

Western Michigan University

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Using the READ (Reference Effort Assessment Data) Scale© to Assess Reference Work

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Using the READ (Reference Effort Assessment Data) Scale[®] to Assess Reference Work

Michigan Academy for Science, Arts & Letters
Library and Information Science Section
March 20, 2009
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Reference

- Changing – fewer questions
- Need better data
- Various assessment techniques
- For daily work – still using hash marks



Carnegie Mellon project

- Bella Karr Gerlich bkarrgerlich@dom.edu & Lynn Beard lberard@andrew.cmu.edu
- Developed READ scale 2003-04
- Assign value to hash marks
- Study with 14 institutions 2007



READ Scale

- **R**eference
- **E**ffort
- **A**ssessment
- **D**ata
- Six point scale
- Effort required for each reference question



READ Scale #1

- Answers require least effort
- No special knowledge or skills
- No consultation of sources
- Less than 5 minutes
- Directional, hours, service points



READ Scale #2 & 3

- Require some effort & time
- Some knowledge needed
- May use some resources
- Call number locations
- Using the online catalog



READ Scale #4 & 5

- Require substantial effort & time
- Research knowledge needed
- Multiple sources consulted
- Complex search techniques
- Graduate research



READ Scale #6

- The most time and effort – maybe over days
- In depth faculty & grad research
- May involve primary sources
- Collaboration on research



WMU READ Scale

- Piloted in Central Reference
- Modified & simplified scale
- Gave apx. times for each level
- Slightly modified desk stats form
- Created off desk stats form



Preparation for READ Scale

- Gerlich & Beard – training and calibration of questions to scale
- WMU – discussed at reference meetings
- Trained students



Immediate satisfaction

- Hard questions now getting recognized
- Takes a little getting used to, but then easy
- Keeps track of off desk questions



Reporting

- Started by counting number of questions under each READ scale number
- October 2008
 - 955 #1's – 41%
 - 760 #2's – 33%
 - 436 #3's – 19%
 - 154 #4's – 7%
 - 21 #5's – 1%
 - 7 #6's - .3%
 - Average 1.95
 - Fridays & Saturdays harder questions



Reporting

- Need online recording system for sophisticated analysis
- Desk Tracker, Library Stats, etc.
- One week in late October we record actual questions asked
- This year on SurveyMonkey – easy to track and analyze



Uses of READ Scale

- Scheduling
 - One library added librarian on Saturdays
 - One reduced librarian hours in evenings
- Providing evidence for need for in-depth knowledge at reference desks
- Training tool
- Assessment tool
- Combine with question analyses



Possible issues

- Potential to be inconsistently applied
- Difficulties with compiling reports if not automated
- Done all the time or occasionally?
- At all service points?



Conclusion

- For now, we like this system and will most likely introduce it to the rest of the reference points at WMU, along with one of the automated reference statistics programs

Questions?

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