

**ACRL Literatures in English Section
Reference Discussion Group
ALA Midwinter Meeting
Sunday, January 9, 2011, 10:30-12:00 pm
Hilton Bayfront, Indigo E**

Minutes

- I. Introductions
 - a. Members went around the circle and introduced themselves. There were approximately 33 members present for the discussion.
- II. Discussion Topics
 - a. Academic/Scholarly/Learning/Research Commons. How are libraries dealing with these space changes, especially when it often means giving up reference space?
 - i. At some libraries, the Commons looks a lot like a regular computer lab or study space, with the addition of a coffee shop or juice bar. In some cases, the reference and circulation desks have been combined. At another library, the Commons includes a digital studio, data services studio, and comfortable/flexible study space, along with librarians and hardware/software specialists.
 - ii. Concerns that emerged from the conversation included money (especially if the Commons model is seen as a fad), increase in noise (from removing sound-dampening books from the reference room), and how to ensure that faculty also feel welcomed at the library.
 - iii. One attendee mentioned that the Commons can be used for recruitment and retention of students, which might help the library stay relevant.
 - iv. Commons model appeals to a variety of learners because it often includes a variety of spaces.
 - v. Implications for staffing: one library uses peer mentors (rigorously trained student staff); some libraries are still working out the staffing model because some librarians resent having to answer basic or tech-related questions and some reference librarians don't want circulation staff answering reference questions; it was suggested that student workers can be very helpful when it comes to combining a tech desk and an info desk. Some libraries are moving librarians away from the desk while others are moving librarians back to public desks.
 - vi. For those concerned about the cost of a Commons, it was suggested that libraries could use thin clients or encourage students to bring their laptops to cut down on technology costs. Another librarian suggested building a suite of research commons services, and then build the space/technology around it.
 - vii. It was suggested that libraries let students move furniture around and for librarians to see what they're doing. Decisions about furniture or space can then be made after watching what each institution's users are doing.
 - viii. These projects require support from administration and a commitment to see them through. Although ideally libraries and librarians (perhaps also with students) would be involved early on in the decision-making process, for some libraries, the university administration is driving these changes and libraries are reacting.

- b. "Data" as a buzzword. How does this affect literary reference?
 - i. An example was given of students studying the book as an object/publication instead of doing a close reading. These students are asking for literary data such as sales history or really granular data. For these types of questions, there's really not one single source to find the answers—some librarians expressed an interest in having more training in this area. Often librarians and students need to go back to more traditional print sources to answer these kinds of questions.
 - ii. Librarians and professors should emphasize the need for students to "interpret" the data found for these kinds of questions. Students should also be aware of assumptions they may be making in answering these questions.
 - iii. Some assignments may be about the process of finding data/answers and answering the question, how do you know when to stop looking for this information (whether it exists and you can't find it or if it simply doesn't exist). This could lead to something more like research for experiential and service learning, where the goal isn't to find *the* answer but to create new information as one participates in a scholarly conversation.
 - iv. What do we do data-wise now in literature that we couldn't do years ago? Data/text mining, geocoding/tagging/mapping, citation analysis, use of newspapers (through more easily-searched online archives), NEH digging into data challenge.
- c. How might we assess reference different now?
 - i. Some libraries have been tracking the time/date/length of reference questions, and then used that information to make staffing decisions (which didn't necessarily take into account the complexity of questions asked).
 - ii. Not many members present mentioned tracking the course and/or instructor for students' reference questions.
 - iii. Student performance/assessment is done in the classroom and reference/instruction is sometimes assessed that way, too. But how can we connect reference questions we answer with a student's performance? Perhaps the National Survey of Student Engagement could give us some indirect measurements. This would require partnering with institutional analysis offices.
- d. As time was running out, Chad encouraged members present to continue discussion of these topics on the LES-L listserv.
- e. Chad also asked the members present if there were any objections to combining the timeslot for the Reference Discussion Group and the Collections Discussion Group. The general consensus seemed to be that it might be worth trying.
- f. Before adjourning, Chad noted that Faye Christenberry was looking for volunteers to serve as Co-chairs for the LES Reference Discussion Group, starting after Annual 2011.