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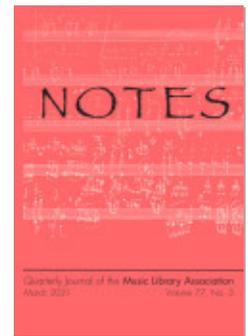
Music Reference Services Pre-COVID-19: A Climate Survey in
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MUSIC REFERENCE SERVICES PRE-COVID-19: A CLIMATE SURVEY IN THE RECENT BEFORE TIMES

BY KATE LAMBARIA, JOE C. CLARK,
KRISTINA SHANTON, AND PETER SHIRTS



Providing assistance with navigating resources and connecting users with information are core objectives of librarianship, and reference services are designed to meet these goals. Yet, the landscape is ever shifting. As technology and patron behavior change, so too do reference service and staffing models. The economic stability of institutions can also impact the size and scope of library reference services. In order to provide effective reference assistance, make service improvements, and develop new approaches, it is important to share and evaluate current practices.

In the fall of 2019, members of the Music Library Association's Reference and Access Services Subcommittee (RASS) of the Public Services Committee conducted an online survey to better understand how libraries are providing music reference services.¹ The study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the state of music reference services in academic libraries? This includes delivery methods (in person, email, phone, chat, etc.), physical locations (branch libraries, main libraries, dedicated reference desk, single service point, etc.), staffing models (librarians, staff, students, referral system, etc.), and training.
2. Is there a relationship between the type and size of institution and how music reference services are provided?

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The authors would like to thank Kristin Yeager, Wren Murray, and past and present members of the Reference & Access Services Subcommittee that contributed to this survey, including Donna Maher, Matthew Vest, and Taylor Greene.

1. This survey was deployed during the fall of 2019 and a significant portion of the analysis was completed in early spring 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States. The writing was completed during the summer of 2020, at a time when libraries nationwide were providing few, if any, services in person. COVID-19 had already forced libraries to reconsider reference in an online environment and most certainly will continue to actuate drastic changes to services when institutions open their physical spaces to patrons. Additional research on the impacts of the virus on music reference services is needed.

3. Is there a relationship between reference service models and their perceived effectiveness?
4. Are there any changes over time to music reference services?
5. Do respondents expect to make changes in reference services?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature concerning library reference services is robust. This review focuses on the two areas most relevant to this study: general academic library reference service models and those specific to music. Annual statistics from the Association of Research Libraries show a dramatic 84 percent decrease in reference transactions from 1998 to 2018.² This decline in questions has not necessarily led to the elimination of reference desks, but instead to changes in service and staffing models. The following large-scale surveys of academic library practices regarding the reference desk illustrate patterns one might expect to find—fewer reference questions, reduced hours of operation, and fewer hours with librarians staffing the reference desk. In 2008, Julie Banks and Carl Pracht surveyed around one hundred libraries and found that use of a separate reference desk was still common, with 86 percent of libraries having one, though 62 percent of these libraries staffed the desk with non-MLS staff at times to free up professional librarians for other tasks.³ In 2011, Dennis B. Miles surveyed 119 universities and found that 66 percent still used a reference desk model and 83 percent sometimes used non-MLS staff.⁴

Although not focused specifically on investigating reference desk models, Jason Coleman, Melissa N. Mallon, and Leo Lo's 2014 study surveyed 420 academic librarians regarding changes made to their reference operations during the previous two years. They found a comparable number of libraries kept the same number of reference desk hours for professionals (42.1 percent) as libraries that decreased hours for professionals (41.2 percent); smaller libraries were less likely to see a decrease in hours.⁵ More recently, in 2019, Samantha Kennedy, Daniel Kipnes, and Ashley Lierman surveyed 239 universities to determine current reference desk models and attitudes toward them. They found that 45 percent still

2. "Service Trends in ARL Libraries, 1998-2018," ARL Statistics Survey Statistical Trends, Association of Research Libraries, <https://www.arl.org/arl-statistics-survey-statistical-trends/> (accessed 3 September 2020).

3. Julie Banks and Carl Pracht, "Reference Desk Staffing Trends: A Survey," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2008): 56, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.48n1.54>.

4. Dennis B. Miles, "Shall We Get Rid of the Reference Desk?" *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 323-24, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rusq.52n4.320>.

5. Jason Coleman, Melissa N. Mallon, and Leo Lo, "Recent Changes to Reference Services in Academic Libraries and Their Relationship to Perceived Quality: Results of a National Survey," *Journal of Library Administration* 56, no.6 (2016): 682-83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2015.1109879>.

used a traditional reference model, but 34 percent had transitioned to a shared or combined service desk—a marked change from 2011.⁶ They also observed that while few libraries (17 percent) exclusively use non-librarians at the reference desk, 75 percent of surveyed librarians support having a physical reference desk.⁷ While these studies show some general trends, services in individual libraries vary widely. Stephanie Alexander and Diana K. Wakimoto surveyed the California State University system libraries in 2017 and discovered that 73.7 percent still use a physical reference desk staffed with librarians and only 21.1 percent use tiered or on-call models or merged service points, though a few libraries were planning to merge service desks at the time of the survey.⁸

While all five of the previously-mentioned studies show that the physical reference desk was still generally in use, they also detailed ways in which libraries were diversifying their reference models; these include virtual reference as well as relatively new models of in-person reference such as information/learning commons, roaming reference, tiered reference, and combined service points.⁹ Combining service points is a popular trend, but reference training, especially for students, has continued to be a barrier. Alexander and Wakimoto identified training as librarians' perceived greatest challenge to adopting new models, including the time involved and the difficulty in helping students recognize when questions should be passed on to professional staff.¹⁰ Coleman, Mallon, and Lo found that while libraries made great efforts to maintain quality with reference training, even well-trained student employees still did not answer questions as well as those with an MLS.¹¹

6. The remaining 21 percent had no physical desk or a form of information commons. Samantha Kennedy, Daniel Kipnes, and Ashley Lierman, "Reframing Reference Services: Perceptions and Futures of the Reference Desk: Findings from a Mixed-Methods Survey of United States Academic Libraries" (Association of College and Research Libraries Together Wherever Virtual Conference, June 8, 2020), <https://youtu.be/sGHu1y8Hf7E> (accessed 3 September 2020).

