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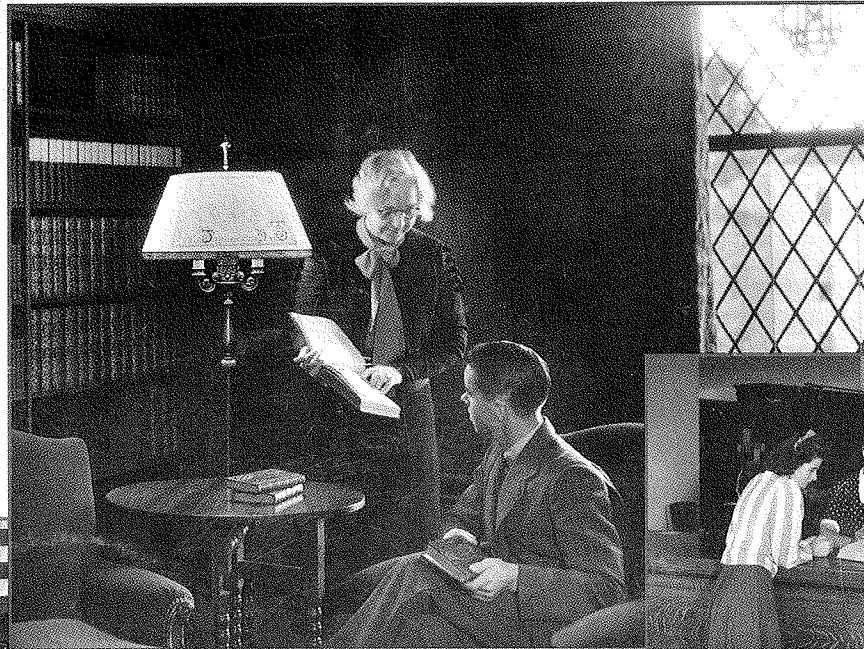
OLA
Quarterly

Reference Services: Change and Constancy

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McDonald (Photo #75A)

Bertha Helse and Student (Photo #75B)
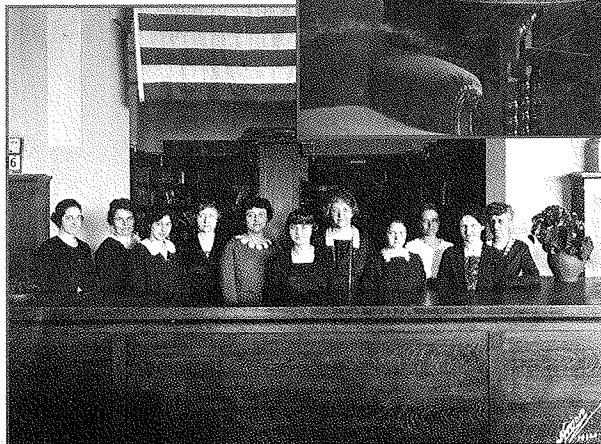
Library Staff 1921 (Photo #G35)

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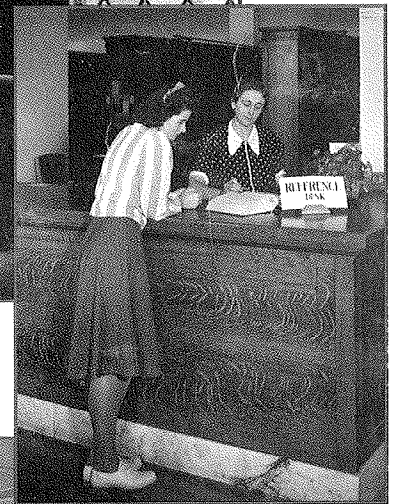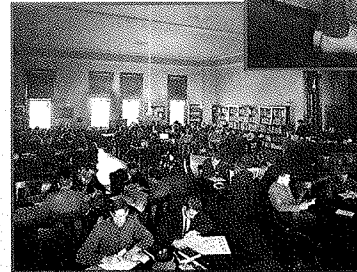
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Fall 1998
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Association

OREGON LIBRARY ASSOCIATION'S
REFERENCE ROUND TABLE (RRT)

Objectives
- To provide a practical framework for sharing information, fostering professional interactions, and providing continuing education opportunities.

- To be a support system for front-line library workers engaged in reference services in all types of Oregon libraries.

Programs are the centerpiece of activity in the organization. The Reference Round Table generally holds four each year, including a program at the OLA conference, and it strives to hold them in different parts of the state.

Programs tend to be practical: They are developed from member suggestions, and they feature expertise from among Oregon's own librarians.

Each half-day event includes a brown bag lunch beforehand and a tour of the host library following the program, when possible.

Reference Round Table programs are free and open to all interested members of the library community.

You can join the Reference Round Table when you send in your OLA membership fees. By checking the RRT box on the membership form and paying an extra $5, you become a member.

OLA QUARTERLY

Reference Services: Change and Constancy

C onversations with librarians and library staff throughout the state confirm the themes emerging from the articles in this issue of the *Quarterly:* "The times, they are a-changin" and "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Our reference "books" are hypertext Web pages. Our patrons may live down the block or across the state. We're asked about downloading "acrobats." We're teaching grandparents to "HotMail" their grandkids. We don't all have an MLS degree.

So what's the same? Library patrons continue to ask for our help. Reference "librarians" remain committed to helping users find answers to their information needs and teaching them to use the resources we make available to them. Reference collections continue to grow and reflect community needs. Although there is change, there is constancy as well.

The contributors to "Reference Services: Change and Constancy" include experienced and new librarians; public, academic, and school librarians; professionals, paraprofessionals, and librarians-at-a-distance. Reference service is, ultimately, about people, and the authors reflect the strength and diversity of our profession.

Loretta Rielly, Oregon State University Library
Arden Shelton, Multnomah County Library
Guest Editors

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Changing Dimensions of Reference Service in Public Libraries

by Walter Frankel

Corvallis-Benton County Public Library

P lanning where you are going is easier when you have a sense of where you are and where you have been. The following reflections are a snapshot in time, the observations of one person, with input from colleagues with whom he works closely.

For the better part of a century, the reference desk at a public library has looked the same – with the addition of a telephone some decades ago and a computer during the last decade. The public library's reference librarian, however, has been asked to change in many more ways. Where this will go or whether reference librarians will become jacks-of-more-trades is impossible to say, but all involved in reference work in public libraries sense that yet more change is in store.

For many years, public libraries needed only one librarian to fill all roles, especially as advisor to voracious readers and provider of answers to more difficult questions. In larger libraries, reader's advisory services and reference services became specialties. In some smaller ones, either the advisory or the reference function took precedence, or one was served better than the other. Providing both these services effectively, efficiently, and expeditiously has become more difficult. One reason is that the reference librarian has taken on new roles.

We continue to field questions in person and by telephone. We continue to have a "ready reference" collection of books most used to answer queries, with a larger reference collection — and the whole library — as a backup. We continue to maintain query files of useful or hard-to-find information, often augmented by a file drawer of similar information, tailored to current local needs. We probably have a community organization file hovering nearby, and we continue to have local government materials at hand. Some public libraries have even established their own databases to serve these local and current needs.

We now also receive queries from our patrons via e-mail and fax. Neither of these means affords the librarian an opportunity to conduct a satisfactory reference interview in a timely manner. Since patrons can get questions to us faster, are we to think that they want the answers more quickly? (At the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, we will respond via e-mail but will only fax information to another library. Part of the rationale for this decision is that some patrons circumvent the costs of making photocopies themselves.) Ultimately, the volume of questions and the reference librarian's knowledge of

resources determine whether an answer can be "instantaneous." The precedent of the in-person inquiry was set when telephones arrived on the reference desk and will probably always remain the norm, unless a library can afford to staff telephone/fax/e-mail services separately.

Electronic resources sometimes allow us to answer a question more quickly. But knowing in which particular reference book to look is often the fastest way of getting a piece of information. While many electronic resources are keyword searchable, we may have to wade through more information than needed to find a single fact! The speed with which a question can be answered is still very dependent on the individual librarian's knowledge of which resource(s) to use, appropriate terminology, a logical progression in searching resources, and the willingness of reference librarians to work together as a team, knowing that someone else may have the key to finding the answer.

