

# Beyond Consultation: A New Model for Librarian's Office Hours

**ABSTRACT:** Given the many changes in our students and their study and research practices, libraries are finding it necessary to seek new ways to reach these students. The Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign created a new model to do so. Librarian's Office Hours are a hybrid of reference and instructional services that fulfill the dual purposes of meeting the needs of term paper research counseling and library workshops. This article discusses the strategies involved in the creation and implementation of this service, and examines suggestions for the future of such a service.

**KEYWORDS:** Office hours, undergraduates, research consultations, library workshops, hybrid services, reconfiguring library services, academic libraries

In recent years libraries have seen significant changes in students and their research practices, both in how and where they access information. Since the mid-1990s it has not been necessary for students, at many institutions, to be physically in the library to access library resources. More recently the growth of services such as digital reference assistance via instant messaging have allowed them to access library services remotely as well. Most librarians would argue that these changes certainly do not indicate a research process that is problem-free and more simplistic, but rather quite the opposite. Students today, more than ever, require the guidance and assistance librarians provide. Reaching these students with this assistance can be problematic. Many libraries that offer generalized, drop-in workshops focused on searching online catalogs and databases and those that offer individual research consultations are discovering that the numbers of students taking advantage of these services has fallen. Students often fail to recognize that the workshops may be beneficial at the time they are provided. The familiar research processes they used upon entering college often continue, including a heavy reliance on free resources such as Google. Until questioned by faculty this tends to continue through the first college years.

The Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois has been no stranger to these problems. A variety of programs have been available to help students understand the library and its resources and increase their success as they began to engage in academic research. Included in the Undergraduate Library's offerings each semester were:

- Tours of the library
- Workshops on searching the online catalog and online databases
- Individual term paper research counseling sessions

Declining participation in these options became evident in the early 2000s. Workshop attendance dropped from 378 attendees in fall semester 1998 to fewer than 50 in spring semester 2005. Usage of term paper research consultations showed a similar decline. These numbers were not interpreted to indicate students no longer had a need for the information provided via these services, but rather these services, as currently structured, did not meet the needs of the majority of our current students. Librarians' Office Hours were born as a reconceptualization of both the workshops and individual term paper research consultations with the intent of reaching students at their point of need, regardless of what that need might be.

Librarians' Office Hours were established in spring semester 2005 as a once a week, two hour session during which students were welcome to drop in at any time. Scheduling a prior appointment was not necessary. The flexibility of leaving the sessions open-ended by not focusing on specific resources or the need for prior registration allows office hours to be more conducive to the drop-in nature of their intent. The initial Librarians' Office Hours began in the fourth week of the semester and continued until the thirteenth week, corresponding with the weeks with the greatest number of research questions at the reference desk. These weeks also corresponded most closely to the weeks during which undergraduates were engaged in research for their term papers and other projects. Staffing of each of the Librarians' Office Hours was provided by two Graduate Assistants (GAs), students in the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), who also participate in the provision of in-person and virtual reference service as well as the library instruction program at the Undergraduate Library.

## *LITERATURE REVIEW*

A review of the literature, both in *Library Literature* and *Library and Information Science Abstracts*, yielded little about office hours in general, and nothing related to this specific model for office hours. The literature indicated there are three existing models for the provision of in-depth, one-on-one research assistance to students. These included term paper consultations within the library, the provision of office hours within academic departments, and the Brandeis model of differentiated reference service. The first model was geared to the needs of undergraduate students, while the second tended to lend itself to the needs of graduate students and faculty, rather than undergraduates. The Brandeis model provided an alternative to the provision of traditional reference services by providing tiered service, including individual research consultations with librarians.

