

Date: May 18, 2012

To: Heads of Public Service (HOPS)

From: Digital Reference Common Interest Group (DigRef CIG)

Re: Recommendations on Staffing the University of California Ask a Librarian Service

This memo is in response to the Heads of Public Service HOPS charge (March 1, 2012) to the Digital Reference Common Interest Group (DigRef CIG) requesting recommendations on staffing, increasing the answering percentage to 75%, and developing shared service expectations. Our recommendations and a link to the shared service expectations are below.

**Charge 1: Recommend staffing scenarios to support anticipated service growth**

**Recommendation:** We recommend triple staffing day shifts during regular sessions.

The volume of questions has become uncomfortable for many staff. We may be juggling multiple patrons, as many as four or five at once, while others are waiting. Triple staffing allows us to better serve our patrons. The revised recommended hours are below:

Comparisons*	Spring Hours	Triple Staffing	Change
Berkeley	15	20***	5
Davis	11	15	4
Irvine	13	18	5
Los Angeles	15	21	6
Merced	5	6	1
Riverside	10	14	4
San Diego	13	18	5
San Francisco**	2	2	0
Santa Barbara	10	14	4
Santa Cruz	8	11	3
Total	102	139	37
* Subject to rounding error			
** San Francisco staffs 2 hours a week but isn't in the base analysis.			
***Berkeley is already informally providing these hours.			

**Recommendation:** Plan a one year pilot project to supplement digital reference staff. The purpose of this pilot is to determine whether increased staffing would enable us to increase our answering percentage to 75% and roll our Qwidget questions up to the 24/7 queue.

Two options have been discussed:

1. Use paid library school student interns

Library school interns could either work a combination of nights and during the day for a total of 10 hours per week each. Training and managing interns would require additional administrative time.

## 2. OR Hire 2 part-time LA IVs

In either case a pooled funding model could be designed to share the cost. If one campus could take on training and administration, the funding could be transferred to that campus. Or possibly funding could be channeled through CDL.

**Recommendation:** Each campus should ensure its staffing scheme results in sufficient coverage.

The CIG acknowledges that UC libraries vary in size and organizational complexity. That has resulted in different solutions for staffing digital reference. For example, many campuses require participation from library staff while the rest operate on a volunteer basis. It may be difficult for digital reference coordinators who work with a volunteer staff to maintain stable staffing. It may also be difficult for them to effectively schedule and balance hours over different units. Therefore, while we do not recommend ‘requiring’ all staff on all campuses to take on chat reference, we recommend each campus review its staffing schemes to ensure “workable staffing solutions” on each campus, and report to CIG if it is having trouble doing so.

**Recommendation:** Each campus should have enough trained staff who can each cover a minimum of 2 hours per week.

Each campus relies on the others to provide digital reference service. While the consortium allows each campus to get “more for less,” it also requires a commitment to maintain the service. Each campus should make certain that there is enough trained staff to cover their scheduled hours.

**Recommendation:** Digital reference hours count towards weekly “quotas.”

While chat reference is not a replacement for in-person reference, it allows us to extend our reference service efficiently by taking advantage of the collaborative. In this regard, chat service should be mainstreamed as one aspect of our reference services. When scheduling public service staff, libraries should treat a chat hour like any other hour of reference service. This will spread the workload and help avoid burnout issues.

### **Charge 2: Recommend a strategy to increase UC’s Answering Percentage to 75%.**

There is interest in having Qwidget roll up to the academic queue only if we can staff it sufficiently. Nancy Huling at the University of Washington noted they could not maintain the 75% level when Qwidget rolled up.

**Recommendation:** Conduct a month long pilot that triple staffs during the day and measure the effect on our answering percentage.

This recommendation overlaps with and extends the recommendation on triple staffing. Once there is enough staff to triple daytime shifts, we will analyze the effects.

**Recommendation:** Explore the goal that each individual library maintains a 75% answering percentage.

Answering percentages vary widely by campus depending on how many questions its students ask, and what time its chat staff work. One idea for achieving a 75% level is to have staff always log in to the 24/7 queue, to be able to pick up questions when our UC queue is slow.

