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This study details a web based survey of the Heads of Reference at member institutions of the Association Research Libraries. The survey was conducted to determine the methods of training used by large academic reference desks in instilling the institutional public service ethic in student assistants. The research indicates that librarians at ARL reference desks who use student assistants are concerned with proper public service training, and that monetary and time constraints have prevented them from developing training in this area to its fullest extent.

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**PUBLIC SERVICE TRAINING OF STUDENT ASSISTANTS AT
REFERENCE DESKS IN ARL LIBRARIES**

by
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Introduction

Student assistants have become a ubiquitous part of most academic libraries. They are often employed by the Reference Departments in academic libraries to provide assistance to patrons at the reference desk. In Emilie White's article, "Student Assistants in Libraries: From Reluctance to Reliance", the author tracks the history of student assistants in academic libraries and how they have been integral parts of providing library services for many years (White 1985). This is especially true of libraries at large research institutions, where the sheer volume of patrons necessitates the constant use of student assistants.

The *Association of Research Libraries Statistics for 2002-2003* reports that ARL libraries employ an average of 65 student assistants in various parts of the library (ARL 2004). Though only a small fraction of these students work in reference compared to the total number of student workers, they are equally as important to the workings of libraries as are their colleagues in other parts of the library.

Often students work at the reference desk in place of or in assistance to librarians, thus freeing the reference librarians up for in depth research consultations, management duties, and instruction. With students working on the reference desk assisting patrons comes the expectation that professional level service be given to patrons.

The Reference and User Services Association division of the American Library Association stresses in its *Guidelines for Behavior Performance of Reference and*

Information Service Professionals that librarians who work with patrons need to possess traits such as approachability, interest, and listening skills (RUSA 2004). In addition to the national association guidelines that reference librarians follow, each individual library possesses a service culture that stresses additional service guidelines in line with the mission of the library itself. Visit most of the ARL library websites, and the service mission of the library is prominently displayed. The mission is basically a promise of service to patrons, and the employees of the library are trusted with the provision of those services.

Since students are taking on many duties of professional librarians and are assisting in face-to-face interactions with patrons, the reference desks at large research libraries need to articulate the service culture of the library to student assistants. In addition they need to provide training to reflect the service ethic that they want student assistants to possess.

Training is greatly affected by the nature of student employment. Student workers at reference desk are an interesting breed of employee: both temporary and part time, they are a transient group. They usually don't stay in one job more than a year or two, thus the cost of constantly training new workers is an ever present source of concern for library administrators.

Public service is ingrained in the essence of librarianship. It is a constant in the current state of professional flux that is gripping institutions. It is the foundation for all that librarians do. Yet little research has been done on how student assistants learn about public service. With public service having such an important role in the day-to-day function of reference librarians, many questions remain unanswered. How is the essence

of what constitutes good public service passed on to employees who have not been previously educated for that purpose? Specifically, how does reference desk training impart public service skills to student assistants? How do libraries train students to work independently when none of the professional librarians are on the desk? How is the service ethic of librarians passed on to temporary, part-time workers? This research will attempt to answer these questions.

Literature Review

The evolution of methods used by libraries in training their assistants is an interesting history unto itself. The methods by which today's reference librarians impart the public service skills to the students is reflected in the training manuals and professional literature of the past two decades.

The literature about the training of student assistants is varied, although the amount of professional writing done in the area of public service training of reference student assistants is relatively sparse. Often the literature addresses methods of training for specific aspects of library duties, such as database searching, library guidelines, or referrals. Manuals for student training describe the need for good public service skills, however, an exact training program for those skills is usually not delineated in as much detail as are other types of training. There are a plethora of worksheets and learning aids such as crossword puzzles devoted to mastering the catalog and basic procedures of library work, but on the subject of developing student public service skills, the literature is strangely silent. An important question that is not answered in the professional literature is, how are librarians utilizing these general methods of instruction in training for public services?

In the past, traditional student training has often involved classroom-like sessions in a lecture-based format. Scholarly literature from the past twenty years on the topic of training is generally task-oriented and focuses almost exclusively on rote or repetitious

learning. Earlier articles about assistant training at reference desks focus on seminars (Westbrook 1989), role playing (Sheets 1998), and group training meetings involving audio-visual materials (Kenney 1995). These methods can often be time consuming, expensive, and difficult to implement given the complexity of student scheduling, the availability of space for training, and time constraints of the librarians themselves.

Public service training recommendations in the literature often focus on presenting the student with a desirable behavior via another medium, such as video or role playing. Woodard wrote about the effectiveness of role playing in imparting interpersonal skills to students (1986) and in a training manual for student assistants by Farmer, “basic library etiquette” is conveyed through handouts and example situations (1997, p. 56).

In a training manual by Boone, “service orientation” is recommended not as a separate part of training in general, but integrated into all aspects of training (1991). The areas of public service are broken down into three areas: working with patrons one-on-one, interacting with patrons on the telephone, and the handling of hostile patrons (p. 69). The manual recommends that written materials and audiovisual materials be utilized to clearly reflect the service ethos of the reference desk. This manual, which is obviously dated, leaves out virtual reference service, which has now become an important part of many of the reference duties of student assistants.