### *Term Paper Consultations*

By far the bulk of the literature examined the provision of individual research consultations between students and librarians. One note of particular interest was provided by Debreczeny (1985). She noted that ACRL's *Bibliographic Instruction Handbook* listed term paper tutorials last in its list of instruction options, suggesting that they are a time-consuming option serving a small number of students. Debreczeny went on to describe the Term Paper Consultations offered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where the objective was to provide "one-on-one reference service at a point when students have already chosen their topic" (p. 158). From its start in 1976 through 1984 the program grew from 111 consultations per year to 731. The program growth provided additional stress for librarians, which resulted in the development of a common form for each consultation. This eventually resulted in a computerized index of topics and sources, available for both student and librarian usage.

Wilson and Wright (1989), at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, referred to term paper counseling as the "library's tutorial" (p. 269). They examined the dual role of term paper counseling, noting it "responds to students' instructional needs in a way that reference service or classroom instruction cannot" (p. 274). The tutorial model addressed the multiple needs of students by analyzing their specific needs, instructing them in the best approaches to filling these needs, and allowing for time to evaluate whether or not the student's individual needs had been met. Keeping a record of each tutorial experience facilitated future sessions with other tutors and encouraged students to return for additional assistance as needed. Wilson and Wright also review several programs of term paper research counseling and the tutoring models each employed. This examination included programs at Berea College, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Michigan, and the University of Ottawa.

The research of Gratch and York (1991) examined graduate students. They found course-integrated instruction to be the least effective. Their findings indicated individual consultations were more effective in meeting the information needs of this particular population. Based on their findings, Bowling Green State University developed individual research consultations for graduate students that included literature searches and often multiple consultations with the same librarian.

Individual consultations with undergraduates appear to be more prevalent than those with graduate students. The University of Central Florida implemented Personalized Electronic Research Consultations; essentially a mediated search service provided to undergraduates. They found this

service met the needs of users by working with individuals “on a specific, meaningful topic at whatever level of understanding best matches his research skills” (Kisby, Kliman, & Hinshaw, 1999, Description and Purpose of PERCS, para.1). A similar program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) was discussed by Yi (2003), noting the consultations combined the “advantages of reference service with those of formal library instruction” (p. 343). More importantly, however, Yi discussed how such consultations are a component of an information literacy program. Mississippi State University (Lee, 2004) has also employed the model of individual research consultations within the reference department. As in the CSUSM model, the objective was to help students learn research skills that they can apply beyond their immediate need.

Cardwell, Furlong, and O’Keefe (2001) examined Personal Research Clinic programs at Bowling Green State University, Marquette University, and Gettysburg College. They likened such programs to the tutoring and one-on-one assistance that takes place in a university’s writing center, noting that such programs “provide value-added service by acknowledging that the library, information, and research process are complicated and difficult”(p. 98).

More recent articles examine virtual research consultations. Roper and Kindred (2005) discussed using instant messaging as the format for providing office hours. They found virtual office hours provided a means of keeping in contact with students outside of the classroom and replicated one of the primary methods used by many faculty to keep in touch with students. Utah State University (Hoskisson and Wentz, 2001) utilized a consultation model that incorporated both in-person and e-mail service. This hybrid approach was found to accommodate the varied learning styles of students, allowing librarians to spend as much time with each individual student as needed.

Librarians often find themselves providing research consultations as the result of other services. The University of New Brunswick examined transcripts for its digital reference service and found that 60 percent of the transactions contained an instructional element (Johnston, 2003, p. 31). Viewing these transactions as a librarian’s office hour could impact the mindset of those providing the service, aligning each interaction more closely with that of an instructor and student, rather than simply pushing information out and providing an answer. The provision of digital reference services illustrated how “reference and instruction need each other and must work collaboratively to answer the patron’s query, whether at the desk or through a pedagogical process” (Johnston, 2003, p. 32).