Patrons expect librarians to stay abreast of new information in order to find the answers to their more difficult questions. But this has been something that librarians have dealt with for decades—the information explosion. The real change for librarians
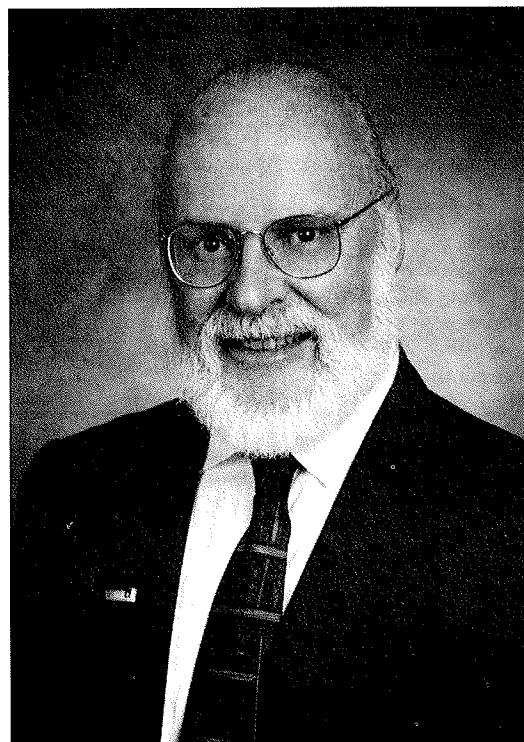
Walter A. Frankel has been a librarian for 35 years. He has worked in academic, school, and public libraries, in positions ranging from rare books to acquisitions, from branch head to director. He offers these reflections from his current position as a reference librarian at Corvallis-Benton County Public Library. He looks forward to retiring in the near future!

has been not what electronic resources are doing for us, but what they are doing to us and to the services we offer.

PROVIDING INFORMATION

Some patrons cannot or will not use a computer—but there have always been patrons who were baffled by the card catalog and refused to use it, too! Even as the public becomes more accustomed to using electronic resources in the library, some patrons will always be uncomfortable without the mediation of the reference librarian. Perhaps we should be grateful that we will always have the chance to conduct a satisfactory reference interview with these people.

When patrons search electronic databases, we are generally unaware of what information they may be seeking. Because frequently no reference interview precedes this use, we cannot usually determine whether the patron has found the information sought, has been overwhelmed by too much information, could have found the information more quickly in a traditional resource, or has simply given up. The usual tag to reference assistance is, "Be sure to come back if you don't find what you need." But unlike the retail clerk who is able to ask, "Did you find everything you need?" libraries do not have the luxury of staffing exits to ask that question. This same question will be even more difficult to answer as we make more information available to patrons at home or in their workplace. Similarly, if the reference librarian starts a patron on a database search, there may never be an opportunity to follow-up on the results. The occasion to ask about the suitability of the materials or to evaluate the reliability of the information may never arise. Determining whether the reference interview and question were satisfactorily completed is becoming more difficult.

Clearly, the reference interview has become more difficult when factoring in the patron's use of electronic databases prior to posing the question to a reference librarian. We have often had patrons tell us what book they used before coming to us—or have determined this through the interview. We are now being told, "I couldn't find anything on the Internet." This is not particularly helpful; when pressed to identify which search engine was used or what descriptors or what logical parameters were involved in the search, the patron more than likely is unable to tell us.

Many patrons apparently start a search with the Internet—because "You can find anything!" — not realizing they will likely find an overwhelming amount of information or that they could have found the answer more readily in a printed resource. More often than not, patrons do not understand that Net-Search opens one of several search engines, each of which has its own protocol, as well as its own strengths and weaknesses. If the librarian chooses to follow the patron's Internet search to seek an answer, the search will likely be repeated from scratch.
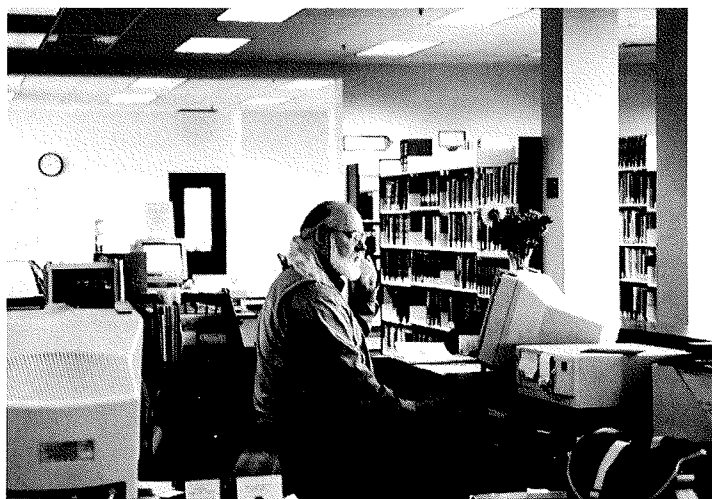
A peaceful moment at the reference desk.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE

In the past, few patrons brought a book to the reference librarian and asked to be taught how to read, although some patrons asked how to use a particular resource. Making electronic resources such as e-mail and word-processing directly available to patrons has probably brought about the most significant changes in reference work. Unless a library has chosen to have a computer lab served by a single staff member, all questions on the use of these resources come to the reference desk. The majority are not informational, but instructional or technical. This is the new dimension in our reference work. The reference librarian is a teacher in a fashion that has rarely existed before in the public library (although the teaching function has always been a standard in school and academic library service). So the reference librarian has taken on a larger teaching role. We are offering classes in how to use the Internet, how to use specific databases, and how to use the catalog. Our "students" range from relatively sophisticated users looking for tips on how to work more efficiently to new users who don't know the first thing about a computer. We see people who have never used a keyboard or mouse. The Corvallis-Benton County Public Library has taken a page from academia and now lists "mouse experience" as required or preferred for some classes.

With patrons using diverse programs, how-to questions range from opening/closing a program to downloading or saving a file to performing sophisticated manipulations of data in spreadsheets and word processing. With dial-in access to some databases, patrons phone the reference desk expecting the librarian to help them use their home or work computer to access library services. Since patrons frequently know no more about their own operating

Books, Bytes, and Bathroom Sinks: The Realities and Rewards of Reference

Service in the Small Public Library

by Pam North
Sherwood Public Library

As a 1997 graduate of Emporia State University's School of Library and Information Management program, I have had the pleasure of serving as reference librarian at Sherwood Public Library for slightly over a year now.

Sherwood is considered a "small" library, one with a long and interesting history. Established in 1936 as a shelf of materials in the local drugstore, it has been run by volunteers, moved from place to place, and experienced cutbacks and even closures. Today, the 3,000-square-foot library is a vital community resource, housing a collection of over 20,000 items and providing service to a population that has nearly tripled over the last 10 years.

Never could I have anticipated what my career in a small public library would hold. I found that reference service involves much more than applying theory. It calls for more than strong communication and research skills. It takes common sense, promotional abilities, tenacity, and sometimes a few unexpected talents.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I returned to school to enter a profession I felt would be both challenging and satisfying, but I had little idea of what realistically to expect. I was reasonably assured that my undergraduate work in technical journalism and years of experience as a technical writer had satisfactorily prepared my research and interviewing skills. I had gained a good deal of experience using the Internet, so I was certain I could put that skill to use. In addition, I have always possessed a strong desire to be of service to others, a desire not sufficiently satisfied through writing computer documentation.

In library school, I experienced "fire in the belly" the first evening of class. I was confident I would become a champion for the ALA Code of Ethics, a passionate supporter of the principles of intellectual freedom, an able "repackager," and an expert "diagnoser of information needs."

At the same time, I had doubts about this new vocation I was about to enter. Sitting through classes like "Psychology of Information Use" and "Information Transfer and the Diffusion of Knowledge," I wondered if I could ever remember the many models and theories we were studying. I was concerned that I might not be able to apply them in the appropriate situations. How could I possibly know at which point in Kuhlthau's information search process is the sixth-grader doing a report on Lizzie Borden? What

about determining and responding to the learning style of a patron searching for information on restoring a '69 Chevy Malibu?

REALITY CHECK

Shortly after receiving the title of reference librarian at Sherwood, I discovered the other hats I was to wear. I would also be librarian responsible for technology, interlibrary loan, some circulation and cataloging, and a bit of desktop publishing. Even more to my surprise were the esoteric functions of the position that eventually revealed themselves: disposer of dead rodents left at the front door by neighborhood felines, controller of ant infestations in the break room, assessor of roof leaks, participant in a Saturday afternoon wallet-snatcher capture, and ultimately, unclogger of bathroom sinks. Studying the works of Kuhlthau, Eisenberg, and Gardner never could have foretold that one day an occasional duty as reference librarian would be mucking the paper towels out of a bathroom sink mischievously clogged by a middle-schooler.

Not that I am complaining! Reference service in this environment can be a fascinating and educational experience. Our patrons cover all age groups and interests. In the past year I have located an obscure monograph published by the Tennyson Society for a visitor from Japan, found a phone number for a diesel repair shop in New Zealand, provided plans for an indoor/outdoor Koi pond, located novels writ-

Pam North, learning new skills and accepting new challenges as reference librarian at Sherwood Public Library.

ten in Portuguese, and retrieved the pattern for a "wizard's shoe."