A shift in the literature seems to have occurred with the turn of the century. Modifications in student training have appeared in conjunction with the changes in attitudes towards traditional training methods, perhaps as funds for training became a scarce commodity. This shift in training methods has resulted in a more personal

approach to student assistant training, moving the focus away from group training to individualized, personal training. The result is something less structured, more flexible, and cost-efficient. Training relies more on informal, mentor-like training.

David Baldwin's most recent book about student employees in the library discusses distinct differences in the types of student training available and when they should be used (2000). Training of student employees to perform their specific duties is often accomplished using more worksheets, computer, and on-the-job training. The training is repetitious and geared towards the immediate employment expectations of the library in terms of the performance of specific duties. Baldwin differentiates public service skill development from this type of training. He considers the development of interpersonal skills to be a long-term training goal involving more "experienced" employees (p. 189). The methods he recommends for the development of skills are not new: case studies, lectures, and role playing, to name a few (p. 190).

Qi Wu's article about student assistants at reference desks focuses on the importance of giving purpose and respect to student positions (2003). This article advocates that the training of students should not focus exclusively on the mindless instilling of library rules and protocols. The author makes a strong case for the inclusion of student assistants as colleagues to librarians and advocates the significance of the work done by students be stressed in the training, and the overall value of student assistants be frequently stated by the reference librarians.

Chris Neuhaus' article about student assistants at library reference desks addresses the fluctuating nature of library funding for student assistant training and the consequences of cuts in funding (2001). Because of budget cuts, classroom training is

waning, so new flexible ways to train reference assistants are required. An individualized method is required to ensure that the ideals and values of the library are adequately passed on to students. Instead of a rigid, one-time training session, continuous training is shown to be more efficient, appropriate, and systematic. Practical experience is stressed in this type of training, and is modeled more after the normal university experience of students in the form of hands-on worksheets tailored to the needs of a particular aspect of training. This way training is ongoing, and it is easier to alter to fit the training needs of the particular student.

Kay Womack and Karen Rupp-Serrano advocate the idea of apprenticeships for graduate reference assistants in which the relationship between librarian and student is categorized by the flow of career-based wisdom from the sage to the green (2000). Though the authors confined this suggestion to Library/Information Science (LIS) students in reference assistant positions, the idea of apprenticeship is not without merit in regards to other types of students if the aim of the library is to also prepare their students for life outside of the university's walls. Their survey of thirty-eight academic reference desks showed that of the training methods available, the majority of respondents favored on the job individual instruction, group orientation, written materials, and student observation.

In addition to student training in general, there are other aspects of library training that influence the public service skills of students. Evaluation, feedback, recognition, and reward are all important dynamics in maintaining public service skills. Many of the manuals about student training published in the 1990s stress the importance of involving the students in reference departmental affairs on a higher level than as just temporary,

part time employees (Kenney 1995). Most recommend the use of written and visual materials to demonstrate to students where they fit in the larger service mission of the library.

Evaluation and feedback to students in regards to public service skills is important because evaluation can be used to reinforce good behavior and illuminate areas that need improvement. Kenney's article on student training stresses ongoing evaluation and daily feedback (1995). Of course, constant evaluation can be considered a time drain on the librarian administrator responsible for evaluations.

The literature shows that ongoing evaluation of public service skills goes hand-in-hand with the implementation of rewards and recognition for student assistants. Types of rewards include meals, recognition of library wide events, scholarships, pay increases, and job-seeking assistance (Clark 1995). These rewards are important not only for reinforcing good public service behaviors but also as a means of evaluation and general training by example for other student assistants.

In light of all of the literature that has focused on student training, how do the actual practices of academic library reference desks match up with the recommendations in the literature? How is the literature reflected in student-librarian interaction? Is training more individualized? Is it consistent? Is it flexible? The fundamental question at the end of this review is: What types of training are being used on student reference desk assistants in the area of public services? How do they reflect the current trends in professional literature?

To date, most professional literature on this subject has taken an anecdotal approach to describing student training. Librarians at various academic library reference

desks have outlined what kind of training has worked for them in regards to student training. In addition, this literature has focused more on training students for the tasks of the reference desk, and not on training for instilling the service ethic that is expected of these students in regards to assisting patrons.

Given the scarcity of research in the area of public service training of student assistants (particularly in the area of reference assistants), more research is warranted in the area of the actual methods used by libraries.

Methodology

This study was designed to examine the extent and the types of public service training given to student reference assistants at the reference desks of large research university libraries. An online survey of the Heads of Reference Departments in Association of Research Libraries in the United States was utilized to obtain this information in an attempt to gather information to supplement the current anecdotal evidence prevalent in professional literature on this subject.

The ARL was chosen because it is a group of institutions that are similar in size, scope, and mission. Because they are all large research libraries, they would be most likely to use student assistants for reference desk duties.