### ***Departmental Office Hours***

Providing office hours within academic departments was yet another option discussed in the literature, albeit to a much lesser extent than the term paper consultations. Blewett (1991) discussed the provision of office hours in the history and political science departments at Loyola University (Chicago). In this example the librarian was available for individual consultation within the physical space of the academic department, offering services to departmental faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Faculty proved to take the greatest advantage of this service, followed by graduate students, with undergraduate students visiting least frequently. A distinct advantage of the provision of the office hours within the department was the opportunity it afforded to forge stronger librarian/faculty relationships. This could often lead to greater acceptance as a professional colleague, something that cannot be discounted in evaluating the effectiveness of such office hours.

In a similar vein, Orchanian-Cheff (2005) wrote of the provision of office hours within the clinical department of a teaching hospital. The notion behind these particular office hours was analogous to that of Blewett: meeting the faculty in the physical space in which they work. In this case, the number of users of librarian office hours increased threefold during the first seven months they were offered.

### ***The Brandeis Model***

In 1991 Brandeis University implemented what is now referred to as the “Brandeis Model” of reference service by replacing the traditional reference desk with an information desk staffed by graduate students and providing a professional research consultation service facilitated by librarians. Among the underlying rationale for this change was the premise that at a traditional reference desk users’ questions, due to their sheer volume, are often “handled too briefly and superficially” (Massey-Burzio, 1992, p. 277). With graduate students handling the directional and brief informational types of questions at the service desk, librarians were then available for in-depth consultations in private offices. In such a setting, without the distractions of the reference desk, librarians could devote their undivided attention to the individual student’s research needs. Massey-Burzio viewed this interaction similar to that of any other professional with an individual client (such as a faculty office hour), noting such a service “emulates the academic model as it is most familiar to an academic clientele” (Massey-Burzio, 1992, p. 279).

Whitson’s 1995 examination of research consultations as a component of differentiated reference services found such consultations to be the “one type of service which clearly needs professional-level staffing” (Whitson, 1995, p. 107). Given the potential for a broad range of questions in the provision of such a service, a librarian’s ability to field such a variety was advantageous to individual students. Whitson drew the analogy of the research consultation being “an individual instruction session”, while course-related instruction sessions could be viewed as “group reference service” (Whitson, 1995, p. 107). Personal research consultations provided by librarians took classroom instruction a step further by creating a session specifically tailored to the needs of the individual student, focusing on the tools, resources, and strategies for successful research for a specific topic. This differed from the individual class where the instruction focus, by necessity, is of a more general nature.

## ***A HISTORY OF PRACTICE AT ILLINOIS***

### ***Term Paper Research Counseling and Workshops***

An examination of the provision of individualized term paper consultations at the Undergraduate Library (Undergrad) at the University of Illinois provides the necessary background that lead to the transition to Librarian’s Office Hours. Term Paper Counseling began in the early 1970s. This service was intended to meet the needs of students both at the reference desk, where time constraints can limit the depth of assistance provided, and those in the library instruction classroom, where it is simply not possible to address the specific needs of each individual student. Students in the early 1970s engaged in research in very different ways than they do today: full-text was non-existent and Google was not the first stop for students as they began the research process. The need for guidance as students began research for their term papers was fueled in many ways by their unfamiliarity with library resources along with the additional steps necessary to physically locate print copies of their sources.

The Undergraduate Library typically offered a series of approximately 20 workshops during the fall and spring semesters on such topics as searching the online catalog, searching online databases, and evaluating Internet resources. Although advance registration was encouraged to monitor numbers attending these workshops, a number of those pre-registered did not attend. The general nature of these workshops can also be problematic in that specific questions of attendees may not be

answered during the course of the workshop and students, particularly undergraduates, can be uncomfortable asking questions in a group setting. Student evaluations following the workshops indicated they felt more confident in using the library and felt the workshops would help with their research, only 40% agreed or strongly agreed they would attend another workshop in the future. The advent of stricter privacy laws prohibited the library from taking attendance at these workshops and reporting the information back to the instructor. This impacted the attendance numbers of a significant number of “non-voluntary” attendees. The numbers attending experienced a dramatic drop the semester the library stopped reporting attendance to faculty.

