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Knowledge Sharing @ Our Libraries

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Knowledge Sharing @ Our Libraries!

These days reference librarians must sift through a "tsunami of information" to meet the needs of their patrons in a challenging mix of interview settings: face-to-face, phone, computer screens. In order to meet the varied information needs of our patrons within the ever more constrained budgetary condition of Oregon libraries, the keys to success will be found in our capacity to creatively change our means of delivering reference service as well as in our ability to transfer knowledge to one another internally—in other words, to value informal conversations about our work as we build our relationships in the library profession.

In this issue, Kevin Barclay examines the reference-staffing model and finds that by examining the types of questions asked at the reference desk, managers can significantly change the number of FTEs needed to deliver quality service at the reference desk by using trained library assistants to field specific types of questions. This variation of tiered reference service can potentially create a more dynamic and interactive staff.

Portland State University's Interlibrary Loan staff and Rose Jackson, the Urban Studies Librarian, explore the ramifications of the lack of internal cross communication when searching for grey literature and other hard to find resources requested by library patrons. They hope to stir interest in their study and encourage *OLA Quarterly* readers to take part in their Web survey about better access to grey literature in Oregon libraries. The article identifies the need for reference cross training between library departments, thus delineating Interlibrary Loan as an unique point of reference service.

Under the canopy of reference services, virtual reference is now considered a core service. Caleb Tucker-Raymond, Oregon's L-Net coordinator, shares impressive statistics from the Pew Foundation's recent report on the Internet that shows the next generation of Internet users as wired and fired-up in their use of instant messaging as their main medium for electronic communications.

AskColorado fielded 20,000 questions during their first year of virtual reference service. Brenda Bailey-Hainer, Director of Networking and Resource Sharing at the Colorado State Library, describes in detail the marketing plan that launched such a successful virtual reference service across a broad playing field.

Sean Scott explores ways that one can feel rewarded from providing serendipitous, spontaneous reference service by tapping into tacit knowledge as a conduit to creative, explicit information sharing. Sean writes about the importance of casual conversation at the "water cooler," and how we can transfer knowledge as well as communal support by embracing the importance of relationship building among the library staff.

Multnomah County Central Library continues to lead by experimenting with new ideas from the implementation of team management to their current, innovative challenge of redefining reference service. Jane Salisbury reflects upon the changes in reference service over the past twenty years then describes the new generalist model now being implemented at Multnomah Central.

Finally, the future is upon us. I attended a presentation about "Bots" at the Virtual Reference Conference 2003 in San Antonio and brought this information back to my Eref partner at Portland State, Arthur Hendricks, who was intrigued by the University of San Diego Legal Research Center's PowerPoint. (Williams, 2003) Arthur's thorough and amusing investigation about intelligent agents can shed some light on how we can use an electronic, reference knowledge base to build a virtual support Bot that can deliver hard facts for the sciences, business, and law.

Oregon's libraries are vital, lifelong learning, and community organizations that cannot be taken for granted as we witness bonds that do not pass with or without a super majority, and severe budget cuts to the Oregon University System executed by our legislature in Salem (not to mention the austere condition of our public school libraries). Finding new ways to recognize everyone's contributions to the sustenance of our library culture is paramount.

Reference

Williams, Brian. *Bots/Librarians/Coal Mines.* Presentation at VRD 2003 Digital Reference Conference. November 17–18, 2003, San Antonio, TX.

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