

Staffing questions for Digital Reference Services (May 13, 2003)
UC SOPAG Digital Reference Common Interest Group

Management

- Who will oversee the entire program?
 - A UC librarian? at CDL? from a campus utilizing network capabilities
 - Percent-time, one-year/permanent assignment
 - Selected by whom?
 - Who will overseer report to?
- Important that management foster quality service, reference values, collaboration, cooperation, sharing of information, mutual respect of staff throughout the system, campus autonomy, reliable information about each campus, etc.
- What systems support will be required on each campus?
 - Is systems support available on all units if needed?
- Who will perform and direct formal evaluation and assessment of overall program at management level?

Hours/Scheduling

- What hours?
 - Hours may vary by unit within each campus (branches, small libraries vs. large)
 - Hours may vary by campus
 - What is the need?
- Can we provide increased extended night and weekend hours?
 - Can we rely on the networking potential to share these hours among campuses?
 - referrals of questions requiring local or specialized attention
 - current information on web pages about each campus's services & facilities available to staff on all campuses
 - Are extended hours needed by all campuses?
- Who will coordinate the schedules?
 - On each campus?
 - For any shared, intercampus collaboration?
- What are the needs for each campus for digital reference?
 - Can there be a fair distribution of workload that will also meet the needs of each campus and of various units within campuses?
- How can small units and campuses be scheduled equitably with large units and campuses?
- Would extended house at a central receiving and routing system work on some campuses? All? Systemwide?

Organization/Network Collaboration/Centralization

- Will each campus maintain a local digital reference program?
- Can all campuses agree to a single system, in order to support networking, shared workload, and easy referrals?
- Is a decentralized or centralized model desirable?
 - Will there be a centralized, fixed hub (CDL?)
 - pool of digital reference librarians serving the UC system
 - responsibility for extended hours for all campuses

- possibility of reducing cost of staff waiting for questions to come in
 - cost of maintaining current web pages and other info for reliable referrals and info to/from/about other campuses
 - Will each campus operate an autonomous digital reference program?
 - require use of the same system?
 - ease of referrals
 - facilitate training and documentation
 - possibility of sharing extended hours by each campus, on rotating basis
- With common software throughout the digital reference network, the center has the potential to be anywhere (any campus, any staff, any office or home with a high-speed connection)
- What access and controls on proprietary, licensed databases?
 - What campus variables?
 - What requirements and liabilities?

Personnel

- Who will staff the service?
 - Level (librarians, library assistants, same as other reference service)?
 - Do all campuses use equivalent staff for reference
 - Volunteers? Mandatory?
 - Are all reference librarians also capable of being good digital reference librarians?
 - time pressures, chat and other technologies, web skills
- Who will work nights, weekends?
- Would staff at a centralized pool for incoming calls require less subject specialization?
- Can existing reference staff levels absorb this added workload?
 - Can there be reductions of in-person reference?
 - Will additional staffing be required to make it work?
 - Examples of UCLA & UCI includes local coordinator/overseer.
 - What about small campuses with barely enough staff for in-person reference now?
 - Will digital reference make it possible for staff on other campuses to help with short-staffed reference operations?
 - How would such staff handle questions specific to a remote library?
 - Is the cost of staff waiting for questions to come in worthwhile? Would collaboration reduce or increase this cost?
 - In most systems, staff can multi-task doing other work and an alert signals incoming calls
- How would a library respond to complaints of poor service from another campus library?
- Can some digital reference be outsourced for UC clientele?
- From where will digital reference be provided?
 - Most experience recommends NOT from reference desks
 - Staff offices?
 - Staff homes?
- Can staff be allowed to provide digital reference from home computer connections?
 - Who provides connections? large monitors? computers?
 - Accountability and liability (workers comp) concerns?
- Who will perform web site maintenance on each campus' information (used for referrals by other campuses)?

Subject Specialists

- Would subject specialists as well as generalists be expected to be trained in digital reference?
- Would a base level be available from digital reference, with e-mail or other referral to specialists as needed (no digital reference training required)?
- How many subject specialists would take and maintain training to be able to use digital reference for scheduled for one-on-one remote reference sessions to demonstrate online resources?
- Should specialized libraries be open and available during hours of digital reference service, for referrals? or are asynchronous e-mail referrals to subject specialists adequate?
- Should common subject-specialty libraries form their own UC collaborations (e.g. Law, medical, business, engineering, music, art, gov docs, health sciences, or physical sciences)

Standards & Competencies

- What is acceptable quality in performance of digital reference service?
 - How do the competency standards for digital reference differ from those for in-person reference?
- Can standards across campuses be sufficiently uniform that campuses can rely on other campus's digital reference service?
- What monitoring, enforcement, training, to assure competency and quality?
- Can priorities for incoming digital and in-person reference be standardized?

Training

- Who will provide training?
 - Vendor training?
 - Trained trainers on each campus?
 - North and South training programs?
 - Mentoring system between campuses?
- Documentation
 - Vendor supplied?
 - Customized for each campus?
 - Shared by all campuses?
- Will adequate training be provided for all staff interested in learning to do digital reference?
- Who will decide if an individual is sufficiently trained for digital reference? Who will retrain?

Assessment & evaluation

- How will the service be assessed once it is up and running?
- Who will evaluate staff members in digital reference?
- How can feedback on performance be handled across campuses in a shared environment?
- Who will track statistics and evaluate? Where? For whole system or campus or unit?

Design & Marketing

- Logo or logos for campuses? Common branding?
- Web pages promoting service?
- Links in appropriate locations on pages?
- Who will be responsible for publicity and marketing?
 - Each campus? Units within campuses? Systemwide?