Rethinking Library Space: What Happened to the Reference Desk and Shelves?

Do we still need a reference desk?!

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“...consistency in frontline service may not be achievable with student employees”\(^3\)

“Some benefits included reducing staffing (especially librarian) hours at the desk; streamlining operations; and improving services” \(^4\)

“Reference service is not only possible, but can thrive without the desk”\(^5\)

“The reference desk is a powerful symbol and essential to the mission and purpose of academic reference service... an academic library without a reference desk is unthinkable”\(^1\)

“Responsibilities were broadened, core competencies were developed, and staff members were cross trained” \(^2\)
What we’ll cover today...

• Taking a look at an example
• Is this change right for my library?
• Literature review
• Getting buy-in
• Planning & implementation
• Evaluation
• Conclusion
Before
Reasons why Le Moyne made the change...

• Number of reference questions decreasing

![Bar chart showing decreasing number of reference questions from 2010/2011 to 2012/2013]
- 2010/2011: 2278
- 2011/2012: 1934
- 2012/2013: 1668

# of Reference Questions
Reasons why Le Moyne made the change...

• Percentage of reference questions being answered in librarian’s offices increasing

- 2010/2011: 13%
- 2011/2012: 19%
- 2012/2013: 24%

% of Reference Questions Answered in Librarian Office
Reasons why Le Moyne made the change...

- Better utilization of librarians, students and staff
Reasons why Le Moyne made the change...

• Removing the reference desk improved the layout of our first floor
How Le Moyne implemented this change

- Combined three service points (circ, media and ref) and renamed it the Library Services Desk
- Removed the reference desk
- Direction, technical and basic level reference questions answered by student assistants at the library services desk
- Librarians available on-call from their office for advanced reference questions
Is this change right for my library?

• What is your reference service philosophy?
• How is your reference desk and other service points staffed?
• Stats, stats and more stats!
• What is the true cost of providing traditional reference desk services?
• Internal/external stakeholders thoughts/feelings about the reference desk
• What do your patrons want? What best meets their needs?
Literature Review!

• We’re librarians so of course there’s a bunch published on this topic
• Read about other peoples thoughts and experiences
Buy-in from internal/external stakeholders

• Internal
  • Librarians
  • Student workers
  • Paraprofessional/other staff
  • Etc.

• External
  • Faculty/Staff/Administration
  • Patrons
  • Etc.
Many different ways to implement

- Combined reference and circulation desk
- Single service point
- Stratified or tiered staffing of service points
- On call librarians
- Mobile/imbedded librarians
Don’t forget to evaluate!

• What’s working... what’s not working?
• Evaluate the change through formal and informal methods
  • Talk to patrons, librarians, staff, etc.
  • Look at statistics
  • Conduct a survey
• Make adjustment as needed
Conclusion

“Whether or not the end result is the creation of a single service point or not, the conversations that arise are well worth having. They cause both front line and management staff to examine how all library services are being delivered in order to best meet the needs of users”