Finding such uncommon information is sometimes an amazing process. I often think of the words of Richard Saul Wurman, "You don't have to know everything, you just need to know how to find it." I cannot emphasize enough the dramatic benefits information technology has on the reference process. Although I did not have the opportunity to work as a reference librarian before the advent of the Internet, it is difficult for me to imagine the limitations those pre-Web librarians faced when seeking resources for the more unusual requests.

The Internet has been significant in another area during my tenure here at Sherwood. I had the unique experience of implementing public Internet access at the library. Nearly every aspect of this project was mine from technology to policy to security to training to furniture to explaining to the city manager exactly why the process required so much time and thought. We have been online for over six months now with few complications and no complaints.

I now realize I did not have to worry about memorizing models and theories. I cannot think of a single instance in which I consciously stopped myself to evaluate a patron's stage in the information search process. I value what I learned of Kuhlthau's theories (and the others) and recognize that they have been helpful in shaping the way I approach information-seeking behaviors, but I certainly have not applied them verbatim. Being exposed to a wide variety of models and processes has allowed me to develop my own methods of reference service. I believe these have served the library patrons of Sherwood well.

LOFTY GOALS
Providing reference service in a small library setting has its obstacles and I am working toward changing the perceptions and assumptions of both patrons and staff.

Patrons often believe that a small library equals a modest level of service. They see small libraries as places of books, not as research centers or providers of information services. Both new and established patrons have generally been unaware of the availability of reference assistance at Sherwood and will often preface their questions with, "If it isn't too much trouble ..." or "I hate to bother you ..." I am quick to respond that I am here to help them find the information they need.

I have learned to promote the reference services and resources we have available. I have learned that demonstrating our comprehensive, customized reference assistance and showing our commitment to a high level of service are crucial in a small library like ours.

Another hurdle I encountered was our staff's tendency to direct patrons with reference questions to the "larger libraries" in the area or to recommend the county telephone reference number rather than offering our reference assistance. I have worked hard to change that tendency, making sure front-desk staff know that I expect to be challenged by any and all reference questions.

I find it important to leave patrons with a positive feeling about their reference encounter, even if I have not been able to thoroughly satisfy their request. Whether I need to ask for more time to answer their question or refer them to another resource, I want them to leave the library knowing I have done all that I can to assist them.

REWARDS
Working in a small library offers many opportunities not found elsewhere. I am fortunate to work very closely with an extremely talented staff. In some areas I have learned more from my coworkers than I could have ever learned in library school. In a small library I am exposed to and welcomed to assist in all areas of library operation from maintenance to management.

Reference is, of course, one of the best jobs in the world in any library setting. Every day I have the opportunity to provide access to information that helps people cope with medical conditions, explore careers, find new jobs, improve lifestyles, find recreational materials, locate lost relatives, embark on journeys, learn new hobbies, research a topic of interest ... the list is endless.

I once read that the reference librarian's job is one of unique difficulty, since ours is the only profession in which we have the obligation to welcome any question on any topic and are expected to find an answer. Uniquely difficult? Yes, but also completely irresistible in its challenge and thoroughly satisfying in its reward. ▣

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Reference is actually BI (bibliographic instruction) at its best. The key components of effective instruction are available in the reference area setting. The user is at the point of need, we are prepared to give personalized service, and we are available for follow-up.

Point of need: Users have determined that they are ready to learn and have made time to focus on a particular assignment or specific informational need.

Reference is BI

by Anne Fox
Western Oregon University

Personalized service: Each user's specific interest and level of expertise can be taken into account, and a brief, one-on-one, interactive instruction session can take place.

Follow-up: The user can ask follow-up questions after exploring some resources, or the reference staff person can check back to see how the user is progressing and provide follow-up instruction.

So let's think of a reference inquiry as a mini-BI session. Time may be limited, but a friendly welcome can quickly make users feel comfortable and ready to talk about their need. Ask a question or two to clarify the request and to show genuine interest. Then suggest some possible resources, briefly explain the type of material contained in those resources, and relate a few important searching and technical tips. Remember the possibility of follow-up during this brief instruction session. There is no harm in being succinct in this initial exchange, since regular BI sessions often err on the side of being too long and including too much information for users to absorb.

Next leave users to explore, to adjust the topic if necessary, and to decide when their needs have been met. Success in searching for information means empowerment and satisfaction for users. If users are not successful, help is near at hand. If the first encounter was comfortable, users will not hesitate to come back and ask. During a regular BI session, the users are often not ready to ask questions because they have not actually thought about or begun to explore the assignment.

Follow-up as the user's search is progressing can provide a few more instructional opportunities. By this time the user may see the need to concentrate on specific subject headings or use an online thesaurus. A user may want more technical pointers on the intricacies of a specific electronic interface. Some users may be receptive to critically evaluating what they have found on the Internet or in a popular magazine. Presenters of BI sessions are always looking for meaningful and interesting examples, but the best examples come from the user's real work. The reference setting provides the opportunity to teach

users with their own searches and retrieved information as examples. Once an interesting and colorful site is on the user's screen, that checklist for evaluating the content of a Web site will take on new meaning. When the user actually is ready to mark and download or print citations, the rather boring details of how to do so will be received with interest.

From these personalized reference/mini-BI sessions will come satisfied users. They will go out into our user community speaking well of our services. They perceive their time well spent, they are closer to completing their own assignment, and they have learned a few useful skills for the future. The users see their library as a less mysterious place, one where they achieved success, and one to which they will return with more confidence in the future. Thus reference, with its BI opportunities and its focus on the individual user, will also bring about good PR for the library.

Material from Literature Review Library is teeming with proclamations about the future of reference and library instruction services. While I am proposing that we provide individual assistance and instruction in the reference setting when the user is interested and receptive, other points of view have been expressed. Ewing and Hauptman (1995) took the position that "traditional academic reference service needs to be eliminated." Lewis (1995) confirmed that "reference is dead" and suggested librarians get on with designing better systems and new tools for accessing information. Rettig (1995) talked about BI and reference in the "sea of change," the instruction-information tension, and polarized groups who
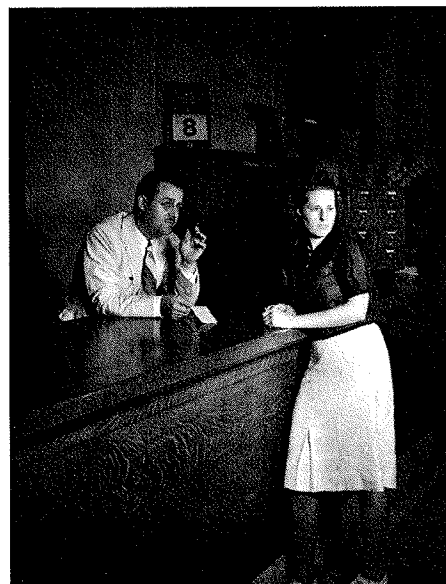
Student Being Helped by Reference Librarian
Photo courtesy of OSU Archives (Photo #75B)

believe BI has no future versus those who believe BI is the future.

On the other hand, Sarkodie-Mensah (1997), Goetsch (1995), and Reichel (1993) are more closely aligned with my point of view and have stressed the importance of the human side of reference. Goetsch (1995) stated "I would argue that the human element is, in fact, our greatest strength, and would be the library users' greatest loss." Sarkodie-Mensah (1997) said "In an era where teaching and personal encounter with undergraduates are emphasized, I find it appalling that many of my colleagues measure the importance of what they do by staying away from the so-called mundane questions from undergraduates." Reichel (1993) said "Our vision needs to remain on the individual user." Tychoson (1997) suggested staying with the basic principles of providing instruction in the use of the library and constantly re-instructing, because the "new technologies, new services, and new sources are not self-evident, even to the most experienced library user." He also said that individual assistance of users is "one of the most important functions of the library to the user and establish the library as a useful and important institution in their lives."

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By now you may be responding that this one-on-one, personalized service is a great idea but also a great luxury. Our budgets are often small. Our staff members are very busy. But I think it is a matter of the library setting its priorities. We do have some money, and we do have the staff to perform some tasks. Supporting personalized reference services and focused, one-on-one instruction on demand is time and money well spent. What could be more important than being there for our users at their point of need? We also spend time and money amassing and presenting our collections in many formats and through many access points. We spend time and money promoting our resources through outreach, formal BI, and faculty liaison activity. When the important moment arrives, when the user has a specific informational need and thus some desire to learn, are we there doing our best? Whether the user comes in person, by telephone, or through an electronic interaction, matters not. There is no substitute for personalized attention and focused instruction. Group instruction, consultation by appointment, simpler electronic interfaces, help screens, and printed instruction guides all have value, but I propose there is more value in point-of-need assistance and instruction, which we can provide through our reference services. Reference is BI, very effective BI, and it's good PR. It should be a top priority for libraries. **Ω**

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Bertha Helse and Student
Photo courtesy of OSU Archives (Photo #75B)

At the beginning of fall term 1997, Oregon State University's Valley Library incorporated paraprofessionals into the reference desk staffing equation. Three Valley Library paraprofessionals describe the circumstances leading to their assignment to the reference desk and their experiences as reference paraprofessionals.