The Heads of the Reference Departments were chosen to receive the survey because they were people in positions of administrative authority at the reference desk, and most familiar with the reference librarians who facilitate student training first-hand. This study focused only on academic libraries within the United States, so only the ninety-seven ARL libraries at institutions of higher learning in the United States were included.

The email addresses of the Heads of Reference came from the staff information provided by the library websites of the respective institutions and from the *American Library Directory*. Often research institutions possess several large libraries divided by subject, and therefore have several reference desks housed within the library. In cases

such as these, the main library and its reference desk were chosen to receive the survey. When a main library was not readily identified, the library with the largest collection (usually the library devoted to the Social Sciences and Humanities) was chosen to receive the survey.

The survey was crafted in an electronic format, pre-tested, and the link sent to the Heads of Reference at the chosen libraries (see Appendices A and B for copies of the Cover Letter and Survey Instrument). The subjects were asked to complete the survey, or to pass it on to the librarian in charge of student training in order for them to describe and comment on the student assistant public service training of their Department. The survey itself was made available through a web based survey instrument called "Survey Monkey" (available at www.surveymonkey.com). The participants clicked on a web link that took them to the survey. The data was collected from the survey website, and analyzed using the Analysis function of Survey Monkey and Microsoft Excel. The respondents and their data was anonymous, with the only identifiers being broad institutional characteristics. Each subject was contacted three times. The initial survey was sent on April 24, 2005. Reminder surveys were sent on May 1, 2005 and May 15, 2005. There were 70 usable responses received, resulting in a 72.16 percent response rate.

Results

Of the ninety-seven ARL libraries surveyed, seventy responded, thus giving the researcher a seventy-two percent response rate. The responses provided were very useful, particularly the final open ended questions.

Demographics of Libraries

The first questions ask the respondents to describe their libraries. As can be seen in Table 1, approximately two-thirds of the institutions were public.

Table 1. Type of Institution

Type of institution	n	Percent
Public	42	60.9
Private	27	39.1

Ninety-two percent of the libraries served populations of more than 10,000 students, and more than half of the responding institutions serving student populations of 20,000 or more as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Size of Student Body Served by Reference Desk

Size of Student Body	N	Percent
5001-10000	6	8.6
10001-20000	23	32.9
More than 20001	41	58.6

As can be see in Table 3, the reference desks are open an average of 62.56 hours during Monday to Friday, and an average of 17.05 hours on weekends.

Table 3. Hours of Operation for Reference Desks

Days	n	Mean	Median
Monday-Friday	67	62.56	65
Saturday	67	7.66	8
Sunday	67	9.49	10

In large research libraries there are large professional staffs to help with research needs at reference desks. The average number of professional (possessing an MLS) librarians at the responding ARL libraries is 13.08.

Table 4. Number of Reference Librarians

N	Mean	Median
68	13.08	11

All of this data is in line with the description of ARL institutions in general as being large research libraries that serve large populations of students and faculty.

The next set of questions from the survey dealt with the kinds of student workers at desks, the amount of time they work on the reference desk, and the average length of employment.

The number of assistants used at ARL reference desks that allow student assistants is a small fraction compared to the overall ARL average number of student assistants for the entire library. The median number of undergraduate assistants was 6.5, while the median number of graduate assistants was 3, as seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Number of Student Workers Who Work as Reference Assistants

Type of student worker	n	Mean	Median
Undergraduate	32	7.03	6.5
Graduate	34	4.18	3

Fifteen respondents reported using only graduate students as assistants and no undergraduate students, and twelve reported using only undergraduate students and no graduate students as assistants. Despite the commonly held opinion that most reference departments use student assistants, twenty reported that they did not use them. Thus, the response numbers for the questions about student training were lower than the number of the total respondents to the survey.

As can be seen in Table 6, respondents reported the hours an average student assistant worked on a weekly basis, with the mean being 12.37 hours, and a median number of ten hours per week.

Table 6. Hours Worked on the Desk by Student Assistants

N	Mean	Median
44	12.37	10

Of the reference desks that allow students to work by themselves, the average number of hours (weekly) that the average student works at the desk alone is 6.68 and the median is 5.65.

Table 7. Hours Worked on the Desk Alone

N	Mean	Median
39	6.38	5.65

Perhaps the average hours worked and hours worked alone can be an indicator of the importance of student assistants at reference desks. If you multiply the average by the number of students, the hours worked by students make up a significant part of the day. Often student assistants are used instead of professionals during late evening/early morning hours.

Although student reference assistants are by nature temporary workers, as Table 8 indicates, the majority of respondents reported that their student assistants stayed at the reference desk for more than two academic years. Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported that their students stayed at least two academic years in the same position.

Table 8. Length of Employment

On Average, How Long do Students Work at the Desk?	n	Percent
One quarter or semester	0	0
One academic year	10	22.7
Two academic years	15	34.1
Longer	19	43.2

Perhaps this difference in perception and reality indicates that students in reference positions, which tend to require more extensive training and more complex duties, stay longer due to the nature of the work. Perhaps the large investment of time in training induces them to stay longer in reference positions.

