ORIGINAL PAPER Mat Soc Med. 2013 Mar; 25(1): 68-69

Having a Suitable Reference Place

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study is to understand reference libraries of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. The reference part of libraries was examined from 2008 to 2011. We found that the number of reference librarians should be increased. We found graduate students are the main patrons. We understand interaction with patrons is very important. This study will be helpful for specialist, librarian, and administrators.
Key words: Reference, library, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Staff and students working at a library information desk should start to refer patrons to librarians for in-depth assistance. The Libraries consist of a main library and branches. The MUI Libraries consists of 20 librarians and 10 staff members.

MUI Libraries should have a help desk at which staff and students may refer in-depth questions to librarians. The data from the research provided an opportunity to identify patterns and to explore how patrons are seeking reference services, and in 2011 were analyzed to answer these questions. The subject areas of the questions were also of interest because they might reflect success in outreach or areas that might be candidates for additional promotion of services. In this study, the researchers looked at the subject areas of MUI libraries.

2. METHODS

Data were gathered from general database. It was originally mean as a method to track referrals. Today librarians are working at the information desk.

The researchers extracted data by contact type, number of patrons helped, time spent, patron status, and whether or not the question was a referral from the help desk for the years 2008-2011. This information was examined to determine trends.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 show that both the number of consultations and the numbers of librarians reporting have decreased between 2008 and 2011.

Table 2 shows that Drop-In was by far the most popular way that patrons received assistance, accounting for 50% (3, 141 questions) of all transactions.

The "Office Hours" refers to librarians providing dedicated office hours to answer questions from drop-in patrons, similar to traditional office hours that faculty provide. Referrals from the information desk were so rare that the concept was abandoned after a short run. "Empty" indicates that no information was entered. "Other" could mean helping someone in the library except of those

The status of patrons who directly contacted librarians (Table 3) shows that graduate students are the heaviest users with faculty members in a solid third place.

Librarians Reporting	No.	Year
20	3, 158	2008
20	3, 556	2009
15	3, 115	2010
11	3, 502	2011

Table 1. 2008-2011 Office Consultations by Year

These figures show that graduate students visit their Librarians in greater numbers than any other category.

The most of them are relatively short (Table 4). Table 4 shows that consultations with librarians are for the most part between 20 minutes and 1 hour 25 minutes. Researchers who contact a librarian are more likely to have questions that require some research to answer, and talking with a student or faculty member in an office usually take longer than an interaction at a reference desk. Of course, there are questions that need only a brief answer; the 1 to 4 minute category includes any number of interactions that took no more than 20 seconds, but were recorded as one minute (see Table 5).

Drop-In dominates this (and all) categories. The number of referrals to librarians from the information or help desks is much lower than expected, as seen in Table 6.

Librarians try to provide the best possible service to their constituents. Some librarians offer reference assistance and this has increased the visibility of librarian services to all in these areas, and possibly resulted in direct contacts rather than referral from the reference desk. As an offer, Librarians can promote their services directly to students in their library instruction sessions.

The actual referrals from the service desk may be an even lower percentage than those recorded here. The decline in referrals from the information and help desks causes many

No. Patrons	Time Spent
1, 667	15m-29m
1, 321	30m-59m
853	10m-14m
773	1h-1h25
694	5m-9m
465	1m-4m
210	1h30m-1h59m
143	Empty
118	2h+
24	3h+
9	4h+
6	5h+

Table 3. Office Patron Status (2007-2010)

Percent	No.	Patron Status
32%	2, 030	Graduate
31%	1, 969	Faculty
18%	1, 156	Undergraduate
9%	557	Community
6%	348	Staff
1. 9%	134	Elsewhere
0. 8%	51	Empty
0. 4%	24	Visiting Faculty
0. 2%	14	Administrator

Table 4. Office Consultations/Time Spent with Patron (2008-2011)

Email	Drop In	Office Hours	Other	Phone	Time
29	56	11	35	29	1 minute
31	123	4	28	28	2 minutes

Table 5. Office Consultations – Short Contacts (2008-2011)

questions. Are the desk staff and patron satisfied with the result of the transaction? Has the nature of questions changed? These are all questions for further examination.

MUI Libraries office statistics consist of office research consultations, reference assistance during "office hours" held in the MUI schools, and assistance via instant messaging, email, phone, and referrals from the Libraries' Ask-a-Librarian email service.

No.	Referral
904	Yes
5, 379	No

Table 6. Office Consultations – Referrals (2008-2011

Reference questions have generally been increasing, with a slight dip in 2010. Total contacts in 2008 were 456, in 2009 were 570, in 2010 were 298, and in 2011 were 550.

Further breakdowns were explored. Students contact the Librarian primarily by Drop-In (42%, 2008 through June 2011). The average time spent with a graduate student was 35 minutes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined patterns in patrons' use of reference services in a library. Instead, a general help desk is used, among other methods, to refer patrons to subject-specific librarians for in- depth assistance. Data were examined to determine if patrons continue to seek librarian assistance without their presence at the reference desk. The data examined how much time librarians spend with patrons, and how patrons contact librarians. These data show that from 2008 to 2011 the majority of patrons who contacted MUI Librarians were graduate and undergraduate students and their primary mode of contact was Drop-In. Further examination shows a decline over time in the number of referrals that librarians received from the help desks.

Over the same time period, there has not been a large increase in the number of office consultations.

Librarians at MUI are making efforts to promote their services on campus cause many advantages. It must be noted that relying simply on statistical data may not provide a complete picture of how and why trends are occurring. Students ask them multiple questions takes from the time that is spent actually helping.

Data gathering is useful for administrators and librarians as a means of quantifying their work. Administrators may use this information justify the need to hire new faculty. Librarians may use the data to show their impact, see trends, and develop relevant online guides and tutorials.

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