Sharing the Wealth: Paraprofessionals at Oregon State University's Valley Library

by Jon Dillon, Cindy Skinner, Mary Swanson

Oregon State University

Two and a half years ago, life at the Valley Library reference desk was different. Reference services at what was then known as the Kerr Library were based on a three-tiered model: a first-point-of-contact information desk staffed by students and classified staff; a second-tier reference desk, inconspicuously hidden behind the information desk and staffed by rotation of approximately 15 subject specialists; and a final level of expert consultation by appointment and referral, also provided by the subject specialists.

In theory, our three-tiered model was efficient and cost effective. Patrons were well-served, with access to a professional librarian when necessary. The lower paid, less-knowledgeable workers could field the routine questions, answer phones, assist with basic online-catalog and database searching, and troubleshoot simple printer, photocopier, and computer problems. Professionals could spend their time in activities requiring a higher level of education and expertise.

However, when we looked at how we actually provided services, we found that the practice was a lot different than the theory. Although separated by about six feet of floor space, the information and reference desks were usually a world apart, with limited intercommunication and no coordination of schedules or supervision. During busy hours, however, the demarcation between first and second tier reference blurred. The reference librarian would come forward to the information desk to fill in to whatever extent was needed. And when the reference librarian was busy, first tier staff would often move into second tier mode, so a patron wouldn't have to wait for reference assistance.

Many members of the reference team believed that a more ideal model of our service was one of librarians, paraprofessionals, and student assistants working side by side at a single desk. It seemed likely that our reference service would be improved by closer contact between librarians, paraprofessionals, and students. On-the-job training opportunities would arise when librarians could observe nonprofessionals interacting with patrons; librarians would model interview and consulting techniques; and all reference staff would take ownership of reference's public service. Also, students and paraprofessionals would add to the reference desk's collective knowledge and experience through their familiarity with departmental requirements, classes and assignments, facility with technology, subject knowledge outside of on-duty librarian's expertise, and special knowledge of aspects of the library's collection or services. Merging the two public service desks appeared to have many advantages.

Unrelated to any service model, other forces were pushing consolidation of reference desks. Subject librarians were expected to spend more time providing liaison and instructional services. Adding extra staff members to the reference desk rotation would provide librarians with more time for those activities. Also, because of a major addition to the Valley Library, the reference desk would move first to cramped temporary quarters, then to a vast, computer-laden "Information Commons," where patrons would expect to access information with the mere click of a mouse button. Finally, an unexpected budget shortfall required us to cut student assistant hours by 60%. There was no way we could continue to provide reference services under our existing model!

Paraprofessionals were first placed at the reference desk in the spring of 1997. Two paraprofessionals already had extensive experience at the information desk; two others worked in "nonranked faculty" positions in other library departments but were interested in being trained to work at the reference desk. For spring and summer terms, each paraprofessional was scheduled with a librarian. The intention was that the paraprofessional could shadow the professional as he or she worked with patrons. As the paraprofessional gained confidence and experience, the professional would do the shadowing and provide support when the paraprofessional needed it.

On the first day of fall term 1997, paraprofessionals were fully integrated into the desk staffing schedule, with most librarians and paraprofessionals spending an average of eight to 10 hours a week at the reference desk. Today, three reference paraprofessionals and one "nonranked" faculty are working regular shifts at the reference desk, covering about 35 of the approximately 139 weekly desk hours.

Library professionals undoubtedly have legitimate concerns about whether or not paraprofessionals can offer the level of service provided by trained librarians. Admittedly, there are situations requiring expert reference assistance. But most of the work done at the desk is routine — checking the online catalog for library holdings, assisting undergraduates in locating journal and magazine articles, answering directional questions, and describing the basics of locating materials in our library. In these cases, service quality is based more on a friendly, eager-to-be-of-service attitude than on educational background.

Library paraprofessionals bring a set of skills and experience to the desk that do not include completion of an MLS but, nonetheless, contributes to the level of service a reference team provides. At the Valley Library, reference paraprofessionals' off-desk duties include managing the reference collection; supervising and managing the reference, circulation and reserves desks; providing technical support for the electronic reference collection; creating and maintaining the Web interface to the electronic collection; and providing interim service for the Valley LINK Reference Referral Center. Thus, each paraprofessional possesses a mastery of at least some aspect of the Valley Library's collection and processes that enhances reference desk service.

A paraprofessional's reference desk experiences are probably not significantly different from a librarian's. They have a common commitment to provide patrons with the best possible service and similar joys and frustrations in dealing with patrons of diverse backgrounds and personalities. Two paraprofessionals' experiences are detailed below.

ARE YOU A LIBRARIAN?

Jon Dillon

When asked to describe my experience working at the reference desk as a nonlibrarian, my immediate response is to say it feels much like I imagine it feels for a librarian working at the desk. And I would say this is how it should be. Because when it comes to breaking down the barriers between librarians and nonlibrarians, I think the Valley Library at Oregon State University is moving in the right direction.

Most of the time my shifts go amazingly well. The people I help seem eager to learn and they value my concern for delivering answers to their questions with as few problems as possible. On good days library users seem to recognize and appreciate that there are sometimes barriers to getting what they want. They see me as someone who understands and anticipates what is needed to provide them with a successful reference experience. I rarely have the question that always requires a difficult and wordy explanation: "Are you a librarian?"

On good days my confidence builds, and I start thinking that a healthy customer service attitude might be just as important as a background in reference. Listening to what a person wants, making sure the request is understood by repeating the question, delivering the "product," and following up the transaction by asking if the question was answered, all seem to be critical to reference. Often it seems my background in the medical and restaurant fields, both of which are service-driven industries, provide me with the skills necessary to survive in the library user's world of challenging, sometimes unrealistic, and always exceptionally high hopes.

Some days I see clearly the ways in which I understand and anticipate what is needed for library users to succeed. These success factors include knowing the collections (both print and electronic), knowing how the overall library functions, and feeling comfortable working with computers.

And then there are the bad days. Every once in awhile, a whopper question hits the desk with a thud that sends me reeling. In a panic flash I realize I'm completely ignorant about what the person in front of me wants, and I wonder how I ever got myself into this. Like the woman who wanted articles about treating blood disease in penicillin allergic adults. She wasn't finding anything in Medline. After a bout of "dueling search strategies," I convinced her to consult with the subject librarian and was able to help her with another topic.

When I think back on this experience, I am more concerned about my interaction with her than I am about my lack of knowledge relating to blood disease. After all, no one can know everything. It was difficult to convince her that I couldn't find what she wanted in Medline, and I couldn't offer her any additional sources. She wanted an answer "now" and because I couldn't deliver, she became very frustrated. I think the greatest challenge working in reference is knowing what to do in these moments of frustration. How to say no? How to refer gracefully?

As my experience level grows, and as I talk to more librarians about similar experiences, I understand the value of the referral process. Working in close proximity with librarians also offers opportunities to share moments of vulnerability and anxiousness with them. This helps in the overall process because it feels safe to admit that sometimes I do not know. All of this brings us closer together. And together we hope for the good days.

Mary Swanson, Jon Dillon, and Cindy Skinner

Reference Services for Off-campus Students

by Leah K. Starr
Eastern Oregon University

If you have not heard yet, distance education is hot. The craze is sweeping the education world. In K-12 through doctoral programs, whether it is called distance education, distance learning, extended campus, off-campus, or some other name, campuses have been opening up to nontraditional students. Correspondence courses have always been around, but the new trend is to use computer technology to enhance the learning process whenever teachers and students are not in the same place at the same time. With advances in telecommunications and the Internet people can earn high school and college credits and even undergraduate and graduate degrees without the traditional campus and classroom experiences.