Moving to a course-integrated model for classes that fulfill the university’s Composition I requirement became the preferred alternative for introducing first-year students to an academic library and the resources and services provided. The Composition I requirement at the University of Illinois is fulfilled by specific courses in the Rhetoric, Speech Communication, or English as a Second Language departments. Composition I is the most universal student requirement at the university, so library instruction in these classes provides the library the greatest opportunity to reach the largest number of students. Library instruction is not mandated, though an estimated 60% of sections include instruction each semester. As students are required to write research papers in Composition I classes, the inclusion of library instruction in these courses is appropriate. The prior library experience of first-year students at the University of Illinois runs the gamut from large school districts and cities that provide a wide-ranging array of online resources to smaller, rural schools that do not have access to any online resources. Certainly course-integrated instruction provides an appropriate context with the students’ assignments and general learning level, but these sessions simply cannot meet the needs of each student.

### *Moving to a New Model*

The time that library staff invests in the provision of services beyond the instruction classroom and reference desk needs to be carefully considered in the development of any new service model. The University of Illinois’ Undergraduate Library took particular note of the many hours devoted to workshops that either: 1) few people registered to attend, 2) many who had registered failed to attend, or 3) did not provide students with the information they needed to be successful at that time. Additionally, many students attended simply because it was an opportunity to receive “extra credit” for a class, not because they perceived a learning need. Yi’s statistics at CSUSM noted that students took part in the Individual Research Consultation Service when they could directly apply this to an immediate assignment, noting that students were being met at their “point of need”, when they were in a particularly “receptive mode” (Yi, 2003, p. 346).

Acknowledging the difficulties in meeting the needs of our users, the coordinator of instructional services (responsible for the provision of general library workshops) and the coordinator of information services (responsible for the provision of term paper research counseling) determined it was necessary to identify a new service model that would combine the features of workshops and term paper research counseling, while tailoring the service to better meet the individual student’s needs. Flexibility was essential for a new model to be successful. Requiring registration or sign-up for a specific time slot, as was required for Term Paper Research Counseling, did not meet the needs of many students. It was also important to move from a focus on a specific library resource, as did the prior library workshops. During the pilot semester it was decided the new service model would take place in the library instruction classroom (which has 40 computers) for a two-hour time slot once a week. Students would be encouraged to drop in at any time during this two-hour time span with whatever library-related research question(s) they had. They were welcome to stay for as little or as much of the two hours as they felt was necessary. We chose the time slots based heavily on the

hours the library has the most traffic to capitalize on the times when students are already in the building, but we also took GA schedules into account. During a typical semester office hours are provided on Monday afternoon from 3 – 5 and Tuesday evening from 6 – 8.

Determining staffing for the service was a thoughtful process. The Undergraduate Library differs from many libraries in that Graduate Assistants (GAs) are responsible for providing many of the public services. Staffing within the library includes six librarians and twelve GAs. The graduate assistants receive intensive training in both reference and instruction prior to the start of classes each August; they are mentored through initial service hours alongside an experienced librarian; and weekly meetings throughout each semester provide opportunities for additional professional growth. Of the approximately 120 hours of reference service provided each week, 100 of these hours are provided by the GAs. They also provide instruction to approximately 2,300 of the 2,700 students reached in library instruction in the Undergraduate Library in an academic year. Thus, it was determined they were amply prepared to provide service at office hours.

Unlike the reference desk, those providing office hours service find it much easier to get a student started on their research, work with another student, and return to further assist each student. This setting also provides the ability to focus on research as a process and better utilize numerous instructional Web pages and guides. A reasonable proximity to the reference collection encourages use of these resources as well. The students attending office hours generally receive a more holistic research experience, while those providing the service have the opportunity to apply both their reference and instruction expertise. For staff, the one explicit difference from many of the models discussed in the literature review is the fact that the time commitment is the office hours alone, as there is no pre-session preparation that takes place.

