

RESEARCH SUPPORT & INSTRUCTION: REFERENCE



The Research Support and Instruction (RS&I) librarians provide direct reference service at the Reference Desk in Shain Library. Reference services are also run out of the Linda Lear Center and the Greer Music Library.

As is the case with academic libraries nationwide, the recorded number of reference queries has dropped slowly over the last decade as students have become more comfortable using online databases. But the central location of the Reference Desk continues to help students to understand the value of asking questions. The simpler questions—for instance, “What are the library’s hours?”—have almost disappeared. Web-based sources and databases fulfill many of the simpler informational needs. However, the complexity of the questions asked has increased when students are unsuccessful in their “self-help” efforts.

Correspondingly, the types of printed reference materials we retain on the library shelves have changed. As an example, Shain Library no longer has a general encyclopedia in print format! The availability of electronic reference sources will allow the print reference collection to be reduced by some 40 percent as a part of the Shain renovation, and replaced with student study seating.

In response to this shift, the Shain librarians now have an active research consultation service. Students can sign up in person, or on a Web-based form, and then spend as much time as they need with a selected librarian.

THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RS&I REFERENCE:

- Including the technologists, there are 63 staff members in Information Services, and 30 percent of those people have formal reference desk assignments.
- In the fall of 2013, a separate room was designed for scheduled personal research consultations.
- In addition to the traditional face-to-face and phone service, the staff at the Reference Desk answer questions coming in by chat and email.

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