Distance learners tend to use both their public and academic libraries when doing research for their classes. Public librarians serve patrons regardless of their motivation, and some students find it more convenient to use their local public library. However, the academic institution is responsible for providing library services to all of its students. That responsibility cannot be assumed by the public library, because it has a different mission. Academic libraries are designed to support the curriculum of their institution while public libraries strive to serve the needs of their entire community.
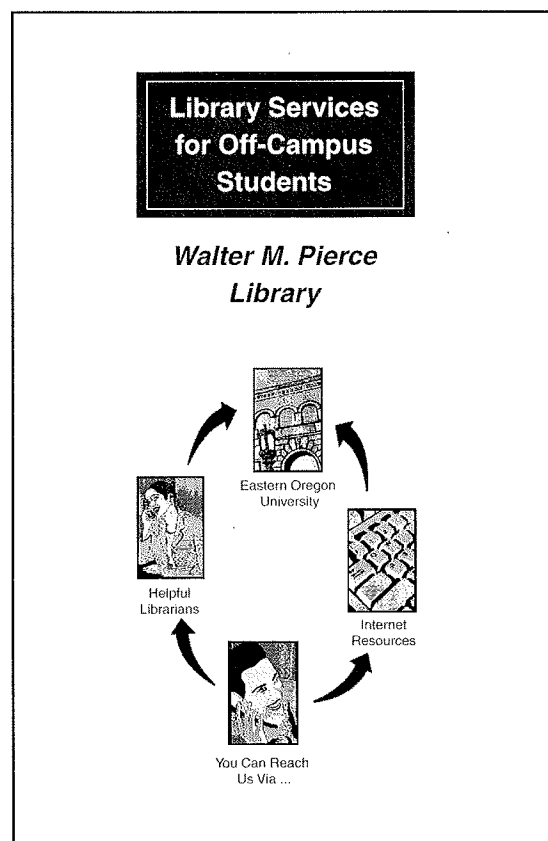
Many of the two- and four-year colleges and universities in Oregon have successful distance education programs that include high-quality library services. In fact, it is fair to say that Oregon colleges and universities are among the leaders in providing library services to off-campus students. At the recent Eighth Off-Campus Library Services Conference, which drew over 200 librarians from around the globe, Oregon was one of the most widely represented states. Academic librarians are working hard to make the most of changes in technology and the subsequent evolution of service opportunities.

These new kinds of educational delivery methods are creating new kinds of students. People with full-time jobs and family responsibilities can benefit from the convenience of asynchronous courses or local branch campuses that offer classes. Asynchronous courses, those not requiring a student to conform to a specific class schedule, are particularly meaningful to students with busy daily lives. Rural areas are especially well served by distance education programs. The lack of local educational opportunities can be a contributing factor to the phenomenon known as "brain drain"; i.e., motivated people move from the country to the city in pursuit of their livelihoods. In rural communities, an extra effort must be made to provide local educational opportunities so that individuals with aspirations aren't exported from the region.

Eastern Oregon University is the only four-year institution in the eastern half of the state, so naturally it has been involved in distance education for many years. Part of the educational package EOU offers to students, no matter where they live, is library services. Providing traditional services through new technology to a group of students who are familiar with neither is an interesting endeavor. Because many students rarely meet with other students as a group, or even with their instructor, reference librarians must consider how to adapt traditional services to fit the needs of off-campus students.

These distance learners are a distinct demographic group from their campus-based counterparts. They are often older and may have been out of the academic environment for many years. If they have ever done library research, it was in a library very different from what they will encounter now. Many are new users of computer technology and are not comfortable with electronic resources. They are, however, more committed to their educational goals than many students who attend college straight out of high school.

Off-campus students have essentially the same information needs as other students, plus some issues that are specific to remote access and delivery. Questions usually come via the phone, fax, or e-

Library Services for Off-Campus Students

Walter M. Pierce Library

Eastern Oregon University

Helpful Librarians

Internet Resources

You Can Reach Us Via ...

Oregon Reference Link: Providing All the Answers Most of the Time

by Amy Kinard
Jackson County Library

All the libraries in Oregon, from a school library east of the Cascades to a public library on the coast, are linked together for reference service. Connected by a network of five regional reference centers located throughout Oregon, no librarian is more than a telephone call or e-mail away from reference support. If your patron's question cannot be answered by local staff or collections, it can simply be forwarded to your regional reference center. Too good to be true? Is there a catch? There is no trick to it. Once local resources are exhausted, a question can be forwarded to a regional reference center where other reference librarians will work on it. (Contact information for regional centers is included in this article.) Based on the number of reference questions received by these centers, most librarians are apparently familiar with the Oregon Reference LINK program, but a little background may clarify the system.

BACKGROUND

The passage of Senate Bill 20 by the 1993 Oregon Legislature ensured establishment of a statewide resource sharing program: Oregon LINK (Library Information Network for Knowledge). Under this legislation three types of library resource sharing activities were allowed:

- Interlibrary loan net lender reimbursement

- Regional Reference Referral centers

- Direct loan net lender reimbursement

Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) funds became available when the Oregon State Library adopted a new, more focused mission to serve Oregon government agencies. Because funds were not sufficient to fund all three components of Oregon LINK at that time, the State Advisory Council on Libraries recommended that the first LINK component would be the establishment of five regional reference referral centers. On October 28, 1993, the State Library Board accepted the State Advisory Council's recommendation to adopt "Proposed Plan for Oregon LINK, 1993-1995," which was finalized as the "Plan for Oregon LINK, 1993-1995." The establishment of five regional reference centers was the highest priority, to be followed by interlibrary loan

net lender reimbursement in the next biennium and direct loan net lender reimbursement at a later date. The five regional centers are as follows:

1. Central Oregon-North Information Network (CONIN)—Located at Deschutes County Library. Serves libraries in Crook, Deschutes, Hood River, Jefferson, Sherman, and Wasco counties.

2. Eastern Oregon Information Network (EOIN)—Located at the Walter M. Pierce Library of Eastern Oregon University. Serves libraries in Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler counties.

3. Southern Oregon Libraries Information Cooperative (SOLIC)—Located at Jackson County Library Services. Serves libraries in Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, Lake, and Lane counties.

4. Northwest LINK—Located at the Valley Library of Oregon State University. Serves libraries in Benton, Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk, Tillamook, and Yamhill counties.

5. Multnomah County Library (MCL)

In addition to serving Multnomah County, MCL serves as reference referral center for Clackamas and

Oregon Reference LINK
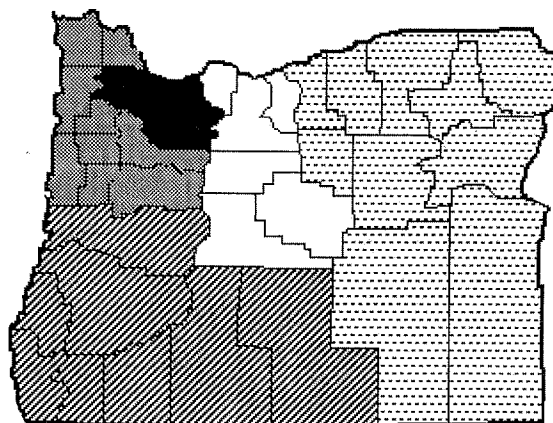
■ Multnomah County Library

▦ Oregon State University,
The Valley Library, Northwest LINK

▨ Jackson County Library, Southern Oregon Libraries
Information Cooperative

☐ Deschutes County Library,
Central Oregon-North Information Network

⠿ Eastern Oregon State College, Walter M. Pierce Library,
Eastern Oregon Information Network

Washington counties under mutually agreed upon conditions. While all the centers serve as third-level centers for each other in areas of specialty, MCL is used most in this manner.

According to the "Oregon Reference LINK Design Plan," all five Reference LINK Centers would provide the following services:

1. Answer requests for information that cannot be answered by the local library.

2. Provide for patron anonymity, toll-free or low-cost communication, and least cost methods of delivery for answers.

3. Communicate regularly with local libraries in the geographic area, either in person, at meetings or via electronic or print communications.

4. Provide or facilitate training and educational opportunities about reference services, seeking to strengthen reference service at the local level.

HOW IT WORKS

Oregon Reference LINK is not a substitute for local reference service but serves to expand a local library's resources. The system is based on a three-tiered structure:

Tier 1.
The first level of service is at the local library, where the patron has direct access to a librarian. When local library resources are exhausted, the unanswered question may be forwarded by the local librarian to that library's regional reference referral center. (Patrons do not call the regional referral centers directly.)

Tier 2.
When a regional reference center receives a request, it may contact the patron if additional information is necessary, but usually communication is librarian to librarian. Answers are sent back to the requesting library to deliver to the patron. This is an important factor in maintaining strong local reference service.

Tier 3.
If a regional center cannot answer a question, it may contact any of the other regional referral centers. This is usually to access a special collection, such as MCL's song collection, Oregon State University's agricultural materials, or material of regional interest. In an effort to avoid unnecessary delays, any Oregon library with more than ten professional staff members may also contact any of the five regional reference centers directly.

As expected, the reference referral centers receive a wide range of questions. Requests include songs, poems, wiring diagrams, health information, and stu-

dent report topics. There are requests for company information, stock prices, trademark searches, and vocational schools. The variety is endless and typical of what most reference librarians see each day. The difference is that a question that is "impossible" in one library may become a successful search with this three-tiered networking. These are some recent requests answered by regional centers:

- A city manager needed a list of trees and shrubs found in riparian zones in Eastern Oregon.

- A middle school student needed the name and biographical information about any female Mexican poet.

- A school principal needed studies about the effectiveness of grade repetition in middle school years.