Answering Percentage (2011-12)	
Berkeley	59%
Davis	96%
Irvine	60%
Los Angeles	66%
Merced	130%
Riverside	59%
San Diego	57%
San Francisco	54%
Santa Barbara	92%
Santa Cruz	133%
Total	70%

### **Charge 3: Develop shared service expectations for UC Digital Reference**

We began the process by reviewing emails from the DigRef CIG listserv to get an idea of what questions or concerns have come up in the past. Due to the Charge requirement that "the expectations must meet OCLC's service standards for staffing the 24/7 queue," we also reviewed two OCLC web documents: *Best Practices for 24/7 Reference Cooperative Sessions* (1) and *24/7 Reference Cooperative Policies and Procedures* (2).

To create the UC shared service expectations, we first pulled content from both web documents by selecting those policies and procedures that are most relevant to UC staffers and which have the greatest impact on digital reference patrons. This content was then tailored to better reflect UC needs, while remaining within OCLC service standards, and additional content was added to address our specific concerns.

The service expectations were added to Ask a Librarian Wiki, for easy access by CIG members and other UC digital reference staffers.

The UC Digital Reference Shared Service Expectations can be found at

[http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC Shared Service Expectations](http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC+Shared+Service+Expectations) and in the attached appendix.

(1) <http://wiki.questionpoint.org/w/page/13839421/247-Best-Practices>

(2) <http://wiki.questionpoint.org/w/page/13839422/247-Policies#24/7ReferenceCooperativePoliciesandProcedures>

#### Other concerns

Other comments surfaced during our discussions that the CIG would like to pass along to HOPS.

- Staffing nights can be difficult for campuses.

The CIG will return to this discussion before the Fall term to explore and propose scheduling solutions.

- Create a structure to administer systemwide digital reference centrally.

Although we have successfully administered the service with rotating co-chairs, it may be time to re-visit this approach. Our model is more appropriate to a pilot, or to a less successful service. Centralized administration may give us a better ability to mold it as an on-going concern.

## Quick Reference

- Pick up Qwidget questions first, since they do not roll into the 24/7 Academic Queue and will not be seen by non-UC staffers.
- Pick up UC questions before non-UC questions.
  - If you are assigned to the UC Queue, monitor UC queue only.
  - If you are assigned to the 24/7 Queue, monitor both UC and 24/7 queues; pick up UC questions first then non-UC questions if the UC queue isn't busy.
- When chat is busy:
  - If you are already helping one patron and another patron comes into the queue, pick up the second patron if you are comfortable and proficient at handling more than one patron, such that the service you provide to either patron will not be impeded by picking up the second patron. Qwidget questions are the exception; see next bullet for details.
  - Pick up all Qwidget questions, since they are only seen by UC staffers. If you are too busy to help a Qwidget patron you pick up, you have the following options:
    - Note: picking up a patron means you have made contact with the patron, not necessarily that you will go on to answer his or her question.
    - Transfer the question to another librarian in the 24/7 Academic Queue once it's picked up.
    - Let the patron know you are busy helping multiple patrons; they may choose to wait or come back later. You may want to use a 'hold on' script to save time.
  - When deciding how much time to spend with a patron, prioritize UC patrons over non-affiliated patrons. Try not to spend so long with any one patron that other patrons are made to wait.
- As soon as you are in session with the patron, send a personal greeting, identifying yourself and your willingness to help.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere by showing interest in the patron's question through chat tone and choice of words, using positive phrasing ("We can..." instead of "We don't/can't/won't..."), and typing like you talk, in a conversational manner.
- Conduct an adequate reference interview to understand the question and the patron's information need. You may need to verify spelling or other possible errors.

For the most current version, visit <http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC%20Shared%20Service%20Expectations>.

