REFERENCE DESK REPORT

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Before I studied in the LIS program I didn’t know there is a special kind of librarians called reference librarian. In my mind, librarians were the people who were working at libraries. Their main works are to order books/journals, check in/out books, and help people to locate books. I treated these reference librarians at reference desk as the others at information desks in airports, railway stations, or hotels, who would like to give your directions with smiles. Therefore, the only question I have ever asked these “reference librarians” was “could you help me to find where is the book?” I never thought these people standing there could answer my specific questions, such as “where could I find the data about sea level changes in South China Sea?” because I thought it was not their duty. After studying the courses of LIS601 and LIS 660 and practicing at the reference desk of the science and technology department, Hamilton Library, I know as a reference librarian my duty is to provide the highest quality directional and informational reference services in all disciplines and areas by using my knowledge and skill.

**General Statement of Philosophy**

As mentioned above, my general philosophy of reference service is to provide the highest quality directional and informational reference services in all disciplines and areas for each user, i.e., what the user wants is what I provide to the best of my ability. It is originated from the first code of ALA Codes of Ethics (ALA, 1995) “to provide the highest level of service,” and the newly issued SLA VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES (SLA, 2003) “add qualitative and quantitative value to information services and products,” but it is not enough. My final goal is all these services I provide at my best to meet the satisfaction from clients’ perspective. This is my key philosophy and challenges me through all my experience at the reference desk.
Objectives of Reference Work

It is not easy for me to meet my philosophy in my practice at the reference desk. My knowledge and service skills are limited while the questions of patrons are unexpected. How to answer a question that is beyond my knowledge while making the patron satisfied is my main objective of reference work.

While my goal is as an academic librarian, from my personal experiences I know that I have special patrons. Some of them might be senior students or professional people with highly motivated and critical. They have already an idea about whether my answer is acceptable. How to deal with those people is another objective of my reference work.

The other objectives of my reference work are:

- To improve my searching skills using UH Voyager online catalog and electronic databases.
- To learn the communication and reference interviewing skills.
- To be more familiar with the layout of the Hamilton Library.

Efforts to Meet My Objectives

My twenty hours of reference work took place in the afternoon of Thursday (4:30pm-7:00pm) and Friday (1:00pm-5:00pm) within four weeks. Most of time, the reference service was very slow compared to the reference desk in main building. Most of time, I worked with another LIS interns. Only four hours I worked with professional librarians.
It was my first time to service at the reference desk and service patrons face-to-face. I tried to accomplish the above objectives in the following ways:

Before my started at the reference desk, I studied the maps and layouts of the library and of the campus to familiarize myself with the buildings. I also studied whether there is any change of the locations of call numbers because the library is relocating.

When there was a downtime at the desk, I might experiment with the UH Voyager online catalog and databases I was not yet comfortable with. I might try to do some further searching for the question I served to see whether my last service was good enough, or there were another good resources to refer. Or, I might talk to my co-worker about the interview.

Because English is not my native language, I listened to queries carefully. This was the most difficult for me. Patrons may speak too quickly, too softly, with a strong accent, or the word/phrase I don’t know. Most of time, I have to ask patrons to write down/type in their key words, or to show me their resources at hand.

I asked both open and closed questions, trying to draw out the most effective information. While doing searching, I tried to explain it to patrons. At the end of interviewing, I asked patrons, "Is there anything else I can help you?" In few cases, they addressed further questions. I also welcomed patrons to come back if they could not find what they were looking for, or had any other questions.
Reference/Search Questions

During my 20 hours practice at the Science & Technology Reference Desk, I served 53 patrons. It is funny that the most frequently asked question (FAQ) is “Where is the restroom?” The second most FAQs are “Can I check out books here?” and “where can I have a copy/charged card?” The percentage of the basic directional questions is over 55%. The following are the three actual questions I referenced.

1. “Could you find the journal is here or not?”