## ***IMPLEMENTING OFFICE HOURS***

### ***Naming the Service***

Selecting a name for the service is obviously an important step in developing campus awareness. Our literature review indicated many names have been used for term paper counseling services. Among them: Research Consultation Service, Personalized Research Consultation Service, Term Paper Counseling, Term Paper Consultations, Personalized Research Clinics, Term Paper Clinics, and Individual Research Consultation Service. How will students know what the service is, when it takes place, and who can take advantage of it? All of this information needs to be communicated to the students at whom the program is aimed. Aptly naming drop-in assistance workshops so they have significance for students is crucial, while choosing a name that is descriptive and meaningful to students can be a challenge. The literature review indicated that term paper consultation services have gone by a wide variety of names. Utah State University provides a good example of the importance of the naming process. Utah State selected Term Paper & Research Assistance as the name for their consultation service. They intended to market the program to a varied audience. Thus “‘term paper’ was chosen to attract beginning students” while “research assistance” was added to attract upper-division students and faculty (Hoskisson and Wentz, 2001, p. 93). Similar thoughtfulness in naming the Undergraduate Library’s service was necessary.

Brainstorming options at the Undergraduate Library led to the idea of simply calling the research workshop time “Librarian’s Office Hours”. The concept of office hours is something undergraduate students quickly become familiar with through their interactions with classroom faculty as they begin

their academic course work. Having previously offered a service named “Term Paper Research Counseling”, it was important to select a name that indicated the offering of a new and different service. The phrase “office hours” also has the connotation of providing an opportunity for one-on-one assistance with a faculty member in a non-structured setting. The addition of the word “librarian” further defines the context of the assistance available.

## ***Marketing***

Key to the success of the implementation of any new program in the library is garnering student awareness and interest, and appropriate marketing must be employed to do so. Numerous authors in the literature review above emphasized the importance of publicity in the success of research consultations and its importance quickly became evident at the University of Illinois. A closer examination of the marketing strategies employed by those institutions that provided a consulting service within the library noted many similarities. Cardwell, Furlong, and O’Keefe’s (2001) discussion of programs at Bowling Green State University, Marquette University, and Gettysburg College indicated all relied on flyers, Web page announcements, and table tents to promote their services.

The Undergraduate Library relied on these methods as well. Flyers for Office Hours were created and distributed to other libraries and select buildings on campus. Buildings that see high undergraduate use were targeted. Table tents were placed on tables in the Undergraduate Library and in the coffee shop adjacent to the library’s entrance. Notifying faculty in departments participating in library instruction provided via the Undergraduate Library as well as posting notices on appropriate e-mail lists and message boards further served to get the message out. Bowling Green State noted from evaluation forms that, in their case, it was “apparent word of mouth is the most effective promotion method” (Cardwell, Furlong, and O’Keefe, 2001, p. 101). Hoskisson and Wentz noted that traditional marketing methods such as advertising in the student paper, flyers, and e-mail to faculty were largely ineffective. They found placing a link on the library’s Web page database menu the best option, meeting users at “their point of need” (p. 94).

During library instruction for Composition 1 classes the library instructors emphasize additional ways students can receive assistance. It is during this time that Office Hours are promoted as a viable assistance option, particularly for those students who benefit from intensive one-on-one assistance. The classes also provide an opportunity to make available smaller quarter sheet flyers with information about the service. A problem with distributing the flyers during the instructional sessions is that students are likely to suffer from flyer overload, as they typically receive several helpful handouts during these sessions.