Oregon Reference LINK
Regional Centers

Please contact the LINK center serving your county. (See article for the list of counties served by each center)

1. Central Oregon-North Information Network (CONIN)
   Deschutes County Library
   (800) 727-5630
   (541) 389-0485 fax

2. Eastern Oregon Information Network (EOIN)
   Eastern Oregon University,
   Walter M. Pierce Library
   (541) 962-3699
   (541) 962-3335 fax
   reflink@eou.edu

3. Southern Oregon Libraries Information Cooperative (SOLIC)
   Jackson County Library Services
   (800) 866-9047
   (800) 564-6817 fax
   solic@jcls.org

4. Northwest LINK
   Oregon State University,
   The Valley Library
   (800) 689-9991
   (541) 737-3453
   nwlink@ccmail.orst.edu

5. Multnomah County Library
   (503) 248-3238
   (503) 248-5475 fax
   ardens@nethost.multnomah.lib.or.us

Service and Information Skills in Oregon High School Library Media Centers

by Diane Claus-Smith
North Salem High School Library Media Specialist

Colleagues at public and academic libraries have often asked me about school library media centers. Here are some answers to their questions.

WHAT KINDS OF RESOURCES DO MOST HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS PROVIDE FOR THEIR STUDENTS AND STAFF?

PRINT RESOURCES

Encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases and specialized reference works form the backbone of a high school print reference collection. Most high school library media centers are equipped with standard reference resources, depending upon the size of their student body, curriculum specialty areas and, of course, budgetary limitations. Currency is often an issue because of financial constraints. Often gaps in collections occur because of budget shortfalls or changes in priorities. Purchases of high cost reference materials may be deferred in place of electronic or online resources. This may result in a spotty reference collection quite difficult to reinstate. Vertical files are often an important part of the reference section.

Students are apt to use print encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries and atlases when large classes visit the library and electronic resources are limited. General reference materials in science, history, literature and art are used heavily for research papers. Specialized reference tools like "CQ Researcher" are helpful for current interest topics or for the student who needs suggestions for a paper concept. Students with specific research needs consult quotation books and poetry indexes in a limited way.

With CD-ROM and online periodical databases becoming more available to school library media centers, print indexes are purchased less often. A student may indeed graduate from high school without having used the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, but instead should be familiar with EBSCO MAS, SIRS, INFOTRAC, UMI, or other electronic periodical indexes and databases.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

When made available, electronic resources become the tools of choice for the majority of high school researchers. Most students think of computers as accessible, fast, easy, and fun. That conclusion may be debated, but this youthful zeal for using technology can be channeled toward a viable and constructive research experience.

Many high school library media centers include CD-ROM resources for their students, either in a networked tower or at stand-alone workstations. Periodical indexes and databases, encyclopedias, and specialized subject-specific CDs are available for in-library use.

ONLINE CATALOGS

The majority of high school library media centers are equipped with online public catalogs to access collections supporting the curriculum and providing recreational reading for students. Some are centrally shared within school districts; others are independent. Library media specialists instruct students in accessing materials.

THE INTERNET

The Internet has dramatically opened research opportunities for high school students. No longer tied to in-house resources, they can access information from a myriad of sources on topics from tattoos to tornadoes. Students eagerly seek and find details of current events and hot topics, which makes the research process up to date and more meaningful for them.

Knit with the advantages of currency and high interest, however, are the triple concerns of accuracy, authority, and appropriateness. As students take in boatloads of information, they need to use critical thinking skills to sift and select. Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) have become an integral part of the library skills curriculum most high school library media specialists develop for their schools.

ONLINE PERIODICAL DATABASES/OSLIS

Student projects demand research from current periodicals in areas of interest for young people. Unfortunately, keeping large periodical collections has been an economic impossibility for most school library media centers. Kids too often are turned off by the fact that there just doesn't seem to be anything available on their topic in their school library media center.

With more schools logging on to the Internet, commercial online resources become more feasible as a realistic option for high school research. Not only can students access articles never before available, they can print them directly, save them to a disk, or e-mail the results to their home computer. Group purchases through projects like the LSTA-funded Oregon School Library Information System (http://www.open.k12.or.us/oslis) will make it pos-

sible for schools across the state to access cost-effective quality online resources.

WHAT SERVICES CAN STUDENTS EXPECT FROM THEIR HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER MEDIA SPECIALIST?

School library media specialists are first and foremost a critical part of the teaching team at their schools. Their role is to administer a program providing information resources, reader advising, curriculum support, and instruction in information retrieval and utilization for the students and staff of their schools.

As a part of the instructional team, they work in partnership with teachers across all curriculum areas to develop research-based lessons and projects that will help teach students active and practical application of the information they access. A library media specialist takes on a formalized instructional role when classes visit the library for book talking or instruction in use of specific research tools. The media specialist also provides point-of-use instruction to groups or individuals as they need assistance in using specialized print or electronic resources. Library media specialists often conduct formal or one-on-one lessons in critical thinking and evaluation of information sources. They produce and provide maps, signs, and pathfinders to help their students become independent researchers. They also set up scavenger hunts and treasure hunts to assist in orientation to specialized sections of the library media center. Some library media specialists compose online tutorials and Web pages for students to pursue on their own, in classrooms, or at home.

As students finalize their projects into research papers, multi-media productions, or graphic representations, they often call upon the expertise of the library media specialist to assist them in word processing, desktop publishing, or graphic arts. Knowledge of bibliographic formats, specialized software details, and individual teacher needs is fundamental for the library media specialist and the library staff.

WHAT GUIDELINES ARE USED BY SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SPECIALISTS TO ESTABLISH QUALITY PROGRAMS?

INFORMATION POWER AND INFORMATION LITERACY

As school library media specialists work to incorporate critical thinking and information literacy into the curriculum of their schools, they have eagerly anticipated the arrival of "Information Power," a work recently published jointly by the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology. This book gives best practices in library programs and ways to support the curriculum. Most importantly, it sets the standards for information literacy in student learning.

The information literacy standards cover three major areas: information literacy, independent learning and social responsibility. Each standard includes several "success indicators" that confirm the standard has been met. "Levels of proficiency" for each indicator

help the educator determine a student's level of achievement.

INFORMATION LITERACY
- Standard 1: The student who is information literate accesses information efficiently and effectively.
- Standard 2: The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.
- Standard 3: The student who is information literate uses information accurately and creatively.

INDEPENDENT LEARNING
- Standard 4: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and pursues information related to personal interests.
- Standard 5: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and appreciates literature and other creative expressions of information.
- Standard 6: The student who is an independent learner is information literate and strives for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
- Standard 7: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society.
- Standard 8: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.
- Standard 9: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information.

(This material has been excerpted from "Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning." It is available at the following URL: http://www.ala.org/news/v3n24/v3n24d.html.)

OREGON INFORMATION LITERACY GUIDELINES
Inspired by the national goals and standards promised by "Information Power," the Oregon Educational Media Association created a tool to assist our students in becoming better information consumers and library users. The statewide Information Literacy Guidelines directly relate to the Oregon Department of Education Standards and Benchmarks. Across all content and curriculum areas, these guidelines can be used to match the requirements of lessons and assessment areas to library media and information literacy solutions. Not only useful for school library media centers and teaching staff, these guidelines should also prove effective in both public and academic libraries. They are available online at http://www.teleport.com/~oema/infolit.html.

WHY IS IT SO CRUCIAL THAT SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTERS PROVIDE PROGRAMS THAT ACCOMMODATE AND ENCOURAGE "PERFORMANCE-BASED" LEARNING? AND BY THE WAY, WHAT IS THE "CIM/CAM"?

A student graduating from an Oregon high school in 1999 is faced with many requirements in order to get that precious diploma. With the advent of our school reform legislation, state mandates must be met in multiple curriculum areas, as well as "seat hours" and credit accrual.

The Certificate of Initial Mastery, or CIM, will be awarded in english and mathematics in 1998-99. Standards in the other four areas (history, civics, geography, and economics) will be phased in over time. The Certificate of Initial Mastery in all six areas will be awarded in the 2002-03 school year.

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) will be awarded to students who achieve grade 12 academic standards in English, mathematics, science, the social sciences (history, civics, geography and economics), the arts, and second languages; achieve grade 12 career-related standards in personal management, problem solving, teamwork, communication, work-place systems, career development and employment foundations; and focus on an area of career interest such as arts and communications, business and management, industrial and engineering systems, natural resource systems, human resources, or health services.

The CAM will be phased in at selected schools. It will be awarded in all schools to students in the 2004-05 school year. (For more information about Oregon School Reform and requirements see http://www.ode.state.or.us/cifs/cimcam.htm)

Many Oregon high school seniors are required to demonstrate through a performance-based "senior project" that they can research a topic, write an 8-12 page correctly formatted research paper, conduct personal interviews, work with a mentor, demonstrate practical work-related experience, and present the findings before a panel of experts.

