

Chapter 107

Reference and Instruction Services as an Integrated Approach

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ABSTRACT

Reference and instruction services in academic libraries were indistinguishable in their early development but were separated administratively as libraries and their programs grew. This organizational separation is not conducive to the coordination of these services, but steps can be taken which will benefit the functioning of each area.

INTRODUCTION

When the librarians of Franklin D. Schurz Library at Indiana University South Bend asked in 2004 whether the planned one-credit information literacy course that would soon be required for all undergraduate students on campus would affect the sophistication of the questions asked at the reference desk (Cordell & Fisher, 2011), this wasn't the first time this possibility had been raised. When the author joined the library faculty in 1993, the librarians would regularly express the opinion that questions at the reference desk were more complicated than they had been in earlier years. Most of the librarians were, in 1993, 10-15 years into their careers, enough time to have observed changes but not so much time that they were reflect-

ing on a much earlier era in the information age. More importantly, 1993 reflects a decade after the first library instruction coordinator was hired for the Indiana University South Bend Library. That ten years represented a significant increase in the number of library instruction sessions taught, the distinction made between instruction sessions and tours, and the designation of a dedicated library instruction classroom (in a new library building). It also represented the establishment of the policies that instruction would be offered wherever (on campus or at satellite program sites) and whenever (weekdays, evenings or weekends) classes were offered; that instruction sessions would be tailored to the particular research assignments given to the students rather than as a standard orientation; and that only library faculty would teach

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such sessions. The fact that the first two library instruction coordinators also had master's degrees in education facilitated the application of broad pedagogical principles and discussions among the library faculty even before "information literacy" became the accepted term for this area of teaching. With this history of library instruction on the IU South Bend campus, the librarians were not just reflecting on the increasingly complicated field of information provision during their careers, which was at the time of the greatest format and technological changes. These librarians had seen the addition of mediated database searching, online OCLC access to the public, the development of a university OPAC, the conversion of major subject periodical indexes to CD-ROM and online access, the development of such internet applications as listserves and Usenet, and the provision of library services by e-mail. However, the librarians were reflecting on the type of questions they were asked, not the scope of the sources at their disposal.

The librarians were quite sure that the quality of questions had changed in the years that they had been providing reference services, but they were unsure of how to measure or even describe the changes. Over the decade following 1993, a few attempts were made to record actual reference questions, but there was no clear answer as to how these questions might be categorized, sophistication or difficulty measured, or to what these questions might be compared. Were the librarians correct in their contention that questions had become more complex, or was it merely that the number of sources on hand had increased? On the other hand, such extensive efforts had been expended in the library instruction program that it was hoped that these efforts had made some difference in students' approaches to research.

In the two decades between the hiring of the first instruction librarian and the implementation of the Cordell and Fisher (2011) research project on the sophistication of reference questions, the

library faculty had developed increasingly objective means of assessing library instruction, as described by Colborn and Cordell in 1998 (See Chapter 11, *SETTING THE STATE: INSTRUCTION & CURRENT STATE: INSTRUCTION*). The librarians were convinced that library instruction sessions were reasonably effective, but the question of whether such instruction affects real life behavior as reflected in the quality of reference questions remained.

The adoption of a new campus general education program requiring the one-credit information literacy course for all students gave the librarians an opportunity to record actual reference questions and compare them before and after the implementation of the course requirement. It represented a unique opportunity, with only the problem of how to measure the sophistication of questions to remain. Cordell and Fisher developed a taxonomy of reference questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy (Committee of College and University Examiners, 1956, pp. 62-77). That a clear pattern of increased levels of sophistication was found was not a surprise (Cordell & Fisher, 2011). It was also a clear link between instruction and reference services.

That instruction and reference services are linked in the minds of students is obvious: a large part of the topics covered in library instruction sessions is the selection and use of reference sources. Research assignments in subject courses and practice assignments in information literacy courses often include the suggestion or even direction to use particular reference sources and consult with librarians. It was hoped that this type of assignment, following appropriate instruction, would also inform these students' future approaches to research unrelated to instruction sessions, and that is what was found. Reference and instruction is integrated for students, but is it integrated for librarians?

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