A large, freestanding sign announcing the Librarian’s Office Hours’ time and location is positioned at the entrance to the library only on days when office hours are held. This is an effective method of attracting attention. However, we quickly discovered that our best marketing tool was the library’s public address (PA) system. Creating a series of announcements to broadcast both prior to and during Librarian’s Office Hours often had a significant impact on attendance. The announcements are brief and to the point, while incorporating both humor and references to current popular culture. For example, an announcement during spring semester 2006 made reference to a popular television program:

Are you working on a paper, and hoping to finish your research before tonight’s episode of Gilmore Girls? Well, that may or may not happen, but it’s always a good idea to stop by Librarian’s Office Hours for research counseling or simply to ask a question or two. We’re



in room 291 every Tuesday from 6-8, so stop on by.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from the often-sporadic attendance patterns that further marketing and publicity strategies must be employed for the success of the program. Finding a way to make certain announcements actually take place within the intended timeframe has proved to be a challenge. At a busy reference desk establishing a pattern for making announcements has been a challenge.

## ***INITIAL RESPONSES AND OBSERVATIONS***

### ***Users and Questions***

Librarian's Office Hours take place in an electronic classroom devoted to library instruction; therefore students do not use this space for their regular independent library visits. When Librarian's Office Hours are in session, the door is open, but the space is only for students who require librarian assistance. Students just looking for space to do group work or other activities are encouraged to use another space in the library. Librarian's Office Hours are scheduled during some of the busiest times in the library, so this class space is like a quiet island in a sea of loud group work, buzzing tattle tape alarms, flirting undergraduates, and the talk and book cart rattle that surrounds a busy reference and circulation desk.

Librarian's Office Hours tend to attract students who are sufficiently engaged with an assignment and their research, as opposed to those with a passing question. The opportunity for student learning is very high and we capitalize on this. As a result, office hours become a hybrid of reference and instruction. Most students have the same types of questions whether they approach the reference desk or attend Librarian's Office Hours. A reference interview is done in both cases; Librarian's Office Hours differs in that it provides students with a significantly calmer atmosphere in which to ask questions and become involved in their research. Students are able to carve out a workspace in an otherwise crowded library; we are able to spend more time showing and explaining concepts; and they are able to spend more time working and exploring research options while having an expert at the ready.

Many undergraduates, partly because they are new to the process, have research questions requiring several steps to answer. For example, they may not know enough about their topic yet to create a reasonable thesis or they may need to search several databases to effectively cover their topic. So that we do not overwhelm students, typical reference desk discussions usually focus on introducing students to just one step. The onus is generally on the student to come back for more help. The office hours setting, on the other hand, allows us to get students started on one step in the process and then check in with them later, when they have begun to explore resources and have become more comfortable. The next step may include becoming familiar with the availability of subject-specific databases or the importance of evaluating sources. In the case of more proficient searchers, we may introduce them to citation management software, such as RefWorks.

Librarian's Office Hours have an advantage over the typical reference desk because there is additional time for interaction and a separate space for learning. We can walk through steps as we would for a library instruction class, but use the student's assignment topic instead of an example. Since Librarian's Office Hours are voluntary, students have more interest than in a library instruction classes and the instruction can be adjusted in pace and content to address the particular stumbling blocks and strengths of each student. Moreover, Librarian's Office Hours allow us to bring students

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<sup>1</sup> Announcement for Librarian's Office Hours written by Karen Fuller, Graduate Assistant in the Undergraduate Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign, Fall 2005 – Spring 2007.

to the next step in their research: Not just finding resources, but finding them in many different places, evaluating these sources, and managing their citations. In short, the users and the questions do not differ between Librarian's Office Hours and the reference desk, however the interaction differs significantly to allow more student learning to take place.

### ***Student Reactions and Responses: Pulling Them Out of the Dip***

Librarian's Office Hours helps to address the affective domain of searching for information. In Kuhlthau's research (2004) into the information search process (ISP) there is an identifiable point in the student's information searching in which they will experience an unsettled moment: this is the dreaded point of "being in the dip." Being in the dip has been identified as occurring after the student has collected sources but before the student has found the confidence of a focus in their approach to the topic. Empirical and longitudinal research into the ISP views the user, not the system being used, as the focal point of understanding how people find information. As such, people experience their search as a process encompassing several human domains: affective, cognitive, and physical. Librarian's Office Hours can alleviate the student's feelings of being "in the dip" or that decreasing confidence as they research. GAs staffing office hours become a sounding board for the student. In the course of the reference interview, by offering the student a chance to talk about their research problem, the student has had a sufficient opportunity to come to a new understanding of their topic. Synthesizing two different sources verbally to another person is sometimes all a student needs to break through the research dip.