A school with these kinds of projects underscores the value of a quality library media program. As students crush into the library with unmet needs for up-to-date, accurate, interesting, and easily accessible information, they place demands upon the collection, the staff, and the expertise of the library media specialist. A well-developed print collection, adequate electronic resources, and a history of library skills curriculum for students and staff is the best "defense" in preparation for these needs. On top of this, a network of external library and information resources is a necessity. Establishing communication and borrowing agreements with university, community college, public, and state libraries is crucial in filling student information needs when local resources are not enough.

HOW CAN SCHOOL, PUBLIC AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIES COLLABORATE?

School library media specialists must consider looking to the larger library community to share library skills curriculum expectations and collection devel-

opment experience. "Collaboration with public libraries, which share the school library media center media program's clientele, is especially valuable for encouraging student learning" ("Information Power," p. 124). Developing partnerships between schools and local public libraries will not only assist students who need resources for that term paper or senior project today, but will lay patterns of cooperation which will benefit programs in each of the libraries.

School library media specialists also look to colleges and universities to develop cooperative relationships. "Action-research partnerships between university faculty and practicing library media specialists can investigate the impact of school library media center media programs on students' development of information literacy" (Information Power 124). Following this article is a selected list of resources discussing collaborative programs with school and academic libraries and research discussing the concept of transferring library skills from high school to higher education. █

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Electronic Resources: Order Out of Chaos?

by Greg Doyle
Multnomah County Library

I magine you are returning from your favorite vacation spot. You have just landed in Chicago and are on your way to the gate to finish the final leg of your trip. You are tired from the 12-hour flight, but you're happy and relieved that the monitors indicate the gate is not far away, and the plane is scheduled to leave on time. But as you approach the gate, a large crowd is milling around, and a line extends out into the hallway. The sign behind the counter simply says "delayed," and an announcement comes over the air that says your plane is out of service. Worse, the agent tells you that you'll be waiting a minimum of three hours, and that's an optimistic guess because they have to find a spare plane. You have her check for other flights on other airlines, but all she can tell you is that everything is booked. If you want to chance being waitlisted and if you don't mind finding your way to the other terminal within 10 minutes, maybe, just maybe, you'll get home with as few surprises as necessary.

Just as the unexpected and often unpleasant can turn an ordinary trip into an exciting adventure, the Multnomah County Library (MCL) has experienced a few delays, some false starts, and many successes on its trip from the land of print to a place where electronic resources integrate nicely into reference services. Providing access to electronic resources has been a challenge in our system of a large research-oriented Central Library and 14 branches, with more branches planned in the next few years. We currently provide access to approximately 40 databases on CD-ROM at Central, most networked; 12 Internet—accessible databases available from any library; and seven networked and 28 stand-alone titles at the Midland Library. These numbers don't include CD-ROM titles for children, which are loaded on stand-alone computers in each library.

THE TECHNOLOGY
You already know how quickly technology changes, which makes the decision about how to deliver a particular resource more complicated. Here at MCL, we've had to manage expectations based on the technology available to us. When the number of titles available on CD-ROM exploded in the early 1990s, we always expected that we would load CD-ROMs at the Central Library and provide access from any MCL site through a wide-area network. Networking certain titles within Central proved a challenge, and we still haven't provided access to these titles outside the building, although we may soon. Our computer staff is experimenting with Citrix Win-Frame software and the ICA network protocol to speed up processing time, which has always been a problem. If this proves feasible, we will have yet another option to consider when we try to decide the best way to deliver an electronic resource.

The growth of the World Wide Web and Internet offers another way to deliver databases to multiple locations. Services such as OCLC FirstSearch, or IAC's SearchBank offered a number of reference resources considered valuable by staff. As we increased the number of Internet-ready public search stations at Central and the branches, and as vendors offered IP address recognition in lieu of passwords, our options increased. These days more vendors are making their databases available via the Web directly from their Web sites, as well as through third parties such as EBSCO and OCLC. More options are great but also confusing. Just how do you make decisions?

Our bias now is for Internet-accessible databases over CD-ROM. In the past year we have moved Novelist, Computer Select, F&S Index, and Marcive GPO/PCAT Plus from CD-ROM access in favor of Internet access. These were easy decisions, as we gave up very little in searching functionality, for the same cost or less in all cases. At the same time, we increased access from a single location to every branch library. Other titles take more negotiation with staff. Selectors in the Central Library don't want to give up BIP+ on CD-ROM because of the searching capabilities, speed, and record display. Technical services staff use BIP+ with Ingram's stock information and don't want to give that up. Our branch staff is waiting for any kind of access, but don't have the capability to run local copies of the CD-ROM. In the end, we will probably have a combination of formats for this resource.

SELECTING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES
In 1993 MCL found itself flailing around trying to make decisions about electronic resources. While it was easy to evaluate a resource for its content, other aspects had to be considered: interface, searching capabilities, sorting/printing/downloading functionality, operating systems and platforms. Much of this was new to librarians who had been exposed only to personal computers at that time. In an attempt to bring order from chaos and to create a process to identify, order, evaluate, purchase, and load, the Database Access Review Committee (DARC) was created. DARC also had a role in producing documentation and training for new products. The committee consisted of nine staff: one member from each of the six sections in Central, three members from the branches, and one person from computer support. DARC met quarterly, with emergency meetings held when necessary.

WHAT DARC WAS ABLE TO DO:
- Develop an acquisition policy for electronic resources,

- Establish procedures for requesting, reviewing, evaluating and approving products for purchase,

- Monitor budget for new products.

WHAT DARC WAS UNABLE TO DO:

- Remain current about the number of vendors offering CD-ROMS,

- Identify and evaluate the growing number of databases available via the Internet,

- Establish and manage communication between public service staff and computer support staff,

- Fully integrate electronic resources into reference services, including branch services.

In 1997 DARC realized it could not effectively manage electronic resources and recommended the creation of a new position, electronic resources librarian (ERL), to coordinate electronic resources. The major initiatives of the ERL were as follows:

- Prioritize work on problem CD-ROM titles and either get them installed on the network or return them to the vendor,

- Identify titles on the CD-ROM network that are Internet accessible and evaluate for replacement,

- Work with vendors to set up trials of products and solicit feedback from staff,

- Represent MCL on the Portland Area Library System (PORTALS) and ORBIS Library Consortium database committees.

The advantage of this position is that staff do not duplicate each other's work and vendors have one point of contact. The disadvantage is that staff are not as involved in the selection and evaluation as they once had been. In the coming year, the ERL plans to formalize the evaluation of products by assigning staff the responsibility of evaluating and recommending whether to purchase.

BUDGETING

This is the first year we have consolidated all electronic reference products into a single line item on the budget. In the past, electronic resources might have been charged to individual sections, grants, etc. We'll now be able to track exactly how much of our materials budget is devoted to electronic resources (approximately 6%). This figure does not include CD-ROMs purchased for the circulating collection. We don't really expect electronic resources to save the library money. In a few cases we can cancel print subscriptions and rely on the electronic version. *Books in Print* and *Encyclopedia of Associations* come to mind. Rather, we are able to increase the availability of a particular resource at a marginal increase in costs and boost service levels for our patrons. Instead of traveling to Central to use Computer Select on CD-ROM, a Gresham branch patron can use the product at the Gresham Library, or better yet, dial it up from home or office. The result is much greater access with marginal cost increases.

We also look at the entire cost of a particular resource. How much does it cost us to purchase, process, and store on the shelves 15 sets of *Books in Print?* How does that compare to the cost of the CD-ROM, plus the hardware to store and run it, plus staff to support it? And finally, what's the cost of accessing the database through a service like Search-Bank or FirstSearch?

INTEGRATING AND UTILIZING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Integrating electronic resources into reference services is a topic that can't be ignored. Just as buying a book and putting it on the shelf doesn't ensure usage, neither does buying a resource and making a link to it. Training of staff and the public is necessary to see effective and frequent use of the resource.

Training adds to the overall cost of the resource. Finding time for staff to become expert enough with the product to teach others is often difficult. And it can be even more difficult to schedule staff off the reference desk to attend training sessions. We try different ways to introduce resources to staff: traditional stand-up classroom training, small demonstration sessions to demonstrate important features and peculiarities in the product; and intranet access to product documentation created by staff. We still have a long way to go with this, especially in getting the training out to our branch staff.

We're also finding that electronic resources are having an effect on traditional reference service. Reference transactions are lasting longer, often due to the need to provide on-the-spot instruction in the use of the computer and the various services available. We're also seeing a drop in the number of transactions, which can be explained in part by the fact that patrons are better able to find information on their own using the various electronic resources we've provided and taught them to use.