7. Ibid.

8. Stephanie Alexander and Diana K. Wakimoto, "Exploration of Reference Models in a Public University System," *Reference Services Review* 47, no.1 (2019): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-08-2018-0062>.

9. For more detailed information on these newer types of reference services, see Kay Ann Cassell, *Managing Reference Today: New Models and Best Practices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Lili Lou, "Models of Reference Service," in *Reference and Information Services: An Introduction*, ed. Linda C. Smith and Melissa Autumn Wong, 5th ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2016), 155–78; Aditi Bandyopadhyay and Mary Kate Boyd-Byrnes, "Is the Need for Mediated Reference Service in Academic Libraries Fading Away in the Digital Environment?" *Reference Services Review* 44, no. 4 (2016): 596–626, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-02-2016-0012>; and Linda Frederiksen and Brandon Wilkinson, "Single Service Points in Libraries: A Review," *Journal of Access Services* 13, no. 2 (2016): 131–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15367967.2016.1161522>.

10. Alexander and Wakimoto, "Exploration of Reference Models," 29–30. To view one example of extensive student reference training, see Michael LaMagna, Sarah Hartman-Caverly, and Lori Marchetti, "Redefining Roles and Responsibilities: Implementing a Triage Reference Model at a Single Service Point," *Journal of Access Services* 13, no. 2 (2016): 53–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15367967.2016.1161516>.

11. Coleman, Mallon, and Lo, "Recent Changes to Reference Services," 691.

In summary, despite a decrease in questions, reference desks still exist in many academic libraries, but institutions have moved or are moving to a shared service point. In both these environments, the desk is not usually staffed by MLS holders at all times. While there are a number of case studies of combining service points,¹² there are few broad, multi-institutional studies of the effectiveness of other new systems, and perhaps because of this gap in the literature, librarians can be resistant to try new models.¹³

The literature specifically addressing music reference services is limited and focuses primarily on assessing the quality of services, including virtual reference services, and the existence of physical reference desks in music libraries. In her 2012 article, Kirstin Dougan outlined specific assessment models such as LibQual+, the Wisconsin-Ohio Reference Evaluation Program (WOREP), and the Reference Effort Assessment Data (READ) Scale. Through implementing the various assessments, Dougan identified several areas for improving music reference training, including general quality of service for student assistants and their approachability and finding smaller items in larger publications, specific articles, and reviews for reference staff.¹⁴ In 2001, Beth Christensen, Mary Du Mont, and Alan Green surveyed thirteen music libraries to determine the quality of music reference using the WOREP as its survey instrument and concluded that music librarians and paraprofessionals were better at reference than students, with longer experience correlating with greater success; training was not part of this study.¹⁵ They also identified important differences between general and music reference: the number of known item requests are three times higher for music, and questions about finding smaller works in larger collections occur six times more frequently than in general reference.¹⁶

Other studies investigated virtual music reference services. Gerald Szymanski and Mary Alice Fields, based on a survey conducted in late 2002, examined what types of virtual reference public and academic music libraries offered. Of their forty-five responses, they found that all used email and 77 percent used some sort of web-based form; 49 percent used chat, but only received an average of 1.3 music-related chats per month.¹⁷ Cassidy R. Sugimoto's 2008 study is a rare case of evaluating

12. "Creating the Single Service Point: Current Perspectives on a Recurring Theme." Special issue, *The Journal of Access Services* 13, no. 2 (2016).

13. Alexander and Wakimoto, "Exploration of Reference Models," 24, 30–31.

14. Kirstin Dougan, "Delivering and Assessing Music Reference Services," *The Reference Librarian* 54, no. 1 (2013): 38–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02763877.2013.734759>.

15. Beth Christensen, Mary Du Mont, and Alan Green, "Taking Note: Assessing the Performance of Reference Service in Academic Music Libraries: A Progress Report," *Notes* 58, no.1 (September 2001): 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2001.0127>.

16. Christensen, Du Mont, and Green, 48–49.

17. Gerald Szymanski and Mary Alice Fields, "Virtual Reference in the Music Library," *Notes* 61, no. 3 (March 2005): 634–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2005.0035>.

the quality of virtual reference. The research analyzed responses to specific music-related chat and email reference questions at ninety-nine academic libraries.¹⁸ The study revealed that chats were answered completely only 28 percent of the time, while email queries were answered completely 40 percent of the time—but only 66 percent of emails were answered at all. Some of the problems seemed to arise from the referral process, as subject specialists were not necessarily the first contact in library-managed virtual reference services. With the remarkable pace of technological change since 2008 and the impact this can have on the quality of service, these surveys are outdated.¹⁹

A 2004 large-scale study by David Hursh focused on the presence of a reference desk at 234 NASM-accredited schools with a separate music library.²⁰ Hursh concluded that standalone reference desks were not a standard feature in branch music libraries (only 22 percent surveyed had them) and that reference desks were more likely in libraries that supported large music programs with advanced non-performance degrees. However, 70 percent of librarians who indicated that a music reference desk was “important” did not have a desk, demonstrating an interest in supporting this service model.²¹ Nara L. Newcomer and David Hursh’s 2008 follow-up was an in-depth case study at one university measuring whether the presence of a reference desk would help students feel more comfortable asking for assistance, even if the desk was unstaffed.²² They found that although students wanted immediate help, the sight of an unstaffed reference desk did not increase their chances of looking for help elsewhere.