- Identify sources appropriate to the patron's need, and answer questions accurately.
- Recommend a search strategy with appropriate search terms, and when applicable, boolean operators.
- Provide context and instruction to the patron, rather than just sharing resources or sending web pages. Provide enough guidance so that patron can recreate the search later if needed.
- Before closing, ask the patron if the question has been answered (“Does this completely answer your question?”) or if they need help with anything else. If they are expecting a followup from a local librarian, verify the patron’s email address and deadline.
- If a patron is non-responsive and a system-generated message does not appear, ask the patron if they are still there and inform them of your intent to end the call ("Are you still there? Unless I hear from you soon, I will be ending this call and another librarian will follow up with you via email."). You may end the call five minutes after asking a direct question about the patron's status.
- Code the session using the appropriate resolution code (link to info and attachment)
- It is extremely important to log out of chat when you are done with your shift, because the Qwidget will remain active at all UC campuses as long as any UC librarian is logged in. To exit chat, click Logout at the top right of the chat window.

### **Picking up the patron**

- Patrons should be picked up as quickly as possible.
- Pick up Qwidget questions first, since they do not roll into the 24/7 Academic Queue and will not be seen by non-UC staffers.
- Pick up UC questions before non-UC questions.
  - If you are assigned to the UC Queue, monitor UC queue only.
  - If you are assigned to the 24/7 Queue, monitor both UC and 24/7 queues; pick up UC questions first then non-UC questions if the UC queue isn't busy.
- After prioritizing Qwidget and UC questions, pick up the patron that has been waiting the longest.
- During busy times, try not to spend too long with any one patron. When deciding how much time to spend with a patron, prioritize UC patrons over non-affiliated patrons.

For the most current version, visit <<http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC%20Shared%20Service%20Expectations>>.

## Greeting the patron

- As soon as you are in session with the patron, send a personal greeting, identifying yourself and your willingness to help.
  - The greeting is your first interaction with the patron, so be sure your greeting establishes a welcoming atmosphere. If you use a script, be sure it is short and friendly. Welcome the patron by name, if you have his or her name.
  - Identify the name of the library or group you are affiliated with, in order to set expectations with the patron.
  - If the service is busy, let the patron know that you're helping multiple patrons and will be with them as soon as you're able (they may choose to come back later).
  - If the patron didn't input their email address, request it up front. A script can be helpful: "Do you mind typing in your email address so a librarian can follow up if we get disconnected?"

### *Examples:*

"Hi, I'm Rob, and I'll be helping you today. I'm reading your question now..."

### **OR**

*If busy with other patrons:* "Hi, this is Amy at UC Davis. I'm just finishing up with another patron, but I'll be with you in just a moment. :)"

### **OR**

"Hi, [patron name], I'm Lee, a librarian at the University of California. I am helping out your librarians by answering questions for them right now. I'm reading what you wrote so I can help you..."

### **OR**

Consider combining your greeting with the initial reference interview question. Example: Patron Jane asks about locating a book. Librarian combines the greeting with a reference interview question: "Hi Jane, my name is Erin. Are you looking for a particular title?"

By asking for more information about the patron's request, the librarian is showing a willingness to help.

### **Juggling multiple patrons**

- If you are already helping a patron and another patron comes into the queue, there may be some instances in which you will need to pick up the second patron:
  - The second patron is a Qwidget question. Qwidget questions don't roll into the 24/7 queue, so it's important that all Qwidget questions are picked up. If necessary, you can transfer a Qwidget question to another librarian once it's picked up.
  - You are almost at the end of the session with the first patron and can handle a second patron.
  - The first patron is reviewing information you have sent and does not need your immediate attention.
- If you decide to pick up another patron:
  - Acknowledge all patrons that you pick up as soon as possible by sending a greeting. Thank them for waiting, if applicable.
  - If you are too busy to help a Qwidget patron you pick up, you have the following options:
    - Transfer the question to another librarian in the 24/7 Academic Queue once it's picked up.
    - Let the patron know you are busy helping multiple patrons; they may choose to wait or come back later. You may want to use a 'hold on' script to save time.
  - After sending a greeting, begin a reference conversation with the new patron (clarify the request, ask about previous searches, etc.). This will give you time to address the first session, while the second patron is responding to your questions. The additional information will also help you refine your search and will provide necessary information to any librarians doing follow up (if follow up is needed).
  - Do not give a time estimate of how long it will be before you will be able to work on the question, unless the patron asks. A typical session lasts approximately 15 minutes. If you pick up a question and it seems likely that you will not be able to get to the question for more than 5 minutes, try to transfer the session to another librarian. [link to transferring patrons]