The patron showed me the journal name “Curr Opin Infect Dis” with a printout paper. I found it was a search result from “PubMed – in Process.” Although I was sure that I couldn’t find it in UH Voyager online catalog because of the abbreviation of the title, I still tried to search it in the Basic Search module of and limit it in “Journal Title.” Then I used the PubMed ID number (PMID: 14502003) of the record and searched it in PubMed. I wished from the record I could find the full name or ISSN number of the journal. Unfortunately, any of them was not found. However, from PubMed Service – Journal Databases I found the full name of the journal “Current Opinion in Infectious Diseases” and the pISSN and eISSN numbers (0951-7375 and 1535-3877). Using these information I searched in UH Voyager online catalog and Hawaiian Medical Library online catalog, but no record was retrieved. I also checked it in the journal list of UH JABSON Library Resource Center, still nothing was found. So, I suggested the patron using interlibrary loan to obtain the article he wanted.

2. “I need to find Russian literature.”

The patron (a lady) came to the reference desk angrily and addressed her require. She had
browsed shelves for a long time and couldn’t find anything. I tried to search “Russian Literature” in Basic Search module and limited it in “Subject heading,” but the patron was not satisfied with the result. My instructor Kris Anderson helped me to get out of this embarrassing situation. After negotiating with the patron, we knew that what she really needed was the literature in Russian language. Then, Kris taught me how to set “Search Limits” in Russian language in UH Voyager online catalog, and search “Russian literature” in the Guided Search module using the options of “Keyword Anywhere” and “all of these.” The patron was satisfied with the records retrieved now. Because most call numbers of the records were beginning with PG, I gave the patron a direction and also reminded her that some of the records were in the Asian collection.

3. “We want to find information on Ebola virus.”

Two patrons from Honolulu Community College came to the reference desk and asked the above question. After asking them closed-end questions, I knew that they needed some general information on Ebola virus for their research paper. After browsing subject headings, I knew that “Ebola Virus” is a LCSH. Therefore, I began to search “Ebola Virus” (as a phrase) in Guided Search module. Eight records were retrieved, but two of the records are duplicated and they have already, two of the records are videorecordings, one of the records is in Kauai Community College. Only three records are in Hamilton Library (QR1 .E7 1999, RA649 .R44 1996, WHO W 7 no.36). The patrons were little disappointed because they thought these three records might be too professional for them. So I suggested them to look for encyclopedias and handbooks about epidemiology. After searching “(epidemiology)[in Subject (SKEY)) AND (handbooks OR encyclopedias)[in Subject (SKEY)]” I retrieved nine records. All of them are
available in Hamilton Library with two records as electronic resources. When I later looked at these 9 recourses, I found the two electronic resources were not useful, and only two of the other seven recourses might be useful for the patrons.

Reference Interviews

Interview #1. I chose this interview because it is the third most frequently asked questions I referenced: find an article in a journal available or not in the Hamilton Library.

Me: Hi, can I help you?

Patron: Yes, I need to find this journal is available in the Library or not.

[The patron showed me the journal of “Semin. Cell Biol.” listed at the end of a printout article.]

Me: Let me try UH Voyager first.

[In Guided Search module, I formed a query as (seminar)[in Title (TKEY)] AND (cell)[in Title (TKEY)] AND (biology)[in Title (TKEY)]. There were 7 records retrieved, but none of them was the patron’s need.]

Me: Oh, there is nothing here. Maybe I can find it in Electronic Resources. Sometimes, full-text journal are available online.

[In Electronic Resources, I searched “seminar” and limited the search only in Title. There were 20 resources with the term “seminar,” but none of them is what we wanted. I thought I need to find out the full name of the journal, so I decided to do backward search – ask the patron the origination of the article.]

Me: Maybe I need to find the full name of the journal. Could you tell me where did you find this article? Maybe we can find a hyperlink.

Patron: It is from the FASEB Journal.

