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# Public Services Work Team Essence Notes

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Public Service Work Team  
August 24, 2015  
Essence Notes

Fred Smith suggested that it would be good for the reference librarians to learn circulation activities. We would be more valuable at public service. Sometimes a book checkout turns into a reference interview.

There would be less sending patrons back and forth if we were at one desk.

Would this change the reference schedule? No, we need the reference librarians out and available. The schedule wouldn't change.

What is our goal here? What are we trying to accomplish?

There is not enough room behind the checkout desk for everyone who currently works at reference. Usually two faculty or staff and two student workers. The circulation desk area is already too crowded at times even with no new people.

Could the reference librarian sit at a station near the entrance? No, you wouldn't want to be by the place the students work on their stapling and paper cutting and so on. Also, there isn't room to confer; the patron would be too close to the pathway. The other side, by Fred's office, might work.

What about the student workers? Could they roam? Or could they just stay where they are?

If they stay where they are, then we would have two desks again. They would get all the reference questions. Could they be trusted to send them on to the reference librarian? I think so. They are pretty good now at recognizing reference questions and passing them on.

The students could do basic reference, such as looking up whether we have a book.

If we leave the students at the old desk and put the reference librarian outside Fred's office, it might be better for the students to call them to come over. Patrons like being helped where they are.

We need better branding. Think about the difference names we have for ways to ask questions. "Ask us," "Ask Zach" and so on.

Could we have a kind of general information desk near the entrance? The person there could direct patrons to the right place to ask their questions.

The current reference desk is too high. It is not approachable. It's also too broad. It's awkward to try to lean across and share the monitor.

There is a consulting desk, but we have student assistants sitting at it and we don't use it that way.

Chat should be done in an office and not at the desk. It is distracting to try to do both the chat and to help patrons.

We need to do something to make it easier to have eye contact between the desks. Could we knock out the wall, or somehow make a larger space where the hole is? Could we move the desk back toward the hole?

### **What follows from here are comments heard after the meeting:**

The main advantage seems to be not having patrons have to go between desks. If we leave the students over at the old Info Desk and they get reference questions, then the patrons will need to be sent over or someone will have to come over. How different is that from what we have now?

How big a problem is people asking at the wrong desk? Have we ever had people irritated when we tell them to go to the other desk?

I don't think the reference librarians are going to like being at our desk. If there is a problem with students not asking for help, I think it'll be an even bigger problem if they are not close by the Learning Commons. They will get practically no questions if they sit over here.

Ruth has a lot more confidence in the student assistants not taking reference questions than I do. I see them do that all the time and they sometimes give ridiculous answers.

They were saying that reference students could do some reference librarian tasks such as looking up books holdings. I don't think so. From what I have seen, our student assistants know nothing about library research. They don't know how to use the catalog or Discover and they don't know where things are in the Library.

I think before we go through with this, we need to list all of the advantages of having the desks the way they are and what we would lose. It seems like a lot of disruption for a relatively small problem.

If we do move over to circulation, what effect will that have on the concept of the Learning Commons?

You reference librarians are crazy. The first time you deal with one of those community borrowers and their logins you'll wish you had never thought of this.

(Notes recorded by Fred Smith, Department Head Access Services)