Finally, several case studies of new reference service models in music libraries have been published in recent years. Lisa M. Woznicki described an embedded reference service at Towson University that created a librarian presence in the music building, though provided little evidence of its success.²³ Kate Lambaria and Kirstin Dougan Johnson explored combining reference and circulation service points at the Music and Performing Arts Library of the University of Illinois at

18. Cassidy R. Sugimoto, “Evaluating Reference Transactions in Academic Music Libraries,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2008): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10588160802157124>.

19. To see slightly more current general virtual reference trends from 2014, see Coleman, Mallon, and Lo, “Recent Changes to Reference Services,” 676.

20. David Hursh, “Calling All Academic Music Library Reference Desks,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (2004): 63–81, https://doi.org/10.1300/J116v08n03_04.

21. Hursh, 73.

22. Nara L. Newcomer and David Hursh, “Calling All Academic Music Library Reference Desks: A Follow Up Study,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (2008): 101–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10588160802143405>.

23. Lisa M. Woznicki, “Transposing the Tradition: Providing Embedded Reference Service to Music Students,” *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (2017): 69–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10588167.2017.1309933>.

Urbana-Champaign, finding that reference staff are now busier at the combined desk and the profile of their transactions types has somewhat changed.²⁴ They also noted an overall decrease in interactions with patrons as a background to their case study, even though—bucking the general trend—the final year of their study (2017) saw a large increase.²⁵ The focus of the study documented in this paper, however, is in general trends within music reference services—determining how common these new experiments in music reference services are, since the last multiple-institution survey about all types of reference in music libraries was Hursh’s study from almost two decades ago.

METHODOLOGY

At the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Music Library Association, members of RASS discussed a wide range of topics related to how librarians provide reference services, from who delivers the service to what delivery methods are used, and the impacts that other aspects of librarianship can have on reference. As a result, a small group of subcommittee members decided to pursue an online survey in order to get a better sense of the current provision of music reference services in libraries. All members of the subcommittee provided feedback on the survey questions and goals.

The survey instrument (see Appendix) was designed with consideration to the survey’s goals, past studies, and specifically, music reference services literature. Recent library science textbooks outline service models, often dividing models between in-person and virtual, with in-person options sometimes being driven by physical design (the physical reference desk) and others by staffing models (tiered reference services).²⁶ For example, while many librarians may not be able to change their physical location to something more desirable, the authors believed that the existence of dedicated reference desks made a direct impact on the service models implemented by libraries and should therefore be included in the questions exploring service models, alongside models such as tiered reference, roving reference, and scheduled consultations that are not necessarily tied to physical locations. These questions were intentionally designed to allow for multiple selections, as one institution may rely on several models. Previous studies explored the existence of physical reference desks in academic music libraries in addition to

24. Kate Lambaria and Kirstin Dougan Johnson, “Changing the Venues but Not Changing Our Tune: Service Model Transition at a Music and Performing Arts Library,” *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2019): 41, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/rusq.59.1.7223>.

25. Lambaria and Dougan Johnson, “Changing the Venues,” 33, 38.

26. Cassell, *Managing Reference Today* and Lou, “Models of Reference Service.”

staffing levels for music reference and the effectiveness of service, so the authors also believed it important to incorporate these concepts to better understand changes over time.²⁷

The survey was reviewed and approved by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board and distributed via Qualtrics in November of 2019 to 620 librarians at institutions accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). While this population excludes public and international libraries, the authors believed that the benefits of being able to distribute via direct email to individuals outweighed this drawback. This population also included those music librarians that do not participate in the MLA-L listserv. The distribution list was developed by visiting each institution's library website and determining which individual was most likely to be responsible for music reference services. If available, the music specialist was selected; if no specialist could be identified, the head of reference or user services was invited to participate. Only one individual per institution was selected.

Two hundred and ten surveys were collected for a response rate of 34 percent and 80 percent of these submissions (n=167) were completed. Incomplete responses were discarded. Each question was analyzed individually and by demographic in order to understand the impact that size of institution, number of music students, available staff, and more might have on music reference services. In addition to the analysis features in Qualtrics, the authors used IBM's SPSS Statistics 26 and Microsoft Excel to conduct quantitative analysis. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest full number. An inductive approach was used to code open-ended responses for themes. For those questions with "Other" responses that allowed respondents to enter supporting text, the data is presented as it was received and remains in the "Other" category (i.e., although the text may have been one of the provided answer options, it was not redistributed).