TRACKING USAGE

Tracking usage is one of the areas in which we are most "in the dark." Some vendors, such as OCLC and IAC, provide regular and useful statistics about use. We can use statistics to make decisions regarding database renewal or to increase or reduce simultaneous users. Some vendors either don't provide the statistics or only do so upon request and take awhile to provide them. And so far, we have not been able to track any use of our CD-ROM titles. Of course, statistics don't tell us how useful the resource was and whether it provided the information to our patrons, but they do give us some idea of how often the product is used.

CONSORTIA

Consortia are both a blessing and curse. As a member of PORTALS, we benefit from the access to databases PORTALS negotiates and pays for. Most of the databases available are ones we don't use frequently enough to subscribe to on our own but love to have

access to. Others, like Worldcat, we've grown to rely on and would probably purchase on our own.

As a PORTALS member, we can participate in the ORBIS consortia and take advantage of any discounts vendors provide to large groups. But because of the nature of ORBIS—each library decides whether or not to purchase each database—beginning a service can take a much longer time than if we were to subscribe on our own. On the other hand, we benefit from all the work an ORBIS member does by tracking down a vendor, setting up trials, following up on price quotes, and coordinating the purchase by multiple libraries.

SUMMARY
In this article I've tried to highlight the issues involved in selecting and integrating electronic resources here at the MCL. It seems clear that just as we get a handle on one aspect of this process another pops up. We try to remain flexible and find new ways to streamline the process of purchasing and installing products. As our technology base increases throughout our system, we'll need to closely examine the role of electronic and print reference in our branches and provide a suite of resources to support that role. Finally, we need to examine whether to continue centralizing the selection of electronic resources or distribute that responsibility to multiple selectors. **Q**

Multnomah County Library Web site:
www.multnomah.lib.or.us/lib/

Changing Dimensions
(continued from page 3)

systems than the librarian who has not seen or used it, the chances for perceived "bad service" are real.

At the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, we have tried developing a baseline of knowledge in each program available to patrons, for which every reference librarian is responsible. This has been necessary for two reasons: First, it will prevent (to some degree) inequity of service in assisting patrons. On the other side of this coin, a reference librarian can also feel comfortable in saying, "I am unable to help you with this; please try a help screen or refer to a book." Second, it becomes a basis for expectations of candidates seeking reference positions. The baseline first deals with hardware troubleshooting, all the "tricks" of checking connections and rebooting that one tries before contacting computer support personnel. The remainder addresses levels of proficiency in the software programs offered to the public. These will at least get a patron started and through the simpler tasks that can be performed with each program.

The public relations aspect of reference service remains vitally important for the future of our libraries. Only the satisfied patron/taxpayer will lobby to continue support of services at the levels at which their needs have been met. Measuring this satisfaction may be elusive. It is, however, to our advantage to take on the added instructional and assistance queries regarding electronic resources. Making electronic resources available only to those who know how to use them goes against the grain of what public libraries in our country have long stood for: access for all. Denial of this teaching role may quickly diminish the support necessary to upgrade hardware and software in the future. Assisting patrons as their needs require assures that these resources — and resources of the future — will continue to be available for our work, as well as for public use.

The measures and standards for traditional public library service appear to be failing us at this time, and new ones should be worked out for some of the situations this article refers to. With electronic resources, we must take into account that not all "transactions" will be informational. The old dichotomy of informational and directional should be supplemented with instructional. Reference (informational) statistics may drop, but the reference librarian may be busier than ever assisting people in using the electronic resources.

In another generation, as more library patrons are comfortable with computers because they have used them in school, at work, and probably at home, the need for the instructional/technical assistance that reference librarians must now give may decrease. By that time information storage, retrieval, and delivery, will have changed further, as will have expectations from our public. Again, reference librarians will find their role changing, as we find it changing now. **Q**

Sharing the Wealth

NO, I'M NOT A LIBRARIAN— BUT YES, I CAN HELP YOU

Cindy Skinner

When I was first hired in the library 11 years ago as a clerical specialist, I never imagined that I would end up working as a paraprofessional "librarian" at the reference desk. Working at the reference desk without an MLS is challenging, in that it is hard to know where I fit in with my colleagues. Each of us brings different experiences with us to the desk. The librarians, of course, have their library education, and I have many years of experience.

When I started working in the library, I managed the reference collection. At first it was just my job, but soon I became very interested in the books. I'd find myself looking forward to processing them to see what we were adding to the collection. That experience has helped me a great deal in my work at the reference desk.

This past year I had the opportunity to work with the NW LINK Program, a statewide program providing reference service to community colleges, schools, and public libraries across Oregon. This was a whole new learning experience for me. I received the questions by mail, phone calls, and faxes. There was no interview to conduct, no body language to read—just the question. What did they really want? What were they going to use the information for? Did what I sent them really help or just confuse them? The questions I received were totally different than the ones I would get at OSU's reference desk. The majority of the questions were referred by public libraries, and no two questions were alike. Some of them were downright funny! I'd have to rely on the groundwork of the staff person who had sent the question to me.

When our service desks merged and I began hearing the librarians interview the patrons, I realized that I, too, could help find the answers. Finding out what the patron really wants to know takes good listening skills, patience, and experience. I have that! Often I recognize what book the patron is asking for, and I know just where it is. Well, this seems easy. But sometimes I don't have a clue what a patron is asking. Nothing sounds familiar at all. How do the librarians know what the patron wants? Is this what they learn in library school? Maybe I can't do this after all! And then I remember: Ask questions. Many times patrons don't know exactly what they want, hence, the valuable reference interview. Sometimes I still have trouble figuring out what the question really is, but once I start asking questions, the barrier between patrons and me seems to break down and together we find what they want. ▣

Oregon Reference Link

- A nursing home volunteer needed the words to the song "Where the Morning Glories Twine Around the Door."

- A home mechanic needed a clutch diagram (and instructions) for a 1941 Ford 9N tractor.

None of these questions could be answered at their local libraries, but because they were referred to a regional center, local librarians were able to deliver the answers, and patrons were well served.

FUTURE OF OREGON REFERENCE LINK

As we know, "nothing stays the same," and this is especially true in the world of information. The Internet and other online resources are expanding the "walls" of libraries. While basic information needs have not changed (there will always be a broken car or a report on capital punishment), access to information is changing. What does this mean for regional reference service? Will our patrons be able to access the information sources without reference assistance? Are our libraries funded and open to provide this access? Perhaps extended reference service will be more important than ever as information sources expand, and citizens' demands for immediate service grow. Questions regarding the future of reference service are the same everywhere. This fall, Oregon Reference LINK services and performance will be evaluated by an independent consultant, and it is hoped that information from this process will help determine how Oregon Reference LINK is structured in the future. Comments on this future and the delivery of Reference LINK services in general are most welcome and encouraged. Send them to Rushton Brandis, Oregon State Library, State Library Building, Salem, OR 97310. ▣

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Reference Services

mail. The phone is preferable, because with e-mail and fax, the opportunity for a full reference interview is lost. Nothing is more frustrating to students than to have their questions responded to by a string of questions—nothing except not getting a reply promptly.

In order to serve off-campus students well, three general areas require special attention and some creative thinking. Other important issues, such as document delivery and collaboration with other libraries, of course should not be overlooked, but these three relate most directly to reference services.

REMOTE ACCESS TO THE CATALOG AND OTHER ELECTRONIC RESOURCES
Many questions can be answered by students searching the catalog or indexes themselves, but many students are not computer savvy. Libraries need to make sure that students can actually use what they are offering. A simple interface is essential. We need to watch out for library jargon (such as OPAC, ILL, citation index, and so forth) that may confuse novice searchers. Remember, an off-campus student can't just ask the person next to them for help.

RESEARCH GUIDANCE
Off-campus students may never have been inside an academic library before. Libraries need to market their services, perhaps with an eye-catching brochure sent along with every course syllabus. Research guides can be added to the online electronic system. These guides can include the kinds of information a librarian would tell a student wandering around the library with a puzzled look. Library instructional sessions incorporated into a class are ideal but are often impracticable.

CONTACT POINTS
Ideally, a library will have one contact person for all off-campus issues. Many libraries separate interlibrary loan and document delivery operations from reference services, but the two operations need to be in close contact. Students should be able to contact the library in several ways: an e-mail address, a phone number, a computer conference, and even office hours, in case they do come to campus.

In short, distance education programs require academic librarians to do everything they already do, but in significantly different ways. Library service to off-campus students is an art form, evolving as new ideas are shared and new technologies are implemented. Also, more institutions are realizing that these adaptations and additional services cannot be successful without additional funding. Change is constant, but it isn't free. With more and more institutions getting into this field and campus-less institutions like Western Governors University joining in, things will get more interesting before they become routine. As much as we may wish library services to off-campus students to be just like traditional academic library services, there is no way around the fact that these different students have different needs. ◗

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Guest Editor

Lynn Chmelir, Linfield College Library

Spring 1999

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