Responding in a Crisis: Pivoting to a Tele-Reference Service Model During Improbable Times

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Responding in a Crisis: Pivoting to a Tele-Reference Service Model During Improbable Times

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About the Presenters

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Outline

• About UCF Libraries & the Research & Information Services (RIS) Department
• RIS Reopening Task Force & Background on Creation of Tele-Reference Model
• How Our Tele-Reference Model Works
• Challenges to Implementation
• Assessment of the Tele-Reference Model
• Benefits & Opportunities and Future Possible Directions of Tele-Reference
• Q&A
About UCF Libraries’ Staff & Campuses

- 64 full time library staff
- 37 full time non-tenure faculty librarians
- 4 library administrators also holding faculty librarian status

Serving across 15 campus libraries around Central Florida
- Main Campus- John C. Hitt Library (main library)
- Main Campus- Curriculum Materials Center
- Downtown Campus- Downtown Campus Library
- Rosen School of Hospitality Management- Rosen Library
- UCF Connect Campuses- Daytona State College, Eastern Florida State College (Cocoa & Palm Bay), Valencia College (West, East, & Osceola) & Seminole State College (Altamonte Springs & Sanford/Lake Mary)
About the Research & Information Services Dept (RIS)

- 10 full-time Subject Librarians
- 3 Adjunct Librarians
- 3 full-time LTAs, 1 part-time LTA
- 3 Non-RIS librarians help staffing at the Research and Information Desk (2 hrs/per wk)
Research & Information Services Reopening Task Force

Internal Task Force Created in June of 2020 for Reopening RIS’ Research & Information Desk (RAID)  
(Department Head, 3 Coordinators)  
*UCF Libraries was closed to the public between March 2020 until August 2020

**Charge:** Make recommendations regarding RAID – hours of service, staffing protocols, safety measures, etc.

**Considerations:**
- RIS staff must be able to participate fully in AAPD (job description) assignments
- **Age or health profiles of RIS staff that prevent them from working onsite or have small children enrolled in home-based online education**
- RIS staff concerns about “physical distancing” behind RAID
- RIS staff concern with “mask fatigue” for staff members at RAID
- Physical presence at the RAID service point- 1 of 3 in the library on 2nd floor
Our Three Service Desks

Legacy Entrance near the UCF Reflecting Pond

New Entrance near the UCF Student Union

Library Technology (Lib Tech) Desk

Research & Information Desk (RAID) at the Knowledge Commons

Circulation Desk
Before the Implementation of Tele-Reference

- In July 2020, an onsite demo was established for internal testing
- Official name “Tele-Reference” was proposed and adopted
- Beta testing was scheduled for all RIS Librarians to staff the virtual desk (July 27 – August 14th 12 noon – 3 pm)
- Encouraged managers and staff from Government Docs, Circulation, Lib Tech, Interlibrary Loan, and Special Collections, to stop by RAID during the beta-testing to provide real-world scenarios and questions to test system out
- Feedback requested from everyone in the library
Additional Considerations Ahead of Implementation

In surveying the other 10 State University Libraries in Florida yielded that NO library in the state was providing this type of service and ALL were providing Ask a Librarian service only via chat, phone, or text as their reference desks were closed to patrons

Email from UCF Associate Vice President and Chief HR Office in August of 2020:
“We must be prepared to handle requests made in person, as well as requests that may require staff to work onsite to fulfill them. To provide these services, all UCF offices need to begin providing an appropriate physical presence during regular business hours.”
How Tele-Reference Works

Staffing:

➔ Remote librarian or adjunct librarian
➔ On-call / in-person librarians (2 daily)
➔ 1 hr shifts (with some 2-3 hour shifts)
➔ NEW Position! In-person Reference Ambassador
  ◆ Helps direct assistance at desk
  ◆ Can answer basic directional, informational questions
  ◆ Physically distanced to help ensure safety
  (also other measures like plexiglass)
How Tele-Reference Works

Technology:

➔ Zoom*
  ◆ Runs continuously on-site during reference hours
  ◆ Remote access requires login

➔ Both on-site and off-site technology setups needed
  ◆ Stable Internet connection
  ◆ Computer monitors (dual use monitors on-site and recommended for off-site)
  ◆ Audio (mic) and video capabilities

*Current university license for Zoom is through end of 2021.

How Tele-Reference Works

Training & Resources:

➔ Basic training on how to use Zoom
  ◆ Emphasis on logging in and out to help make shift transitions easy and seamless
  ◆ Also covered:
    ● Turning audio and web cameras on and off
    ● Optimal settings for audio/video
    ● Mute and unmuting
    ● Using virtual backgrounds
    ● Screen sharing considerations (i.e. sharing entire desktop versus a specific browser or application)
Training & Resources:

➔ LibGuide (Password protected)
  ◆ Includes Zoom login information
  ◆ Ready Reference information
  ◆ On-Call contact information

➔ Quick Instructions (1-page PDF with basic info, link to LibGuide, etc.)
How Tele-Reference Works

Click inside this box to be taken to a video on how our tele-reference works.
Challenges

• Staff skepticism/reluctance to adopt Zoom for reference assistance

• Patron accessibility

• Technology issues
  • Software
  • Hardware
  • Library laptop availability
Assessing Our Tele-Reference Model

Figure 1
RAID Reference Question Categories
Figure 2
John C. Hitt Library Gate Counts
Sept. to Nov. 2019 vs Sept. to Nov. 2020

Figure 3
RAID # of Reference Transactions
Sept. to Nov. 2019 vs Sept. to Nov. 2020
Benefits & Opportunities

• Continued reference support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

• Allows users to receive assistance at the moment of need

• Tele-Reference allows librarians to work in a safe and socially distanced environment

• Change in the mode of reference service well received based on LibInsights data
Future Possible Directions for Tele-Reference

• Research assistance in a single service desk

• Serve as a backup station during peak hours

• Connect with subject librarians on the spot - More powerful collaborative research assistance
Thank you! Any questions?

Feel free to contact our team

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