Institutions with LIS Schools

Fifteen of the responding institutions reported having LIS programs on their campus. The mean number of students from that program who work at the reference desks is 5.5, with a median number of 5 students. Although responses from these institutions were similar to those without LIS programs, there are a few differences to be noted.

First, there were vastly more public institutions with LIS programs than private. Fourteen were public and only one was private. Second, their students averaged almost the same hours at the desk as non-LIS students as shown in Table 11.

Table 9. Hours Worked at Desk Among Institutions with LIS schools

Hours worked at desk	n	Average	Median
Hours a week that students work desk	15	11.99	10
Hours a week that students work desk alone	15	6.5	6

Third, students at reference desk that had LIS programs on campus tended to stay at their job for shorter periods of time. As shown in Table 12, almost half left after one academic year and a little over fifteen percent stayed longer than two academic years.

Table 10. Average Length of Employment among Institutions with LIS

On average, how long do students work at the desk?	n	Percent
One quarter or semester	0	0
One academic year	6	46.15
Two academic years	5	38.46
Longer	2	15.38

This may be explained by the nature of LIS graduate programs, which usually last one year or at the most two. This would explain the higher turnover rate.

Training of Reference Assistants

The next section of the results focuses on the training received by student reference assistants. In terms of initial overall training, student reference assistants average 14.74 hours of initial training, with the median hours of training being 10 as seen in Table 13 below.

Table 11. Hours of Initial Training

How many hours of initial training do students receive?	n	Mean	Median
	40	14.74	10

In terms of initial training devoted to public service skills, Table 14 shows over one third (35.6%) of respondents indicated that between 1 and 3 hours were devoted entirely to developing public service skills. There is a rather even distribution among the four choices, which indicate the differences among training programs provided by ARL institutions.

Table 12. Hours of Public Service Training

Training Devoted to Public Service Skills	n	Percent
Less than one hour	9	20
1-3 hours	16	35.6
4-6 hours	7	15.6
7 or more hours	13	28.9

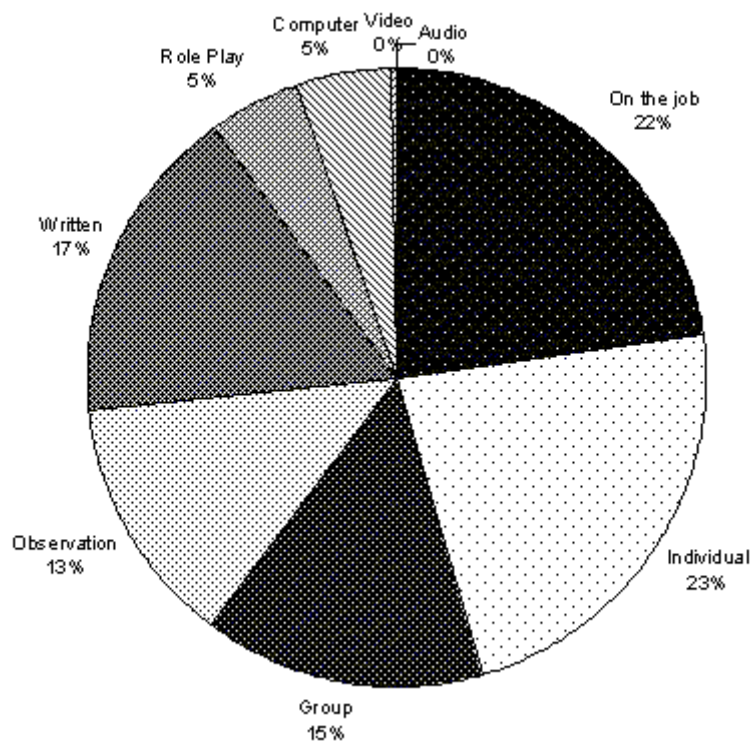
Consistent with the literature, nearly every responding library reported that individual instruction is used in training. In addition to this, on-the-job training was also heavily utilized, as well as group training and written materials. When ranking the top ten training methods used for public service training, reference librarians indicated on-the-job (training during the performance of duties) and individual (training uniquely formatted for a particular student based on his/her individual traits) as the most popular methods.

Table 13. Most Frequently used Training Methods

Methods of training used	N	Percent
On-the-job training	41	91.1
Individual instruction	44	97.8
Group Orientation	30	66.7
Written materials	39	86.7
Observation of the desk	29	64.4
Role Playing	13	28.9
Computer-assisted instruction	15	33.3
Video tape	4	8.9
Audio tape	3	6.7
Other	7	15.6

Not only are on-the-job and individual training the most frequently used methods, but the respondents indicated that they were the most popular methods. Respondents were asked to rank the most popular methods of training used by their institution on a scale. The data results showed that individual and on-the-job training are the most popular among librarians in charge of student training. A composite scale for each type of training was established, translated into a total ranking score, and the results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ranking of Most Popular Training Methods



As for the more traditional means of training, the use of video and audio tapes, role playing, or computer-based instruction was not heavy. In the additional comments portion many librarians responded that this was because of budgetary and time

constraints, as it is expensive to have professional public service training of students and almost impossible to get all of them together at one time to receive it.