FINDINGS

Demographics

A majority (71 percent, n=119) of responses came from Masters or Doctoral degree granting institutions. The remaining schools were Bachelors granting, (25 percent, n=41), Associates granting (3 percent, n=5), or independent conservatories of music (1 percent, n=2). Approximately two-thirds (65 percent, n=109) were public institutions. Institutional enrollment among the survey respondents varied widely

27. Hursh, "Calling All Academic Music Library Reference Desks."

Table 1. Institutional and music program enrollment (FTE)

Total Student Enrollment (FTE)	
< 1,000	4% (n=7)
1,000 – 4,999	28% (n=47)
5,000 – 9,999	17% (n=29)
10,000 – 19,999	23% (n=38)
20,000 – 29,999	13% (n=21)
30,000 +	15% (n=25)
Students Enrollment in Music Programs (FTE)	
<100	23% (n=39)
100 – 299	31% (n=52)
300 – 499	20% (n=33)
500 – 999	8% (n=13)
1,000 +	2% (n=4)
I don't know	16% (n=26)

(see Table 1). Almost three-quarters (73 percent, n=121) had less than 20,000 student FTE.

Enrollment in the schools/departments of music was under 500 student FTE for most, while 16 percent reported not knowing how many were in their music programs (see Table 1). The most common population was 100–299 music student FTE, with under 100 and between 300 and 499 music student FTE as second and third respectively. Comparing these numbers to overall NASM membership which was received through personal email correspondence with a NASM representative, smaller music programs (1–100 students) were underrepresented in the survey, as they comprise 52 percent of NASM schools. Participants with medium music student populations (101–299) were about even with their corresponding NASM percentage, while large music programs (300+ students) were somewhat overrepresented in the survey (30 percent of survey contributors, 14 percent of NASM's population).²⁸

Delivery and Service Models

Of the 166 responses to the question “where are in-person reference services delivered?” almost two-thirds (63 percent, n=105) indicated services were delivered in their main library building and not in a dedicated music/arts space. Eleven percent (n=18) delivered in-person reference at a dedicated music/arts space within a main library, while 19 percent (n=31) provided services in a branch music/arts library outside of the main library. Of the 12 respondents who selected “Other” as the location

28. Nora R. Hamme, Accreditation and Research Associate, National Association of Schools of Music, email message to Karl Paulnack, forwarded to authors, 10 April 2020.

Table 2. Delivery of in-person music reference services by institutional enrollment

Total student FTE enrollment	Branch location	Dedicated space in main library building	Main library building	Other	Total number
< 1,000	0	14% (n=1)	71% (n=5)	14% (n=1)	7
1,000 – 4,999	11% (n=5)	9% (n=4)	70% (n=33)	11% (n=5)	47
5,000 – 9,999	7% (n=2)	7% (n=2)	86% (n=25)	0	29
10,000 – 19,999	16% (n=6)	16% (n=6)	63% (n=24)	5% (n=2)	38
20,000 – 29,999	33% (n=7)	5% (n=1)	43% (n=9)	19% (n=4)	21
30,000 +	46% (n=11)	17% (n=4)	38% (n=9)	0	24
Total number	31 (19%)	18 (11%)	105 (63%)	12 (7%)	166

for reference services, several indicated their offices, in the music department, or in multiple locations (such as both main and branch libraries).

Reference service models in use varied. Respondents were instructed to select all service models and delivery methods that applied. Forty-six percent (n=48) of respondents who provided reference services in a main library employed dedicated reference desks, while only 16 percent (n=5) of branches reported using dedicated reference desks. A strong majority of branches (84 percent, n=26) and dedicated music/arts spaces (78%, n=14) within main libraries had combined service desks, offering additional services beyond reference assistance at the physical desk location. Only seven respondents (4 percent) did not indicate a reference desk presence through a dedicated or combined desk, although this may be a result of question phrasing.

Table 2 shows that institutions with enrollment of twenty thousand and greater were much more likely to report a branch location. This is also true for enrollment in an institution’s music school or department, with 50 percent of institutions with enrollment of five hundred or more in music programs having a branch location. The likelihood of a dedicated music/arts space inside the main campus library also increased with higher music student enrollment if no branch library existed.

Four primary modes of delivery emerged from study results: in-person, email, phone, and chat. Almost all of the 167 participants provided in-person and email reference, with phone consultations close behind (see Figure 1). Chat services were also common, with institutional or consortial chat used by 80 percent of respondents. Eighty-six percent

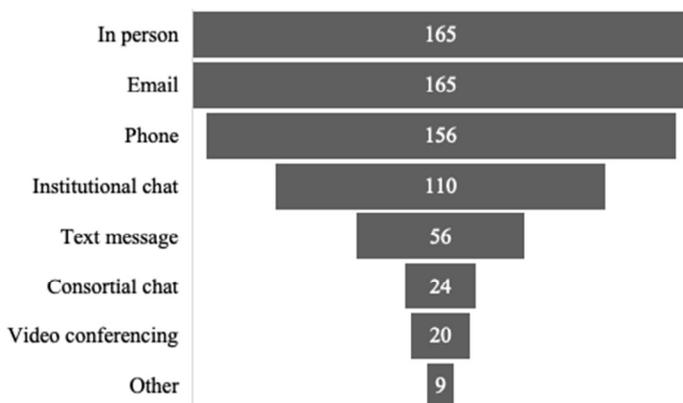


Figure 1. Frequency of delivery methods for music reference services

(n=143) of respondents offered scheduled consultations. Just over half (51 percent, n=85) employed a referral or tiered reference model. About one-third (34 percent) of libraries reported offering reference help via text message services. Reference help via roving within libraries was reported in less than 20 percent of branch and main libraries, although branch libraries were more than twice as likely to offer said service (16 percent, n=5 of branches vs. 6 percent, n=7 of main libraries). Responses from the “Other” category included mentions of Facebook, ticketing systems, and video capture software.

Results showed that public institutions were more likely to offer chat or video reference services compared to private ones, but the percentage of each type of institution offering text reference services were comparable. Ninety-one percent of public schools had chat services compared to 60 percent of private. The percentage of public institutions offering video reference was three times more common than their private counterparts, at 16 percent and 5 percent respectively.

