

Western Michigan University

From the Selected Works of Maira Bundza

March 26, 2010

Training Students for Reference Desk Work

Maira Bundza, *Western Michigan University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/maira_bundza/6/

Training Students for Reference Desk Work

Michigan Academy for Science, Arts & Letters
Library and Information Science Section
March 26, 2010
Maira Bundza
Western Michigan University

Overview

- ▶ Basic data about WMU and its libraries
- ▶ History of student reference workers
- ▶ Current responsibilities of student reference workers
- ▶ Training program
- ▶ Assessment
- ▶ LibStats
- ▶ Handbook
- ▶ Conclusion

Western Michigan University and its Libraries

- ▶ Enrollment nearly 25,000
- ▶ Main library – Waldo library
- ▶ Branches – Education, Music, Archives & Visual Resources
- ▶ Librarians – 25
- ▶ Staff – 59
- ▶ Student employees – 157
- ▶ Central reference – 8 librarians, 2 staff

Reference Students

- ▶ WMU used to have a library school
- ▶ Students from the library program worked reference
- ▶ When school closed in 1984, continued using student help
- ▶ Developed training program for students
- ▶ 37 students currently answer reference questions in these departments:
 - 11 in Central Ref, 5 in Science Ref, 8 in Gov Docs, 7 in Music Library, 6 in Special Collections
- ▶ Most train on the job

Current responsibilities of student reference workers

- ▶ Shelf books
 - Doing a usage study, so scan each item before re-shelving
- ▶ Check-in new materials
- ▶ Process weeded materials
- ▶ Keep the reference area tidy and clean
- ▶ Run errands across campus
- ▶ Do projects for librarian
 - Search for books etc. from lists in our catalog
 - Enter data into Word & Excel, updated guides
- ▶ Answer questions at Reference Desk
 - In person, phone and IM (not e-ref)

Training program

- ▶ Once a week over a semester
- ▶ Used to train in wide variety of ready reference sources – FAQ's
- ▶ Reference librarian who taught retired in 2005
- ▶ Surveyed all Central Reference students

Survey results – what students wanted & needed

- ▶ 2 hour sessions seemed right length
- ▶ Get to know the librarians in the department more
- ▶ More training in online sources than print
- ▶ Tour(s) of library useful
- ▶ More time to practice
- ▶ Learn to do reference interviews

Student Training

- ▶ Office work – trained by Reference Coordinator, their supervisor
- ▶ On the job training – in the office and on the desk
- ▶ Library offers sessions for all employees on safety, first aid, etc.
- ▶ Central Reference – 2 hour session every Friday fall semester for 12 weeks
 - Also attended by interns and new Central Reference staff

Student Training (cont.)

- ▶ Tour almost every session
 - Whole Waldo (main) library
 - Education, Music, Archives
 - Gov Docs, Rare Books, Digitization Lab, ILL
 - Reference collection, Literary sources, History sources, Business, sources, etc.
- ▶ Tutorials
 - Formerly Searchpath, now our new ResearchPath
 - Information Cycle, LC–Easy
 - Internal – Library customer relations skills

Student Training (cont.)

- ▶ Learn advance searching skills in catalog and databases
- ▶ Cover at least one service each week
- ▶ Cover at least one type of resource (biographies, news, etc.)
- ▶ Cover one subject area each week
- ▶ Reference interview techniques
- ▶ Role play – have them teach each other
- ▶ Have exercises to complete on the resource types and subject areas

Student Training (cont.)

- ▶ Central Reference librarians present in their field of expertise:
 - Business (2 sessions)
 - History/political science
 - Sociology/social work/communications
 - Psychology/law
 - Languages & literature
- ▶ Plus collection & branch librarians:
 - Gov Docs, Rare Books
 - Archives, Education & Music

Assessment

- ▶ Pre and post test last two years
 - Showed major improvement
- ▶ Evaluated IM responses
- ▶ Exit survey every year
 - Have made changes, like increased number of sessions on business
- ▶ Could evaluate all questions answered in future with LibStats

LibStats

- Open source online reference tracker
- Keeps statistics on reference questions:
 - Location (where answered – department and at desk, in office, in stacks, etc.)
 - Patron type
 - Question type (reference, directional, etc.)
 - Time spent – READ scale
 - Question format (in person, phone, email, IM, etc.)
 - Who answered
 - Actual question and answer (if time to fill this in)
- Provides reports – still need tweaking
- Have expanded to beyond regular reference areas

LibStats

Library Stats : Add Question

Central Reference | Admin | Add Question Page | Reports | Log out

Quick Search: [] | Advanced Search

Location: Service Desk | Patron Type: Student-Undergrad | Question Type: Reference | Time Spent: 1- up to 1 min | Question Format: In Person

Initials: [] | Backdate: []

Question: []

Answer: []

Save Question / Answer | Last question added from this computer at 2/10 9:51 AM

LibStats

12672	Student - Undergrad	Assistance 1: up to 1 min	IM	Service Desk	Q: How do you print? A: Explained	3/25/2010 10:51 AM	Wilson
12672	Student - Undergrad	Equipment Assistance 2: 1 to 5 min	In Person	Stacks/Floor	Q: Person trying to open word document on copy machine, to print. A: Explained that if needed to be PDF or "PDF" - needs to convert file. I said if he was in a hurry I could print in office - only two pages.	3/25/2010 10:50 AM	AT
12670	Faculty/Staff	Reference 3: 5-15 min	Email	Service Desk	Q: Faculty member is writing a grant proposal and wanted to know how many journals the Libraries subscribe to. A: According to Google, we subscribe to 4,500 unique print titles, and approximately 46,000 unique electronic journals/serials, many of which we get through our aggregator database such as UncoverIt, Proquest Research Library, InfoTrac, ABI/Inform, etc.	3/25/2010 10:46 AM	MPS
12669	Student - Undergrad	Directional 2: 1 to 5 min	In Person	Service Desk	Q: Student wanted to know where she could find copy machines. A: Both first floor were in use so I sent her to second floor.	3/25/2010 10:44 AM	MPS
12668	Don't know	Reference 2: 1 to 5 min	In Person	Service Desk	Q: Question about life expectancy worldwide. A: Found table in Stat. Abs. of U.S.	3/25/2010 10:21 AM	GR
12662	Faculty/Staff	Reference 3: 5-15 min	Email	Office	Q: WMU staff member wanted to know if we had books on tape. A: I walked her through doing a NuFind search, and then told her she could also check her local public library AND InfoCat, too.	3/25/2010 8:58 AM	MPS

Handbook

- General Information
 - Pictures of librarians, staff & other students
 - Basic info on job and duties (procedures, safety, copiers, etc.)
- Library Branches & Collections
- Library Services & Departments
 - Includes details about different borrowing privileges
- Types of Library Resources
 - Physical formats
 - Types of information (biographies, dictionaries, dissertations, statistics, etc.)
- Resources by Subject
 - Condensed versions of subject guides – only those presented by librarians

Conclusion

- Librarians and students happy
- Reference desk coverage 94 hours/week – times when students are the only one's covering the desk
- Students comfortable answering questions
- Less comfortable with business, law and science questions
- Will pass questions on to professionals
- With LibStats – more quality control

Questions?

Maira Bundza
Western Michigan University
269-387-5207
maira.bundza@wmich.edu

<http://code.google.com/p/libstats/>