Evaluation

When asked about evaluation, the greatest number of respondents (42.9 %) indicated that student evaluation occurred “as needed”, the next highest amount (28.6 %) indicated that student assistants were evaluated once a year as can be seen in Table 14. Only 4.8 % evaluated students on a monthly basis. Granted, “as needed” would indicate a wide range of frequencies. However, this possibly indicates that evaluation would most likely be utilized in the event of a glaring problem, and not as a means of continual improvement of public service skills in student assistants.

Table 14. Frequency of Evaluation of Students.

How often are students evaluated?	n	Percent
Monthly	2	4.8
Once a semester or quarter	8	19
Once a year	12	28.6
As needed	18	42.9
Other	2	4.8

The type of evaluation used was also interesting. As Table 15 shows, 40 % of student reference assistants were evaluated using informal evaluation. This goes hand in hand with the “as needed” response to Question Fourteen in the survey. The second highest evaluative method (35.6 %) used by respondents was formal written evaluation.

Table 15. Types of Evaluation Used.

How are students evaluated?	n	Percent
Formal written evaluation	16	35.6
Formal oral evaluation	2	4.4
Informal evaluation	18	40
Other	3	6.7
No evaluation	6	13.3

Open Ended Questions

The last questions in the survey offered the responding institutions the opportunity to express their opinions to several questions. These replies reflected the wide range of opinions held by the entire spectrum of the Heads of Reference. These differences were particularly evident with regards to rewards systems and the “wish list” that Heads of Reference have for public service training of student assistants.

The first of these questions asked the respondents to describe the types of public service training or development given to students after the initial training period. The results indicate that weekly meetings were used most frequently for additional training in general, as well as the option of “refresher courses” available to students. Other respondents mentioned using email listservs and instructional software such as Blackboard to supplement training. Mentoring seems to be a popular method, as many respondents replied that the students would be working closely with librarians, and that the working relationship would be the basis for further instruction.

The next question asked about rewards. The use of a rewards system was not common. For the entire group of respondents, a rewards system was not indicated by the majority of institutions responding. Only sixteen of the respondents reported using

rewards. Of the institutions that responded, a wide variety of rewards were used including formal recognition by the department, special lunches, and pay increases (see Appendix D for responses in full). The types of rewards offered by these libraries are not different from the kinds discussed in the various published student training and management manuals.

At the end of the survey the respondents were given the opportunity to describe how they would provide training if there were no money or time constraints (see Appendix D). The wide range of responses was very interesting.

Six different respondents wanted to explore video and role playing learning. As one respondent replied, they “would love to do some video and role-playing training with our students.” One suggested that a professional trainer be brought in to teach the students. Two respondents wanted to develop online training so as to have students train at their own pace without time constraints. Three respondents suggested cross-training at different locations within the library as a way to possibly improve service, thus giving the students a better idea of how their work influences the rest of the library. Two respondents wanted a new librarian position created that would exclusively deal with student training. Nearly all suggested that more time for training was needed: more time being mentored by librarians, more time before students should be allowed on the reference desk, and more time for students to be trained together to ensure cohesiveness within the reference desk unit. Their responses included desires for formal workshops, shadowing of librarians, regular classes, and more informal observation. All of the desires in public service training can be summed up in one response: “It would be great to spend more time with them.”

It was obvious from the responses that there is a great need to have more time and money to put into student training. The responses reflect the desire for more time for formal training and more money to develop and implement training of students. The increase in time and money would allow for the training of student assistants to be moved to the forefront of priorities for the reference desk instead of to the back burner where it appears to be located at this current time. Very few of the respondents reported significant time expended especially for public service training, either at the beginning of employment or during the students' tenure at the desk.

In the final question, the librarians were given the opportunity to comment about the subject of public service training in general. Some stressed that a good interviewing process can help to ensure that the students hired to the desk possess a good service mentality. Others suggested that keeping the training "fun" can go a long way to making impressions on students. One respondent used clips from popular films to demonstrate the differences between good and bad service. One institution uses "a video segment from 'Maid in Manhattan' where Jennifer Lopez is trying to be waited on in a department store. It usually gets a laugh." The complexity of student schedules were mentioned as a hindrance to training as it is difficult to work around their fluctuating schedules. Having a low turnover rate was indicated as a plus, since constant retraining is not necessary.

Clearly librarians at ARL reference desks who use student assistants value their work and are concerned with proper public service training. The data suggests that of all the variables, time and money influence the outcomes of training greatly. The infrequency of evaluation, the small amount of time devoted to public service training,

and the most popular types of training indicate that the most time and cost-saving training methods tend to be used the most.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

The data gathered from this survey showed that the librarians at ARL libraries are interested in public service training and would like to add to their training programs, but are constrained from doing so through a variety of variables, such as student schedules, money, and time shortages. Especially telling is the large percentage of reference desks that do not use student assistants, over thirty percent in all.