Staffing Models

All but three survey respondents (2 percent) indicated that librarians provided music reference services. The following four staffing models accounted for 90 percent of responses: (1) librarians only (53 percent, n=88); (2) undergraduate students, paraprofessional staff, and librarians (13 percent, n=21); (3) paraprofessional staff and librarians (12 percent, n=20); and (4) undergraduate students, graduate students, paraprofessional staff, and librarians (12 percent, n=20). Forty-one percent (n=68) indicated that paraprofessional staff participated in reference

Table 3. Percentage of staff types by location

	Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students	Paraprofessional Staff	Librarians
Branch	58%	52%	77%	100%
Dedicated space in main library	56%	44%	67%	100%
Main library	16%	5%	23%	98%

services. Institutions offering graduate degrees were more likely to have undergraduate students providing reference, with 33 percent (n=39) employing students compared to 24 percent (n=10) at Bachelor granting schools. When examining employee type by location, data showed that both branch locations and dedicated music/arts spaces located within main libraries relied on students and paraprofessionals much more than did main library reference desks (see Table 3).

The survey also asked how many individuals were providing music reference services, as well as the FTE. Cross tabulation of data showed that as the size of the music program increased, so did the number of individuals who provided reference assistance. The mean of the number of individuals was 6.1026 for music programs with fewer than 100 students and went up to 13.5 for those with 1,000 or more music students. When examining number of individuals who provided reference services by the size of institution, the mean was not as predictable. Table 4 shows the mean rising as institutional enrollment rises, but then decreases from institutions with 10,000 to 19,999 students and 20,000 to 29,999 students. The mean then rises to 9.2917 for the largest schools. When considering the FTE of those providing reference by location, branches reported a slightly higher mean (M=2.9393) than dedicated spaces in main libraries (M=2.4861) or those at the main library (M=2.5217). Note that the standard deviation column shows variability of reference staffing for some categories of institutions.

Reference Training

Approaches to reference training were mixed. Respondents were instructed to select all training methods that applied to their institution, and 44 percent (n=74) indicated that they used more than one method. This compared to 21 percent (n=35) who only employed one approach. Twelve percent (n=20) indicated there was no training (usually by selecting the “Other” response option and adding text), or no training specific to music, but half of those responses were from institutions where

Table 4. Number of individuals who provide reference services by institutional size

Institutional Student Enrollment (FTE)	Mean of Individuals	Std. Deviation	Number of Institutions
< 1,000	2.7143	1.79947	7
1,000 to 4,999	5.5319	5.37244	47
5,000 to 9,999	8.1429	7.97549	28
10,000 to 19,999	7.9474	10.08597	38
20,000 to 29,999	7.1500	6.50728	20
30,000 +	9.2917	7.61851	24
Total	7.1646	7.59018	165

only librarians provided reference services. Almost a quarter of respondents (23 percent, n=38) did not respond to any portion of the training questions; again, most (82 percent, n=31) were situations where only librarians offered reference assistance.

The most common training methods included on-the-job sessions (n=49), online or print written documentation (n=46), shadowing experienced reference staff (n=35), and dedicated training sessions or workshops away from the desk (n=27). Additional popular responses included role playing with staff (n=12), online or print quizzes (n=12), computer training modules (n=11), and assigned readings on reference (n=7). When analyzing the data by training methods and employee types, a higher percentage of graduate students received all types of training compared to undergraduate students and paraprofessionals (see Table 5). A slightly higher percentage of undergraduates received training compared to paraprofessional staff, who had the lowest percentage of training between the three groups.

When asked about the effectiveness of reference services using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “not effective” to “extremely effective,” a majority selected either “very effective” (44 percent, n=71) or “moderately effective” (45 percent, n=74). Only 2 percent (n=4) selected “extremely effective,” while 7 percent (n=12) selected “slightly effective” and 1 percent (n=2) selected “not effective at all.” Respondents were given the opportunity to explain their choice in natural language. These open-ended responses were coded for recurring themes, which provided the criteria that respondents used to rate their models. Fifty-two percent (n=35) of respondents that selected “very effective” considered the level of assistance and referral given to patrons to be a major benchmark for the successful delivery of music reference services. The next most frequent response was the level of training given to those providing reference services (22 percent, n=15). Other recurring criteria mentioned included patron feedback; the speed of services; the

Table 5. Training methods used for students and paraprofessionals

Training Method	Undergraduate (n=49)	Graduate (n=32)	Paraprofessional (n=68)
On the job	73% (n=36)	84% (n=27)	62% (n=42)
Written documentation	65% (n=32)	78% (n=25)	60% (n=41)
Shadowing	47% (n=23)	53% (n=17)	44% (n=30)
Training/workshop	43% (n=21)	53% (n=17)	31% (n=21)
Role playing	20% (n=10)	34% (n=11)	13% (n=9)
Computer modules	22% (n=11)	25% (n=8)	16% (n=11)
Quizzes	20% (n=10)	22% (n=7)	16% (n=11)
Readings	10% (n=5)	16% (n=5)	9% (n=6)
Other	12% (n=6)	13% (n=4)	15% (n=10)

availability—including the number of reference hours—of services; the presence of music specialists; faculty and student outreach; and the level of traffic, including desk statistics and number of consultations. Participants who reported their service as “moderately effective” also mentioned these criteria and felt that they compare favorably. While there were negative comments in the “very effective” responses, these were not mentioned with any significant frequency.

