Training Students for Reference Desk Work

Maira Bundza, Western Michigan University
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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

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
- 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

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/