The smaller turnover rate than expected was also an interesting finding. This result could indicate that more time and money expended on student training would not be a waste of resources. The lack of constant evaluation or set rewards and recognition in many of the institutions may be an area of improvement. In all, the research showed that the most popular types of training were the ones that were the most flexible, easily individualized, and least expensive.

The survey shows that reference librarians value developing the public service skills of their student assistants, so much so that the respondents almost unanimously would like to spend more money and time training them. Many of the respondents indicated that they have interest in developing mentor-like relationships with the students. This is interesting, considering at this point the literature has focused primarily on mentor relationships with LIS students.

The responses from this survey raised many interesting questions. Why is public service training such a small part of overall training at many reference desks? Is the

problem behind the lack of public service training of students primarily an issue of shrinking budgets and time constraints, or are there deeper reasons behind the lack of action in this area?

Since most library reference desks are staffed by students, both with professionals and alone, for a significant amount of time when they are open, this is an indication that more time should be devoted to training skills that the students would use in their interactions with patrons (such as public service skills). For students who work the desk alone without a professional there to guide them it is even more important that these skills be developed.

Is a shift in priorities required to transform student public service training? If time and money are a primary issue, then the importance of public service training must be communicated to the library's administration. There continues to be a need for solid research in this area that transcends the current anecdotal articles.

The desire of some librarians involved in student training to have more video and role playing training is surprising. A new direction in research may be to investigate the effectiveness of these public service videos. In the mid-1990s, a rash of videos appeared just for this purpose (Albert 1994). Are they up to date or obsolete? With regards to role playing, research on the effectiveness of role playing in public service training could be useful. Have new videos and role playing exercises been created to match the changing duties of reference desks, such as virtual reference? If not, it is possible that the current resources for public service training may be unacceptable and in need of renovation. Is this desire by librarians for money for videos and time for role playing an indication of ideas bequeathed from the current literature (some of which is out of date) or is it a result

of training experience? Could reference librarians feel inadequate when it comes to public service training, and require higher quality materials to fill in the gaps?

Also, according to the survey, it also appears that rewards and recognition are underutilized. It is a pity that fewer institutions do not make use of rewards and recognition more often in their public service training. It could go a long way in giving students incentive and positive reinforcement to emulate and develop good public service skills.

How has the increasing frequency of instruction duties of reference librarians changed how public service training is provided? How has the boom of Bibliographic Instruction classes changed the ways that reference librarians approach the training of students? Teaching skills have become more and more important job requirements for reference librarians, and it would be interesting to study the effects of these skills on other parts of the responsibilities of reference librarians, including student training. Has training gotten better since reference librarians have focused more on developing teaching skills, or has it gotten worse because reference librarians are away from the desk more to preside over Bibliographic Instruction classes thus necessitating the need for students to replace them? More research is needed to understand the effects of the shifting trend from reference towards instruction.

The effectiveness of current avenues of public service training is key. It seems that more research in this area may provide many benefits to librarians in charge of training student assistants at reference desks. Not only could it give the librarians leverage in making arguments for more funding of student training, but it would also give them more up-to-date guidance in choosing training methods.

In addition to the needs of reference departments benefiting from further research about training, the future trends in public services indicate that student training in public service skills will become a very important topic in the near future. As more and more reference departments change to become more technologically savvy and merge with other service points, the role of student assistants has once again come into the spotlight. As one survey respondent pointed out, students are often used to assist with computer issues in addition to the more traditional work with research questions.

With the move of academic libraries to more holistic means of service to users, reference librarians have undergone a drastic change in the types of questions presented to them and the realm of mastery they are expected to possess. To close this gap between current and expected services, many libraries have begun to install hybrid public service points which include both reference librarians and student assistants to answer research and computer questions. A trend which started in the late 1990s (after much of the well known training literature was published), the “Information Commons” strives to combine library information content with cutting edge technological expertise (Beatty 2003). This hybrid structure is resulting in a change in the physical layout of libraries as well as the way patrons can use library materials.

This emerging trend in libraries underscores the need for public service training of students even more than ever. In an ARL Survey from 2004, 22 ARL libraries reported having Information Commons (Hass 2004, pg. 11). Training of librarians and support staff in technology is occurring, but additional training in public service skills for the student assistants who assist with IT problems was also stressed. IT student assistants,

while not traditionally reference assistants, often work in tandem with reference librarians, thus underscoring the need for reference training (Hass, pg. 14, 37).

Though right now the numbers of students who work at reference desks is relatively low when compared to the numbers of students working in other library departments, this may change in the near future with the merging of reference desks with IT help desks. As students take a more active role in providing comprehensive services to patrons, it is vital that they are schooled in the essence of librarianship, the culture of service that librarians hold dear, and the importance of good service.