- Try not to spend too long with any one patron. When deciding how much time to spend with a patron, prioritize UC patrons over non-affiliated patrons. Use ‘followup by me’ (if one of your campus’ patrons) and ‘followup by patron’s library’ if you feel the patron will be better served by you responding to their question later or by their own librarians.
- If you are handling multiple simultaneous sessions, be sure to send messages and URLs to the appropriate patron.

### **Approachability and other interpersonal skills**

- Show interest in the patron's question through chat tone and choice of words
- Use positive phrasing ("We can..." instead of "We don't/can't/won't...")
- Type like you talk, in a conversational manner. Clarify confusing terminology and avoid excessive jargon.
- Use spelling and grammar appropriately. Never type in all capital letters - this has the effect of shouting at the patron.
- Show professional courtesy and respect when answering questions. Maintain objectivity and do not interject value judgments about subject matter or the nature of the question into the transaction.
- Avoid yes/no responses. Yes/no's can be interpreted as cold and unfriendly, just as in face-to-face reference.
- Break up long responses into a few blocks. This avoids long pauses and the patron can begin reading your response while you are completing it. Shorter answers are also easier to read for patrons using the service from a mobile phone. However, try not to break your chat into too many discrete units, as this may be confusing or frustrating to the patron. A good rule is to send one or two sentences at a time.
- If you are going to be taking some time with a question, try to provide the patron with a resources to look at while you search.
- No more than 3 minutes should elapse without the librarians ending a message to each patron who is in session, even if it is a simple “Still searching...”

### **Conducting the reference interview**

For the most current version, visit <<http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC%20Shared%20Service%20Expectations>>.

- Conduct an adequate reference interview to understand the question and the patron's information need. Be sure to clarify the patron's question before beginning the search.
- Ask open-ended questions. The goal is for patrons to tell you in their own words what it is they want. Avoid putting words in their mouths.
- Find out where and how the patron has already searched. Even if you intend to redo the search (perhaps using different keywords, etc.), the patron's response can provide additional insight into their topic and level of familiarity with library resources.

### **Providing professional level search assistance**

- Choose resources at the appropriate level for the patron's research. In general, databases are preferable to Google or other general web sources when assisting students with research projects.
- Use the library policy page to find links and information about the patron's library's services and resources.
- Identify sources appropriate to the patron's need. Evaluate resources for authority, objectivity, and currency, and share with patron. Help patron evaluate the sources for relevancy to topic.
- Answer questions accurately.
- Provide context and instruction to the patron, rather than just sharing resources or sending web pages. Provide enough guidance so that patron can recreate the search if needed (include the name of links, which one patron should click on, as well as the "click path"). Only providing links often will not suffice – some URLs are dynamic, such as library catalog search results, and the links that appear in session transcripts may become dead links.
- Recommend appropriate search terms and subject headings, in the context of a recommended search statement using Boolean operators. Verify spelling and other possible factual errors.
- Ask for feedback on resources sent.

### ***NOT:***

**Patron:** Need help finding books on the history of black businessmen in New York City.

**Librarian:** You should search the catalog with keywords like black, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, New York, african americans, history

For the most current version, visit <<http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC%20Shared%20Service%20Expectations>>.