[I noticed that this article is published in 1996. When searching in the Electronic Resources I found the journal (with full text) is only available from January of 1998. So I decided to search SCI.]

Me: Oh, your article is too old for the online journal, but we can try “Web of Science” which have the most popular and core journals in the world.
[From the Source List in Full Search – General Search module, I found the full name of the journal: *Seminar in Cell Biology*. Then searching this journal in Source Title, I retrieved 49 records. Clicking any of these records, we also found the ISSN number of the journal: 1043-4682.]

Me: Now, we can search this journal in UH Voyager.

[While I searched in UH Voyager, I also explained there are two ways to search the journal. One is using Basic Search module type in the full name of the journal and limit the search in Title field. The other is using Guided Search module type in the number of ISSN and limit the search in ISSN field. After doing two kinds of the search, I confirmed that this journal is not available in the Hamilton Library.]

Me: This journal is not available in the Hamilton Library. But if you need this article, you can request an interlibrary loan.

Patron: What is the interlibrary loan?

[I explained the patron what is an interlibrary loan, and told him that it can be done online and is free of charge for UH faculties and students.]

Patron: That’s great. Could you do it for me?

Me: Of course. Do you have your library card at hand?

Patron: Yes. Here you are.

[After confirming his library card is active, I helped the patron to request an interlibrary loan. I told him the librarian would e-mail him to confirm his request and then e-mail him the article usually in PDF format.]

Patron: How long will it take?

Me: I am not sure. It depends. At the most of cases, it usually takes 1 to 2 weeks.

Patron: That’s great. Thank you for your help.

Me: You are welcomed. Is there any other thing I can help you?


After interviewing, I tried to search the journal in ScienceDirect database. There are full text available in PDF format, but our library doesn’t subscribe it. (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=JournalURL&_cdi=7145&_auth=y&_acct=C000050041&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=996227&md5=61bdf39234ae03d03beb31cb681ddb35)
Interview #2. I chose this interview because I referenced the patron actively (not waiting for the patron comes to the desk)

Me: Do you need help?

[It was downtime at reference desk, but I noticed an old man who was sitting in front of a computer near to the desk and seemed distressed. I went over to him.]

Patron: Yes, Mam’. I am trying to find information about the milk production of murrah in India. I know there are a lot of articles about it, but I couldn’t find any of them.

Me: Could you show me how you did your search?

[There is a strong accent in his voice. I noticed that he used AGRICOLA (CSA version). The patron showed me his query: KW=(murrah water buffalo) and KW=(milk production) and KW=india. There was no hits for this query.]

Me: Could you come to the reference desk so I can do search for you?

[While walking to the desk, I asked him whether he was familiar with CSA databases. He replied not. At the desk I asked him to write the keywords he thought that might be help for the search. He wrote four terms: murrah water buffalo, milk production, artificial insemination, and India. I built a query according to his keywords: KW=(murrah water buffalo) and KW=(milk production) and KW=(artificial insemination) and KW=India, and searched in CSA. Nothing returned.]

Me: Nothing. Maybe the keywords are too narrow. Could you point out the most important keywords?

[The patron thought all these four keywords were important. After thinking, he admitted me to form a query as: KW=(buffalo or murrah) and KW=(artificial inseminat*) and kw=india* and kw=milk. But still nothing returned. However, when I ignored the first keyword (buffalo or murrah), there were 2 hits returned, and fortunately both of the records are about buffalo.]

Patron: That’s it. Thank you.

[Only two hits is too small for me, and one of these two records is in 1978. I thought I can find more. Thanks to the exercises in LIS660, I learned many resources about agriculture.]

Me: You know, the AGROCOLA database is not focused on international. There are other databases covers international. Do you want me to do some more search in other databases?

Patron: Why not.
[I selected CAB International database to execute a query as “(buffalo or murrah) and (artificial inseminat*) and milk and india*”. There were 18 hits returned. I printed them out and gave to the patron.]

