for experienced Hub staff).