When evaluating responses of those who reported their reference model as “moderately effective,” the same criteria mentioned above appeared, but a significant number of librarians identified these areas as concerns. The most reported benchmark was again the level of assistance or referral, but several “moderately effective” responses reported this with a degree of concern. Level of assistance or referral and the presence of a music specialist were the only criteria where positive remarks outweighed the negative remarks (see Figure 2). Other areas of mixed responses were speed or availability of services—or both, faculty and student outreach, and level of traffic. There was a clear decline in the number of librarians who viewed these criteria as satisfactory, and an increase in those who viewed them as areas of concern. Notably, no respondents in the “moderately effective” category considered either the level of training for those providing services or the level of staffing to be sufficient.

Survey participants in branch libraries ranked their reference services’ effectiveness much higher than those in main libraries (either at a dedicated music space or general reference desk). Sixty-eight percent (n=21) of respondents ranked their branch library as either “very” or “extremely” effective. The authors were surprised to see that dedicated music/arts spaces within the main libraries were ranked lowest for effectiveness (34 percent, n=6 “very” or “extremely” effective), with main libraries without dedicated music spaces faring better with

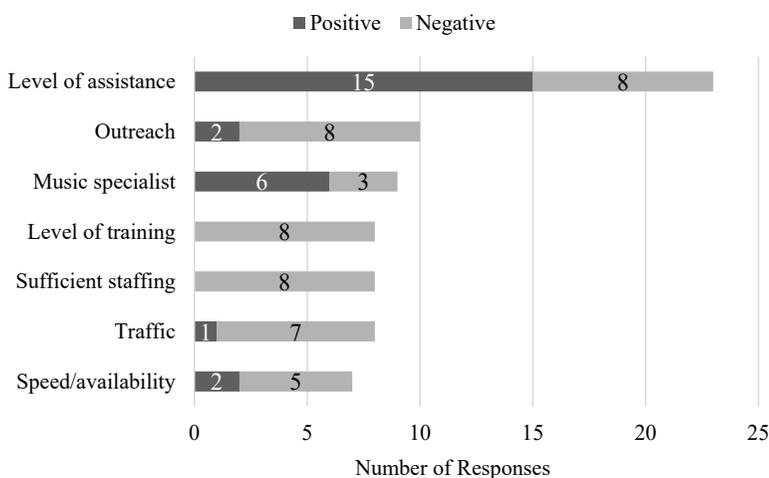


Figure 2. Breakdown of criteria by positive or negative mentions for moderately effective responses

43 percent (n=44) garnering a “very” or “extremely” effective rating. Librarians rated their branch library’s service highly, and not a single branch respondent indicated that their reference services were either “not” or “slightly” effective (the lowest ratings). Cross tabulation of the data revealed that there was not a meaningful difference in effectiveness between the various staffing models. Those institutions that employed students did not have a notable drop-off in perceived reference service effectiveness, and survey responses showed that library reference services that included either graduate students or paraprofessionals were ranked the most effective (although the numbers were close).

Changes Over Time

In response to the question of whether respondents experienced an increase or decrease in music reference transactions over the past five years, 19 percent (n=32) reported an increase and the same amount reported a decrease. Thirty percent (n=49) reported that transaction levels had stayed the same, while 32 percent (n=53) did not know whether there had been a change. It is worth noting that just under half of the respondents (48 percent, n=79) reported that they do not collect data on how many music reference transactions occur in their libraries, so these participants likely based their answers on anecdotal information. Branch libraries reported a higher rate of increases in reference

Table 6. Changes in music reference transaction and outreach or instruction over the past five years by space/location

Music Reference Transactions				
<i>Space/Location</i>	<i>Increased</i>	<i>Decreased</i>	<i>Stayed the same</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Branch	32% (n=10)	13% (n=4)	35% (n=11)	19% (n=6)
Dedicated space in main library	22% (n=4)	33% (n=6)	17% (n=3)	28% (n=5)
Main library	15% (n=16)	18% (n=19)	30% (n=31)	37% (n=36)
Other	17% (n=2)	25% (n=3)	33% (n=4)	25% (n=3)
Outreach and/or Instruction				
Branch	65% (n=20)	0% (n=0)	29% (n=9)	6% (n=2)
Dedicated space in main library	50% (n=9)	11% (n=2)	33% (n=6)	6% (n=1)
Main library	42% (n=44)	7% (n=7)	45% (n=47)	7% (n=7)
Other	67% (n=8)	25% (n=3)	8% (n=1)	0% (n=0)

transactions than main libraries or dedicated spaces in main libraries, which reported a higher rate of decreases (see Table 6).

Approximately half (52 percent, n=87) reported collecting data on the number of music reference transactions while 48 percent (n=80) did not.²⁹ Those respondents who indicated an increase in transactions were more likely to also collect reference transaction data. Libraries that supported smaller music programs were much less likely to collect data on numbers of reference transactions.

The survey explored outreach and instruction, and through cross-tabs the authors examined its possible impact on reference services. Of responses from institutions that reported an increase in outreach or instruction efforts over the past five years (49 percent, n=81), 31 percent (n=25) also reported an increase in reference transactions during that time period, while 12 percent (n=10) reported a decrease and 22 percent (n=18) reported that reference transactions had stayed the same. The remaining 35 percent (n=28) reported that they do not know whether transaction frequency had changed. Of those institutions that reported their outreach or instruction efforts had stayed the same (39 percent, n=65), 44 percent (n=28) also reported that their reference transactions had stayed the same, while 25 percent (n=16) reported a decrease in reference and only 9 percent (n=6) reported an increase. Branch libraries were more likely to report an increase in outreach or instruction than their main library counterparts.

