Background

The Digital Reference Operations Team operates a digital reference service for the University of California community, called Ask a Librarian. The service uses OCLC’s QuestionPoint software. Currently the UC Libraries staff the service 48 hours a week; however the service is available to UC patrons 24 hours per day, 7 days a week through our cooperative partnership with other academic libraries and QuestionPoint librarians. UC librarians answer questions from non-UC library patrons; in return, academic librarians from other institutions in the cooperative pick up UC questions during our off hours.

The Ask a UC Librarian cooperative digital reference service began in November 2006 with six campuses participating; now all ten campuses participate. While not staffing Ask a Librarian, CDL contributes a portion of the annual cost of the service. Currently staff from all 10 campuses answer questions via the Ask a Librarian service. A total of around 24,000 questions are asked each year from all 10 campuses and CDL’s instance of Melvyl. Undergraduates are the predominant users of the service; they are followed by graduate students and then non-UC patrons. Questions range from off campus access, to paper topics, to tracking down citations.

In 2013 the University Librarians agreed to support the hiring of a .25 FTE manager for the Ask a Librarian service. The Ask a Librarian Manager’s responsibilities include:

- Managing the service for the UC Libraries
- Coordinating UC wide staffing
- Serving as a liaison between OCLC and UC staff in matters related to QuestionPoint

Charge

The Digital Reference Operations Team will ensure that the Ask a Librarian service is well managed, properly staffed, that hours are distributed equitably across the campuses, and that staff providing the service are properly trained and proficient at providing digital reference to their campus patrons, UC patrons, and patrons from other academic institutions. In addition, the group will keep statistics and assess how the service is being used in order to make recommendations to the appropriate SAG about potential changes that would improve the service.

The Digital Reference Operations Team, through the membership, is responsible specifically for the following:

- Establishing and maintaining shared service expectations to facilitate campus training efforts
- Determining the overall schedule for the service, ensuring that staffing hours are equitable between larger and smaller campuses
- Ensuring individual campuses are fulfilling their assigned hours
- Creating and revising operational policies pertaining to Ask a Librarian
- Maintaining statistics about the service and regularly assessing if the service is meeting UC patrons' needs
- Communicating changes in operational policies and/or procedures to the librarians and staff who staff the service
- Consulting with SAG2 on high-level policy development and strategy

Organizational Structure and Membership

- Each UC campus is represented on the Operations Team
- CDL is represented by one staff member

Manager’s Specific Responsibilities

- Managing the Ask a Librarian service for the UC Libraries and chairing the Operations Team
- Drafting procedures and policies to be shared with the Operations Team
- Ensuring that the individual campuses are fulfilling their responsibilities to the team
- Overseeing the QuestionPoint service agreement
- Communicating with OCLC staff in matters related to QuestionPoint
- Communicating with OCLC staff in matters related to QuestionPoint contract renewals and contract negotiations
- Communicating with SAG 2 and providing communication back to the Operations Team
- Gathering, analyzing and reporting statistics
- Performing program analysis, troubleshooting and problem solving
- Taking the lead to promote the service, and developing marketing materials for shared use

Communication

- The Operations Team will continue to communicate among its members using the established UC Digital Reference Interest Group List (UCDIGREF-IG-L@LISTSERV.UCOP.EDU)
- The Operations Team will communicate with all Ask a UC Librarian reference providers via the UC Digital Reference Listserv (UCDIGREF-L@LISTSERV.UCOP.EDU)
- The Operations Team will continue to post information to the established wiki http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/
- The manager will communicate regularly with SAG 2 and provide communication back to the Operations Team

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