This survey has shown that it is generally accepted by reference librarians that more training is needed in this area, and more money allocated to ensure that student reference assistants uphold the high standard of service expected of them. Instead of treating them as temporary employees, perhaps a shift in mindset is required, from temp to fellow professional. By holding the training of students and their input to academic library missions as important as other parts of library training (including training of professional and paraprofessionals) then perhaps training can be improved to the benefit to both the library and the user.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter

School of Information and Library Science
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
CB #3360, 100 Manning Hall
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3360

Dear Heads of Reference:

As I am sure you are well aware, student assistants are often employed by Reference Departments to provide quality service to their patrons. With the utilization of students at the reference desk comes issues of training and service quality. There is a great deal of professional literature devoted to the training of student assistants in the tasks of the reference desk. There is less, however, on the instillation of the service ethic to student assistants. I am interested in the instruction of the student in the service culture of the reference desk, specifically how to interact with patrons in the proper manner, separate from task-oriented aspects of training, such as database use. I am conducting a survey of ARL-member library reference desks, on the topic of service training of student assistants who have face-to-face interaction with patrons at reference desks, as part of the requirements for my Master's Paper. I would appreciate your help by either completing the survey given or by giving it to the person most responsible for training of student assistants at your library.

Attached at the bottom of this letter is a link to a brief electronic survey which should take less than 10 minutes to complete. The results of this survey will be summarized and included in my Master's Paper. Your participation in the survey will imply consent to your data being included. I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with your personally, even for those who provide optional contact information.

I hope you will take a few minutes to complete this online survey. Your participation is totally voluntary. Regardless of whether you choose to participate, you can request to have a summary of my findings.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the survey you may contact me at (336) 312-1766 or at elwhite@ils.unc.edu, or my academic advisor, Barbara Moran at (919) 962-6067 or at moran@ils.unc.edu.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth White

(This research project has been approved by the Office of Human Research Ethics Behavioral Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the IRB at 919-962-7761.)

Appendix B

**ONLINE SURVEY OF PUBLIC SERVICES TRAINING AT ACADEMIC
REFERENCE DESKS:**

- 1) Is your institution public or private?
 - a. Public
 - b. Private

- 2) How large is the student body?
 - a. Less than 2500
 - b. 2501-5000
 - c. 5001-10000
 - d. 10001-20000
 - e. more than 20001

- 3) During a normal week, how many hours is the Reference Desk open:
 - a. Monday-Friday _____
 - b. Saturday _____
 - c. Sunday _____

- 4) How many professional (MLS degree) librarians work at least part of their day at the Reference Desk? _____

- 5) How many student employees work as reference assistants?
 - a. How many are undergraduates? _____
 - b. How many are graduates? _____

- 6) Is there is a Library Science graduate program at your institution?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- 7) If so, how many students from this program work at the desk? _____

- 8) How many hours per week do students staff the desk alone? _____

- 9) How many hours a week on average does a student employee work on the desk assisting patrons? _____

- 10) On average, the students who work at the reference desk leave after:
- One semester or quarter
 - One academic year
 - Two academic years
 - Longer
- 11) How many hours of initial training do student assistants receive? _____
- 12) How much of this training is devoted to development of service skills and at the reference desk?
- Less than one hour
 - 1-3 hours
 - 4-6 hours
 - 7 or more hours
- 13) Libraries may employ a number of ways to impart the service ethic. Below is a list of some of the most popular methods. Put it rank order the ones that your library uses, with the most frequently used method as "1", the second most frequently used method as "2", and so on. If a method is not used, leave the space blank.
- On-the-job training _____
 - Individual instruction _____
 - Group orientation _____
 - Written materials _____
 - Students Observations of the desk _____
 - Role Playing _____
 - Computer-assisted instruction _____
 - Video tape _____
 - Audiotape _____
 - Other (explain) _____
- 14) How are the students work evaluated at the reference desk?
- Formal written evaluation
 - Formal oral evaluation
 - Informal evaluation
 - Other (please note) _____
 - None
- 15) How often are they evaluated?
- Monthly
 - Once a semester or quarter
 - Once a year

- d. As needed
- e. Other (please explain)

- 16) Is there a rewards system used to recognize students who demonstrate excellent public service attitudes? If so, explain.
- 17) Is further public service training or development given to students after the initial training period during the course of their employment? If so, describe.
- 18) If you had unlimited time and money, how would you improve your public service training of student employees?
- 19) This survey has attempted to cover the major aspects of public service training. Is there anything else you would like to share that might be useful for other professionals to know? If so, please comment below.
- 20) If you wish to receive a summary of the findings of this survey, please provide Contact Information below. This is **COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY**.

Appendix C

Recommendations of other professionals gleaned from survey

Is there a rewards system used to recognize students who demonstrate excellent public service attitudes? If so, explain.

When students are seniors, I recommend them for the Dean's commendation letter. Otherwise, it's pretty informal, cards, emails where we cc the dean, etc.

Student lunches, birthday recognition.

Continued employment; possibility for higher pay.