Anecdotal evidence comprised of statements students make as they leave office hours are overwhelmingly thankful and appreciative. GAs observe that after attending office hours students are able to see their project with new eyes. Students begin to appreciate the new direction their work will take. Those who struggled to find a focus now have a geographic region or time period they have sources on; those who were looking for places to start searching now know where they can begin. If freely available Web-content was consulted it was done so with an eye toward evaluating critically. Students leave office hours with strategies for transferable information seeking skills, the goals of information literacy education.

Through the use of Librarian's Office Hours, students connect with library resources. The Undergraduate Library (in this case) helps to lay the foundations for students to make use of other departmental libraries. Becoming aware of and making use of the full range of resources available to undergraduate students is a benefit of this service. Furthermore, students respond to the service positively in that they make use of the lab space for sustained research activity. Having a staffed dedicated research environment offers one possible solution to students facing library anxiety. By virtue of students spending the entirety of the service hours in the space it may be inferred that students find the environment welcoming.

### ***Attendance Patterns***

The initial implementation of office hours took place once a week for a two hour time period. That has been expanded to include an additional two hour time period each week. Office hours are intentionally scheduled during some of the busiest times in the library with a late afternoon and evening session. These sessions are held early in the week when more students tend to use the library. Office Hours taking place in the Fall Semester seem to be more heavily attended than Office Hours in the Spring Semester. We suspect that spring weather conditions make it more difficult for students to be inside and underground (the Undergraduate Library was built underground). Many of

the first-year students attending will also have experienced some degree of library research by their second semester, and this could also impact their attendance at Office Hours. However, it is difficult to predict attendance patterns for Office Hours. Most two-hour blocks of Office Hours have attendance ranging from two to twelve students. Most receive the desired assistance in 15-30 minutes, though occasionally a student may stay for an hour or more. In many cases, students are encouraged to stay for the entire time period, particularly if they have started their research and are comfortable and “on a roll.” However, many students locate print resources and pack their belongings to retrieve these sources in one of the university’s 40 other libraries.

As noted earlier, PA announcements were very effective in increasing attendance. While even one announcement would increase attendance, attendance was at its highest when announcements were made approximately 15 minutes prior to the session, at the start of the session, and every half hour during the session. We know the announcements have a direct impact, as students often come to the reference desk asking for a repeat of the room number or directions to find the room. Students also appear at office hours within moments of an announcement. Attendance is sometimes higher on days when students have completed a library instruction class, as they are at an opportune point to begin research on their papers. This was especially noted when office hours were held either right after the class or in the immediate three or four hours following the class.

Office hours attendance is also impacted when those at the reference desk refer walk-up, in-depth questions to Office Hours as an alternative option. While those staffing the reference desk typically answer these in-depth questions when office hours are not in session, the volume of virtual reference questions and general walk-up questions can make it difficult to devote an adequate amount of time to completely address all needs associated with in-depth questions. During high volume service peaks the reference desk can appear intimidating to some students. Students are more likely to feel comfortable asking multiple questions of someone when they are sitting side-by-side in the same room, rather than returning to the reference desk multiple times. The attention required for in-depth, in-person questions can be best handled by the format of the office hours and the “hand-off” by reference staff is a helpful word-of-mouth advertisement.

Word-of-mouth advertising by the reference desk also impacts attendance even if an office hours session is not occurring simultaneously. At times students have in-depth questions during the day but need to leave the library (e.g. for work or class) before feeling satisfied with the result. Students often do return for the Librarian’s Office Hours as a result of these suggestions, knowing they will get more individual attention and have a workspace to do their research.