**RECOMMENDED:**

**Patron:** Need help finding books on the history of black businessmen in New York City.

**Librarian:** You should search in the library catalog by typing in things like this (exactly as I have them)...

**Librarian:** african americans and business\* and new york

**Librarian:** or using that last one, replace business\* with the word entrepreneur\*

**Concluding the session**

- Before closing, ask the patron if the question has been answered (“Does this completely answer your question?”) or if they need help with anything else. If they are expecting a followup from a local librarian, verify the patron’s email address and deadline.
- If the patron indicates that no additional information is needed, send the appropriate goodbye script provided by the patron’s library. If no goodbye script is available, thank the patron for using the service and encourage the patron to return.
- Code the session using the appropriate resolution code:
  - *Answered:* question answered OR nothing else can be done (e.g. no email address)
  - *Follow up by patron library:* question could not be adequately answered during the session
  - *Follow up by me:* only use this if you know you have the info at hand; typically only used for your own patrons
  - *Lost call:* only use this if patron never responds and there is no email address.
  - See attached flowchart.
- Do not set descriptive codes; descriptive codes are a local convention so only use with your own library’s patrons (if your library has made the decision to use descriptive codes).
- It is extremely important to log out of chat when you are done with your shift, because the Qwidget will remain active at all UC campuses as long as any UC librarian is logged in. To exit chat, click Logout at the top right of the chat window.

**At the end of your shift**

For the most current version, visit <<http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC%20Shared%20Service%20Expectations>>.

- If you are still helping a patron and it is the end of your shift, the following options should allow you to exit the session gracefully:
  - If at all possible, stay online with the patron long enough to finish the session.
  - Offer follow up to the patron ("This is taking longer than I expected, may I send this on for additional research and someone will get back to you via email?").
  - Ask any of your colleagues who are arriving for the next shift if they can accept a transfer. Be sure and send an IM to the librarian first, before transferring. If no Cooperative librarians are online, transfer to the After Hours Queue. Be sure and tell the patron you are transferring the session to another librarian.
- You may exit your active queues when your shift ends without dropping your current patrons. To exit a queue, click Queues at the top right of the chat window, then deselect your active queues. This serves two purposes:
  - If you are still chatting when your shift ends, this will allow you to finish with your patrons without being interrupted by the “ping” of new patron questions.
  - If you are the last UC librarian scheduled for the day, this will also make the Qwidget inactive so new patrons are only able to enter the service through the Chat with Viewport page (“Chat”) and can be picked up by 24/7 Coop librarians.

### **If patron becomes non-responsive**

- When a patron does not respond to chat messages, the patron could be experiencing technical difficulties, browsing in another window, or away from the computer.
- To ensure that the patron has sufficient time to return to the session, follow these procedures before ending the call:
  - Ask the patron if they are still there and inform them of your intent to end the call. For example, a script like this can be used when the patron has provided an email address: "Are you still there? Unless I hear from you soon, I will be ending this call and another librarian will follow up with you via email."
  - The librarian may end the call after receiving a system-generated message about the patron's status:
    - The "Patron is no longer connected" message is displayed four minutes after:
      - the patron is accidentally disconnected due to tech problem
      - the patron navigates away from the window

For the most current version, visit <http://ucdigref.pbworks.com/w/page/53752984/UC%20Shared%20Service%20Expectations>.

- the patron clicks the browser X button and closes the window
- The "Patron ended chat session" note is immediately displayed after the patron ends the call by clicking the "End Call" button.
- If the patron continues to be non-responsive and a system-generated message does not appear, you may end the call 10 minutes after asking the direct question about the patron's status. The exception to this rule is if you pick up a patron within 10 minutes of your shift ending and you are unable to stay past time; in this situation, you may end the call five minutes after asking the direct question about the patron's status or transfer the patron to another librarian.
- If the patron left an email address, the Follow Up By Patron Library resolution code should be used so the local librarians can continue helping the patron.

### **Additional information from QuestionPoint's 24/7 Reference Cooperative Policies and Procedures.**

Scope of service including information NOT covered (legal questions, personal opinions, questions requiring interpretation e.g. clarification about an assignment, etc.)

#### Patron privacy

Types of patrons, including rude patrons, suicidal patrons and crisis calls, and persistent repeat patrons.

#### Transferring sessions