Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities: What Librarians Really Need to be Successful at the Reference Desk

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**Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities: What Librarians Really Need to be Successful at the Reference Desk**

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**Introduction**

Librarians at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library are using reference statistical software to record transactions at the merged reference desk. The software program allows librarians to easily compile and report on reference transaction data. Aggregated and analyzed reference transactions for a period of one year will be presented. The data demonstrates the needs of the patrons from this merged library and conversely indicates what proficiencies and capabilities are required from employees.

Important information can be gained from using a reference tracking system. Understanding the nature of the questions being asked at the desk will enable the library to identify where information needs are lagging or being overutilized. Technical skills required of library employees include the ability to assist with using computers, printers, scanners, and copiers. In addition to these procedural and localized functions, users are asking for assistance in operating the software programs on library machines. As more and more processes and information resources move to the online environment, these skills will be increasingly in demand.

**Reference Transcations**

**Collection and Analysis**

Library staff input their transactions into Gimlet. Questions are searchable and can be aggregated and analyzed through spreadsheet software. Searching for reference transactions can be aggregated and analyzed through spreadsheet software. Searching for reference transactions allows libraries to easily compile and report on reference transaction data.

**Results**

Reference transactions were collected by the Gimlet software. Informational fields included the duration of the interaction, the question type and format, location, and who fielded the question. Answer fields were customizable, allowing the King Library to designate the types of questions that were most important for reporting purposes.

**Methodology**

Reference transactions were collected by the Gimlet software. Informational fields included the duration of the interaction, the question type and format, location, and who fielded the question. Answer fields were customizable, allowing the King Library to designate the types of questions that were most important for reporting purposes.

**Discussion & Further Research**

Larger thematic categories should be created to organize the types of questions that the library staff receive at the merged service desk. These organized questions can then be used to create training and professional development materials.

Questions logged into a reference tracking software program can also be mined to populate a frequently asked questions (FAQs) page. Lastly, the information from the reference tracking software can inform and effect policy changes to improve the user experience at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library.

**Conclusions**

At a merged academic/public library, reference questions that require resources, strategy, and consultation continue to constitute the highest percentage of work performed at the reference desk. This is followed closely by user queries that require technical skills.

Technical skills required of library employees include the ability to assist with using computers, printers, scanners, and copiers. In addition to these procedural and localized functions, users are asking for assistance in operating the software programs on library machines. As more and more processes and information resources move to the online environment, these skills will be increasingly in demand.

**Bibliography**