Patron: That’s wonderful. Thank you so much for you help.

Me: You are welcomed. Is there any other thing I can help you?

Patron: Oh, how do I find them in the Library?

[Because time limit, I asked him to pick up 2 or 3 most related records he thought. While I tried to find these records available in the library or not, I explained him the steps I executed (almost the same as in the Interview#1). The patron left with satisfied finally.]

Evaluation of the UH Voyager Online Catalog and Electronic Resources Gateway

The most disadvantage in the UH Voyager online catalog is there is not a Refine Search option. Sometimes, users might retrieve more records than they want. The only options of Sorted by Author, Title, and Publication Date, and Limited in Date, Language, Format, and Location are not enough. They want to execute a new search within the results (refine). In my experience, I have to do several separated searches, and use “Search History” to combine (boolean AND) my search queries. The other way I used is to search only in Basic module. If I need to refine my search I can easily change my queries in the “Search for” box or change my search field.
Compared to the Basic Search module, users could not change their queries in Guided Search module. It may confuse users.

For the Electronic Resources, the most inconvenient is users cannot search multiple database at once. Users can only choose one database, login, and execute their searches. Then, they choose another database, do the same things. It may bother users a lot. The other is the hyperlinks are not obvious in the main page. For the first-time users, they may wonder what they do next. The color scheme are almost same for the title and hyperlinks. Unless users move their cursors, they don’t know which of the following text are hyperlinked. That is why I like to choose Science & Technology’s webpage to begin my search.

### Electronic Resources

**Locate Articles & Search Data**

(in Online Indexes, Full Text & Statistical Databases, Journals, Newspapers, eBooks)

Note: Major electronic resources to which the Library subscribes are restricted to University of Hawai‘i students, faculty and staff to comply with licensing agreements. Please refer to an explanation of Remote Access for clarification on accessing these resources while off campus. Selected FREE databases are also available.

Many research tools are available only in paper format. Ask a librarian for assistance to locate additional reference sources.

To locate a specific publication in the Library, search the Hawai‘i Voyager Library Catalog. A telnet connection is also available: [telnet://uhmanoa.lib.hawaii.edu:4141]
However, there is minor problem in the Sci-Tech page: the section titles are not as the same as the titles listed on the top of the page. For example, “Indexes” are the list of databases, but the section title is “Find Science Journal Articles.” It may confuse users. Another is some comprehensive databases are not listed. For example, CSA or ProQuest is not listed as an individual entry, but EBSCOhost is listed.

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**Evaluation of Experience**

I was surprised that compared to the CIS reference desk, most of time the Sci-Tech reference desk is slow. Maybe it is because of the location. I think that is why the instructor requires us at least 20 hours reference practice (only 10 hours at CIS desk). It is a challenging and interesting experiment for me. Most of my objectives are met, but some of them still need to be improved,
e.g. communication skills. I am valued this experience. It gives a chance to develop my service skills face-to-face, and practice the knowledge learning in class into real life.

During the Reference Desk practice, I found there exits no standards for librarians to determine where to begin search. It is based on individual professional skills. Different librarians might choose different databases. I think that a multiple-search strategy is helpful and effective.

Working at the Reference Desk confirm that the decision of changing my career is correct because I enjoy what I do. I was able to help people, answer questions and contribute my knowledge. Meanwhile, I felt regret after each reference because my service is not perfectly and I cannot redo it again.

Evaluating and writing a report on this experience helps me to clarify the most important attributes of the reference librarian, especially for science and technology librarian. Overall, I benefit a lot from work at a reference desk.

**Bibliography**


Special Libraries Association. SLA New Vision, Mission and Core Value. (Nov.20, 2003) ([http://www.sla.org/content/memberservice/ommunication/pr/pressrelease/2330.cfm](http://www.sla.org/content/memberservice/ommunication/pr/pressrelease/2330.cfm))