

**ACRL Literatures in English Section
Reference Discussion Group**

**ALA Midwinter Meeting
Sunday, January 17, 2010, 8:00-10:00am
Hilton Boston Financial District, Commerce Room**

Agenda

1. Introductions: 19 in attendance.
2. "Alternatives": As our budgets shrink and we are forced to cancel resources, what alternatives are librarians using to get information?
 - 2.1. When cuts are necessary, some libraries are focusing on eliminating databases before monographs and serials. Content overlap across databases is an issue that is constantly being assessed. Usage data and questionnaires (for faculty and librarians) are used to evaluate databases.
 - 2.2. Directories and encyclopedias are often targets for cancellations. An example is the *Encyclopedia of Associations*. One library has canceled a subscription to *Encyclopedia Britannica* and is using *Wikipedia* as the primary digital encyclopedia.
 - 2.3. Question: Does using *Wikipedia* as the default encyclopedia send a message to patrons?
 - 2.3.1. One reply was that it adds value to *Wikipedia*, in that the library deems it valuable for reference transactions. Some members voiced concern over the lack of consistency among articles in *Wikipedia*.
 - 2.3.2. Another library has shifted emphasis from general encyclopedias to subject encyclopedias, as many faculty do not like students citing general reference works in research essays.
3. What freely available WWW resource do you use most often? Does it have a commercial rival?
 - 3.1. The *William Blake Archive* is popular, along with other free and peer-reviewed projects gathered in *NINES*, which are presented along with non-free resources.
 - 3.2. Freely available foreign language primary resources, specifically for undergraduates, are difficult to discover.
 - 3.3. Some undergraduate assignments require reading dense scholarly materials, which have low accessibility. Although not free, the use of *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism* and *Cambridge Collections Online* are great introductions to difficult topics, yet include bibliographies for further research. *Literature Resource Center* is also helpful in moving from broad to specific topics.
 - 3.4. Question: Did libraries stop subscribing to print resources after subscribing to Gale's *Literature Resource Center*?

- 3.4.1. The majority replied, "Yes." Additional comments reflected an increase in usage after subscribing to *Literature Resource Center*. Most librarians sent print resources offsite, with a couple discarding the titles. The majority of libraries cannot afford both print and online subscriptions due to monetary and space constraints.
4. Are ILL services (or pay-per-view models) increasing in usage? Does this affect time-sensitive reference services?
 - 4.1. At one library, pay-per-view has been looked at, but it is not the cheapest option, therefore is not used.
 - 4.2. Another library tried pay-per-view with some specific resources in the sciences, but there are concerns about wider accessibility for faculty and students.
 - 4.3. Concern was expressed for dependence on ILL in regard to reference transactions, as speed is essential. Many undergraduate students do not have time to wait for ILL items, especially if they are on a quarter system.
 - 4.4. One library's ILL department has a purchase-on-demand system. Items of high demand are purchased, but the librarian is not notified of items added to collections.
 - 4.5. Question: Were cuts made in the book budget to allow purchase-on-demand? As one library would need to decrease book budgets to allow purchase-on-demand.
 - 4.5.1. Answer: Not aware of it affecting book budgets.
 - 4.6. Question: Does anyone have issues with promoting ILL in a reference transaction?
 - 4.6.1. Many undergraduate students do not want to wait, therefore it can be hard to promote the service.
 - 4.6.2. One method is to continue the reference transaction and find equivalent resources, as many undergrads have more options than graduate students (who are likely to wait).
 - 4.6.3. One library has a pilot where rush orders are initially treated as ILL items by technical services. The item is cataloged once the patron returns the items. An item must cost less than an ILL transaction, so there is a low threshold (\$45).
5. General Discussion of Virtual Reference
 - 5.1. The use of Pidgin is common. Some libraries had configuration problems with Pidgin and use either Meebo or LibraryH3lp.
 - 5.2. Question: Did libraries stop using QuestionPoint instant message options?
 - 5.2.1. Many have stopped using QuestionPoint for instant message.
 - 5.3. SMS (texting) is also common, both as pilots and official services.
 - 5.4. Question: Where do you perform virtual reference?

- 5.4.1. 7 of 19 use the main reference desk. Other libraries include the option of using personal offices.
- 5.5. IM can be too limiting and informal to some librarians, although some students like the accessibility of IM.
- 5.6. Some librarians have concerns about clearly communicating one's availability and setting proper expectations for students. Many librarians are very pleased that students will contact the librarian at any point in the process. Setting guidelines for availability, away messages, and confirmation of questions helps a patron understand the turn around time for a reference transaction.
- 5.7. There are concerns for identification of patrons and librarians within reference systems. The concern is for follow-ups, referrals, safety, and security. Authentication, whether through university or through a secure third-party is a preventive security step.
6. General Discussion of Literature Department Reference/Office Hours.
 - 6.1. At one library various subject specialists have been enthusiastic about departmental hours. It is more about getting to know faculty and students than interactions strictly defined as reference.
 - 6.2. One librarian stated that a department visit is the best time of her week. Outreach is enhanced and the experience has been successful.
 - 6.3. It was noted that some librarians get office space at a literature department, but that is not necessary. Additionally, it may take weeks or even a semester to catch on, but it is recommended to be patient.
 - 6.4. Promotion is also key, whether it is on the syllabus or word of mouth. Working with a literature department administrative assistant is key to successful outreach. Working with any official department liaison helps develop a strong relationship. Yet, it was noted that official liaisons can limit potential, whereas certain freedoms come with the lack of an official point of contact.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:00am