29. Note that the survey did not ask whether respondents review their reference transaction data on a regular basis.

Respondents reported whether their reference service or staffing models had changed in the last five years. Both service and staffing models were included in the question because they are closely related and directly impact each other. Forty-two percent (n=70) of libraries experienced change to one or both models, while 51 percent (n=85) did not. Seven percent (n=12) selected "I don't know." These response trends were consistent across library locations (main library, dedicated spaces, and branch libraries).

Survey participants were given the opportunity to provide details as to how their reference services have changed. Some discussed service models specifically, while others discussed staffing. Sixty-one percent (n=33) of respondents that reported change in service models over the last five years moved to a tiered reference or single service point model. Less significant reasons for change in service model included reduced desk hours, branch closure, and more emphasis on instruction. Fifty-three percent (n=12) of the responses that reported change in staffing models indicated a reduction in staff, and 38 percent (n=8) of those were specific to librarian positions. Other recurring themes included an increased reliance on student staff, and the occasional additional librarian and paraprofessional positions. Less frequently mentioned factors included new administration and other organizational changes.

Thirty-five percent (n=58) of participants reported anticipating change to their music reference services in the next five years. The most significant concern mentioned in open-ended responses was the predicted loss of staff. Multiple respondents mentioned retiring staff who will likely not be replaced, or are unlikely to be replaced with a librarian, while others indicated concern or uncertainty with their administration's support of reference services as a whole. Other reasons for anticipated change included an expected evaluation of current services, concern over unsustainable models, need for more reliance on student employees, and an acknowledgement that services and spaces are constantly changing and being adapted. Librarians who reported experiencing change to reference services were more likely to expect more change forthcoming in the next five years (see Table 7). A slightly higher percentage of public institutions have either changed their service or staffing models in the last five years or anticipate doing so in the next five years (12 percent and 13 percent respectively).

DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Although 79 percent of respondents in Hursh's 2004 article thought that it was important to provide scheduled music reference desk service,

Table 7. Whether respondents have experienced change over the last five years or if they expect to experience change in the next five years

	Has experienced change	Has not experienced changed	Does not know
Expects change	30 (43%)	23 (27%)	5 (42%)
Does not expect change	40 (57%)	62 (73%)	7 (58%)

the majority did not have one in their academic music libraries.³⁰ A combined service desk where staff have multiple responsibilities—such as circulation and reference—is more common, especially in branch music/ arts libraries and dedicated spaces within main libraries. Music libraries and librarians also participate in new trends within reference service models, such as scheduled consultations and referral or tiered reference models, but still rely on “traditional” delivery methods of in-person, e-mail, phone, and chat services. While in light of the COVID-19 pandemic the results of this survey no longer provide a current snapshot of music reference services in academic libraries, they do provide a clear picture of what occurred before, which can help libraries as they continue to change and adapt as needed in a post-pandemic environment and future studies that will explore the impact of the pandemic.

Most librarians were generally satisfied with the effectiveness of their reference services, but the survey responses point to several areas for improvement. Since a significant portion of music reference takes place at a main library reference desk (and survey respondents ranked effectiveness lower in such cases), music librarians should strive to articulate the differences between music and other reference, and also advocate that those answering these questions have specialized training or training that helps them understand when to refer these questions to a specialist. Staff providing services in dedicated arts spaces within libraries may have their own special reference needs not being met, but these needs are still unclear following this analysis. In branch libraries, which seem the best prepared to answer music reference queries, there is more reliance on paraprofessionals and students. There is also a clear need to increase advertising of reference services in an effort to help patrons understand how the library can assist them in their search for music related information—more important, perhaps, because the survey findings suggest that increased outreach and instruction may lead to

30. Hursh, “Calling All Academic Music Library Reference Desks,” 70–71.

increased reference transactions. The open-ended responses also suggest specific ways to improve music reference services. Despite the current perceived high level of effectiveness, the development and assessment of training for library staff providing music reference services (often seen as a challenge for those in the “moderately effective” category) is one area that libraries can focus on to improve services, perhaps now with a stronger emphasis on how to effectively provide remote and online services. The Music Library Association’s Basic Manual Series Volume 8, *Basic Music Reference* by Alan Green and Michael J. Duffy, IV, is one resource available to librarians responsible for developing training for staff providing music reference services.³¹

With the ubiquity of reference services via e-mail and chat, more research should be done on what constitutes effective music reference via virtual services, especially considering the poor performance of participants in Sugimoto’s 2008 study and the impact of COVID-19 on services.³² It is also worth examining whether librarians go beyond tracking reference transactions to also assessing the quality of transactions. While survey respondents signaled a sense of their services’ effectiveness, further research that assesses the quality of music reference services is needed to help determine whether this is true. Additional areas for future research within the realm of music reference services include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how libraries rapidly transitioned their reference services to a remote environment and whether they were effective, along with user expectations for services.

CONCLUSION

Very few previous studies on music reference services go beyond individual case studies and focus on the bigger picture, providing broader insight into how our colleagues at other institutions provide their music reference services. These survey results show that music reference services do follow trends seen in general reference studies, such as an increase in combined service points, especially within dedicated branch libraries. Additionally, the higher the enrollment at the institution or in the music school, the more likely a dedicated branch library exists, a finding that many might expect. The results also show that librarians perceive their music reference services to generally be effective, but whether this confidence is also felt by patrons is still unknown. And

31. Alan Green and Michael J. Duffy, IV, *Basic Music Reference: A Guide for Non-specialist Librarians, Library Assistants, and Student Employees* (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, Inc. and Music Library Association, 2013).