### ***Working with Multiple Students***

At times Office Hours can be busy with multiple students needing assistance. When this occurs, students get help starting their searches while staff moves on to the next student. Taking advantage of the need for a student to review resources from a search provides an optimal time to move between students. That is usually a best-case scenario, however. On occasion students do have to wait to be assisted. It is important, however, that the presence of every student is acknowledged upon entering the room and they understand they will be attended to shortly.

When multiple students came into the room at the same time (e.g. at the beginning of office hours), a quick survey of the types of questions students have is useful. Several students may need to understand how to search a database and can be given a brief introduction at the same time, followed by independent exploration on their own while other questions are handled. There are also numerous guides on the library Website to which students can be directed while they wait. Most often students need additional assistance during office hours—the brief prelude, however, introduces them to

resources on the Website and allows them to continue their use later on in their research (perhaps at crunch time when the library is closed).

## *CONCLUSION*

### *Further Observations and Next Steps*

One of the most problematic pieces in the provision of Librarian's Office Hours remains marketing. This was also noted in the literature review by other authors providing similar services to students. Seeking new ways to bring about awareness is crucial to student participation. A possible area for development of promotion will be to utilize the Undergraduate Library's new Twitter feed, a type of feed that allows up to the minute updates on what is happening in the library. The feed theoretically could announce the beginning of office hours (perhaps with a parenthetical note about what this is) with a suggestion regarding the availability of first-rate researchers waiting to help, so now is a good time to drop-in. One can envision the feed: In depth research help: No waiting! Bring your questions! Additionally utilizing social software such as Facebook and MySpace provide great opportunities to reach our students where they are.

As the vast bulk of library instruction classes taught in the Undergraduate Library are for Composition courses, Librarian's Office Hours provide a further opportunity to connect with the instructors. Students who remain after a library instruction class to ask their Composition instructors questions give librarians an opportunity to hear the types of issues and concerns students have and the interaction between student and teacher. This provides another opening for librarians to suggest that the student's question is one that could be handled in Librarian's Office Hours. Sending reminders of the service to these instructors via mailing lists also encourages them to promote the service to their students.

Connecting with other learning opportunities that exist on campus is also important. Promoting awareness of office hours in the university's Writer's Workshop (the writing center) can allow for additional referrals. Providing promotional materials to resident assistants, the residence hall libraries, and campus dining services also places office hours information in the physical spaces students frequent most often.

It is important to note that while many of the authors in the literature review noted the provision of an individualized consultation service caused a significant increase in the workload of librarians participating in the program, that is not the case in this model. In most of those cases the increased workload was due to programs that required students to submit their questions and schedule a session in advance. This often required a significant amount of preparation by the librarian beforehand. Lee (2004) described the experience as being "quite labor intensive, depending on the needs of the user." (p. 178). A drop-in workshop such as Librarian's Office Hours essentially eliminates these particular drawbacks by the absence of prior scheduling and the provision of assistance "on the fly." However, this can create some challenges for those staffing the service in that they need to be prepared to handle a multitude of questions in a wide range of disciplines. One luxury that exists at an institution the size of the University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign is the presence of both subject libraries and subject specialists. This approach is employed when questions are clearly out of the scope of expertise available in the Undergraduate Library. This is similar to the approach taken at the reference desk as well. Office hours also provide the opportunity to engage with individual students for longer time periods, allowing for more experimentation with various keywords, subjects, and databases. This advantage is one clearly not available at a busy reference desk.

As our students change so, too, must our service models. It is imperative that libraries continue to

be agile organizations willing to accommodate the varying learning styles and preferences of our students. Clearly a “one size fits all” model will not meet their needs. Student surveys and focus groups to be conducted will provide additional information for retooling and refocusing Librarian’s Office Hours. Reaching students with library services can be a challenge, but listening to their voices and responding appropriately to their needs can allow librarians to contribute to their academic growth in new and meaningful ways.

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