We have several rewards (these are the ones that come to mind first): --we give out pins to students who give the best service each quarter, for example the most helpful, the best attendance, etc. Students wear the pins on their name tags. --each quarter and at the end of the year we select a student of the quarter and a student of the year. These students are treated to lunch and get a letter from me, as department head. The student of the year gets a certificate and a cash reward. --we have NICE awards. These are slips of paper that any staff person can fill out to recognize when a student has done an excellent job at the desk. We post these in our office for all staff to see.

To an extent. The work performance of graduating student workers is acknowledged and the students are given gifts. A formal system would be a better incentive.

The increase is between 1-5% and the better they are the higher the increase.

There are SLA (Student Library Assistant) and a GA (Graduate Assistant) awards of excellence given at our yearly library awards breakfast. We also have a recognition ceremony for all library student assistants who have been employed with the University Libraries for two years or longer. A library plates a book in their honor.

If you had unlimited time and money, how would you improve your public service training of student employees?

Cross training- If every student got to spend a little bit of time at another service desk, I think the consistency of our supervisors' commitment to service would demonstrate this 'company culture' by example.

Would love to do some video and role-playing training with our students.

More observation time - more time on subject training - constant reinforcement - have each student mentored by one librarian - the staff tries to do this now but time limitations make it difficult. Would like to have a rewards system - even just vouchers for the coffee shop.

Offer students opportunity to work in other departments when they are doing their reference training. Cross training could be minimal but would give student reference employees a fuller picture of the way the Library operates.

Create better online/on-demand training materials.

Create videos. Get professional trainers in to teach. Otherwise, we spend a lot of time and effort on training the students, and we do a good job of it now.

It would be great to spend more time with them.

I would have the students observe the desk during busy hours when a librarian was there. I would occasionally send sample questions to the students via email and evaluate their responses, giving constructive criticism where necessary.

Offer continuing education and reinforcement of principles during the time that they work for us. We train them pretty well (I think) during their orientation period, but after a year or so of working for us they start to forget.

Spend more time on the idea of public service.

A retreat-like training session would be good for developing camaraderie in a short span of time. If we carve out time for training away from the library, we could incorporate more techniques including role playing and videotaping. We could also purchase DVDs dealing with customer service issues and distribute to students for home/dormitory use.

Additional training prior to the start of each semester as well as more shadowing opportunities with strong librarian models.

I would have them work with me individually at the desk for a least a month before leaving them on their own.

Have more structured mandatory training, including more cross training so students could work at multiple service points.

Our biggest problems are having enough staff to train the students and training students who are hired later in the fall after classes have started. We used to have two staff member who worked hours into the evening, so their schedule overlapped with most of

our students who work evenings and weekends. I'd have another staff supervisor or two who worked some non 8-5 hours.

Have the attend staff development training sessions at least once a year.

I would have a librarian whose primary job it was to recruit, supervise, educate, and mentor student employees. Our students work mainly in the evenings and that person would need to have more face to face time with the students than is now possible. They could also develop effective training materials and spend more time in evaluation. I would increase the number of graduate assistantships with stipends. Most of our reference student employees are paid per hour with no tuition remission. Training is always more effective when a person is receptive and they are more receptive when they are better paid, have more status, and are more engaged in the work. And along the same lines, I would employ only students who have a future interest in the library profession. Graduate students who want to enter the profession are more motivated to learn and also want to do well for the sake of getting positive references.

More meetings as a group (perhaps, monthly), longer initial orientations.

Create an incentive and salary program and require all students to be proficient in certain skills by a certain date after hire.

Perhaps use some video recording of their patron interactions. Overall I believe our system is very good.

I would have a librarian who can devote halftime to training and mentoring the students - our regular student employees as well as the students from our library science program who do Directed Fieldwork with us. I used to have such a person, and the students benefited enormously. Our program was much more organized then, but she was transferred two years ago. The librarian overseeing the program now is superb, but is also a subject librarian responsible for a large college.

Spend more time with them, pay them more and have them set up a website of how they view the job.

I would spend more time on the RUSA Guidelines for Behavioral Performance, including more instruction (role playing? video w/discussion?) on question negotiation and the reference interview.

We are currently looking into making a video on customer service. It is a great deal of money and time to invest in and that would be one thing I would like to do if we had unlimited time and money.

Spend more time individually with the students, working through questions, evaluating resources and examining reference transactions.

more classes beyond the initial sessions and they would regularly receive guides and questions to work on at the desk

Send them to classes on the reference interview. Do more follow up on their work at the desk - give sample questions for them to work on and discuss with librarian.

Training them for the first semester before setting them loose in the desk. Afterwards would require a full academic year of service

A one-day paid training workshop with speakers, videos, role-playing, handouts.

I or a colleague would spend time observing each interns work at the desk and give them more formal feedback on their work

Our training would be improve if our desk configuration allowed the librarians to be in closer proximity to the student workers, so we could always hear and see what they are doing.

More frequent formal and informal training sessions, include web-based and in-person

If I had more time, I would spend more time with the students observing their work and critiquing when necessary.