32. Sugimoto, “Evaluating Reference Transactions.”

finally, there is a strong interest in developing or improving training around music reference services.

While higher education and the library services that support them continue to evolve through the COVID-19 pandemic, understanding recent practices can assist librarians and administrators in thinking critically. The rapid transition to increased online teaching will lead to more emphasis on electronic resources and therefore library interactions to instruct patrons in their use. The need for specialized music reference services will not diminish in a virtual environment. Instead, it will create new demands on reference services as patrons may no longer be able to handle the physical materials to find the information often not included in catalog records, such as key signatures or whether the liner notes include vocal texts and translations. The long-term effects of the pandemic will cast a long shadow over all library operations, and an appreciation of where librarians and patrons were before the pandemic should allow all to better implement needed changes to music reference services.

ABSTRACT

In the fall of 2019, the Music Library Association's Reference and Access Services Subcommittee surveyed academic librarians as to the following parameters regarding their music reference services: delivery methods, physical locations, staffing models, approaches to training, perceived effectiveness of services, and changes over time. Findings suggest that despite technological advances, most music reference help is delivered through in-person, email, phone, and chat. Just over half of respondents have only librarians addressing reference questions, while the remainder also use students and paraprofessionals. There was no meaningful difference in perceived effectiveness between the various staffing models. While only 19 percent of participants are situated in branch libraries for music, these locations experienced a higher increase in reference transactions and more outreach and instruction over the last five years and also ranked their reference services with more effectiveness. Additionally, respondents identified training and outreach as integral to the effectiveness of reference services and communicated their experiences with changes to service and staffing models.

APPENDIX

For the purposes of this survey, we have defined the following:

- **Reference transactions** are information consultations in which library staff recommend, interpret, evaluate, and/or use information resources to help others to meet particular information needs. Reference transactions do not include formal instruction or exchanges that provide assistance with locations, schedules, equipment, supplies, or policy statements. (From RUSA: <http://www.ala.org/rusa/guidelines/definitionsreference>.)
- **Music reference** includes music-related reference transactions provided by library staff.
- **Music reference services** is used to describe how libraries systematically support music reference transactions.

Service Models

Q1. Which of the following delivery methods are implemented for music reference services at your institution? (Select all that apply.)

- In person
- Via the phone
- Via email
- Via text message
- Via institutional chat service
- Via shared consortial chat service
- Via video conferencing software
- Other (please describe):

Q2. Where are in-person music reference services primarily delivered at your institution?

- Branch music and/or other arts library outside of a main library building
- Dedicated music and/or other arts space inside of a main library building
- Main library building, not in a dedicated space
- Other (please describe):

Q3. Which service model(s) does your institution use for delivering music reference services? (Select all that apply.)

- Dedicated reference desk
- Combined service desk (e.g. circulation and reference)
- Referral or tiered reference model
- Scheduled consultations

- Roving reference within the library
- Reference outside of the library (e.g. office hours in music department)
- Other (please describe):

Q4. Does your institution collect data on the number of music reference transactions?

- Yes
- No

Q5. [If yes] Please describe how your institution collects this data (how often, software/tools, etc.)

Q6. Over the past 5 years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of music reference transactions?

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stayed the same
- I don't know

Q7. Over the past 5 years, has there been an increase or decrease in outreach and/or instruction (including instructional tools, such as LibGuides) for music at your institution?

- Increase
- Decrease
- Stayed the same
- I don't know

Staffing Models

Q8. Who provides music reference services at your institution? (Select all that apply.)

- Undergraduate student employees
- Graduate student employees
- Paraprofessional staff
- Librarians

Q9. How many staff (number of individuals) provide music reference services at your institution?

- Undergraduate student employees
- Graduate student employees
- Paraprofessional staff
- Librarians

Q10. How many full time equivalent (FTE) staff provide music reference services at your institution?

Q11. What type of training is provided to staff that provide music reference services? (Select all that apply.)

- Dedicated training sessions or workshops
- On-the-job training sessions
- Shadowing experienced reference staff
- Role playing with staff
- Online or print documentation
- Assigned readings on reference
- Computer training modules
- Online or print quizzes
- Other (please describe):

Q12. How effective do you consider your current service/staffing model?

- Not effective at all
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Very effective
- Extremely effective

Q13. Please explain why you selected [answer to Q12].

Q14. In the last 5 years, has your service and/or staffing model changed?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Q15. Please explain how your service and/or staffing model changed and the factors that led to the change.

Q16. Do you anticipate your current model changing in the next 5 years?

- Yes
- No

Q17. Please explain why and how you anticipate your model changing.

Q18. Please include any other comments about music reference services below.

Demographics

Q19. Please select the option which best describes your institution.

- Non-degree granting institution or program
- Independent conservatory of music
- Associate's degree granting institution
- Bachelor's degree granting institution
- Master's or doctoral degree granting institution

Q20. Is your institution public or private?

- Public
- Private

Q21. Total student enrollment (FTE, full-time equivalent)

- Less than 1,000 students
- 1,000 to 4,999 students
- 5,000 to 9,999 students
- 10,000 to 19,999 students
- 20,000 to 29,999 students
- 30,000 students or more
- I don't know

Q22. Number of students enrolled in music programs (FTE, full-time equivalent)

- Less than 100 students
- 100 to 299 students
- 300 to 499 students
- 500 to 999 students
- 1,000 students or more
- I don't know

