

6-2016

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Jennifer L.A. Whelan

College of the Holy Cross, jwhelan@holycross.edu

Alicia S. Hansen

College of the Holy Cross, ahansen@holycross.edu

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Recommended Citation

Jennifer L. A. Whelan & Alicia Hansen (2017) Personal Research Sets the Stage for Change, *The Reference Librarian*, 58:1, 67-83,
DOI: 10.1080/02763877.2016.1194245

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Personal Research Sets the Stage for Change

Jennifer L.A. Whelan

College of the Holy Cross

Alicia Hansen

College of the Holy Cross

Abstract

Starting in 2011, implementation of Personal Research Sessions, or PRS, not only showed librarians at College of the Holy Cross the success of one-on-one research appointments, but also led the reference program on a path of service-centered changes. This path includes fewer hours on the physical desk, a system of on-call reference shifts, an increase in reference student worker training, a semester-to-semester increase in PRS, and new goals for assessment. We discuss the state of student research at Holy Cross and our approach to reference service.

Personal Research Sets the Stage for Change

The College of the Holy Cross is a 4-year, undergraduate-only, liberal arts college located in Worcester, Massachusetts. With a small student body (FTE: 2,900) and a faculty-student ratio of 10:1, Holy Cross is very much a teaching college where students interact with faculty at a level often reserved for graduate students. Undergraduates serve as research assistants, conduct independent summer research projects, produce theses, as well as apply for and receive a competitive number of Fulbright grants each year. Statistically, the most popular majors include History, Psychology, and Economics, but students can major in a number of subjects across the full range of the humanities and social and natural sciences. Holy Cross students are academically driven, engaged with the campus and Worcester community, and are passionate about intellectual curiosity. Most have schedules bursting with athletic, service and other extracurricular activities in addition to their academics, often leading them to approach research and other projects with a ‘putting out fires’ mentality.

In keeping with its liberal arts philosophy, the College has no specific sequence of required courses, save that which may be required for a given major. Instead, students are asked to choose from the range of the College’s curriculum to fulfill twelve major disciplinary requirements. While courses such as ENGL 101 and BIO 101 are offered, they are not mandatory. Our first-year program, Montserrat, is similarly open in format: rather than taking a specific, designated course, incoming freshmen choose topical seminars in one of six thematic living-and-learning communities, or ‘clusters,’ giving them an early introduction to the liberal arts experience. This format has many academic advantages, but it also presents particular challenges for instruction librarians, due to the fact there is no standard first-year course in which

to deliver information literacy instruction. Since there is no single course at any level at Holy Cross that is taken by all students, library instruction continues to be a challenge across all four class years.

In recent years, the libraries have attempted to improve students' access to library instruction in many ways. For example, we ramped up our engagement in the Montserrat program and the general curriculum by designating a 'personal librarian' for each Montserrat cluster and liaisons for each department. We also increased outreach relating to library instruction. However, with in-class time always at a premium, we started to seek creative ways to provide research assistance that reaches all skill levels and allows us to work around both class time constraints and students' busy schedules. Our efforts resulted in the development of a now highly popular Personal Research Session program. In this article we share the path, shaped by Personal Research Sessions (PRS), which led to our reference service model as it stands in 2016. We also offer themes in Holy Cross' history of reference service that speak to the larger conversation of research and instruction in academic libraries.

Relevant to this larger conversation is a point brought forward by Magi and Mardeusz in 2013, where one student described her feelings about research as "living on the verge in the land of almost," but then followed by "excited" after meeting with a librarian -- demonstrating a boost in confidence in approaching her own research needs. Similarly, Ted Chodock's 2015 assessment project at College of Southern Nevada shows a correlation between library instruction and student success, specifically relating to confidence in conducting students' own research. "Attitudes matter: Student success beyond information literacy" found that students became "more confident about their academic ability after an instruction session"¹. This idea of instilling the confidence needed to approach research methods is what we believe fuels an

¹ Assessment In Action Cohort 2 project: <https://apply.ala.org/aia/docs/project/10171>

individual research service, especially at a small liberal arts college where students are academically driven and often afraid to display a need for help.

Our Personal Research Sessions are managed using Springshare's LibCal product. Each participating librarian identifies 30-minute slots (originally 60 minutes) when they are available for appointments, which are uploaded into LibCal; students can then choose the time that works best for them from among the options in the online calendar (Figure 1). They are asked to fill out a brief form (Figure 2) with information about their assignment and their research topic at the time of booking, ideally giving the librarian enough information to prepare some specific strategies and/or resources in advance. Because these meetings are personalized, they are designed to meet the student at whatever place and skill level they need at the moment -- running the full gamut from finding books in the catalog or assistance with citation styles, to advanced primary source research -- and are scheduled both in conjunction with, and in place of, traditional library instruction.²

The PRS program has made great strides in the availability of valuable research assistance to our students, but it has also been a work in progress. Now in its fifth year, the program has evolved significantly as we learn from its development and from the needs of our student body. We have watched the number of PRS grow exponentially as numbers of extended desk transactions have fallen steadily (Figure 3). It also has allowed us to think differently about

² As part of the ACRL Assessment in Action Cohort 3, the Libraries are currently engaged in a project to assess this relationship between PRS and library instruction, specifically in the context of the Montserrat program.

our services on a broader scale, and to reimagine what our future ideal model of reference service might look like, especially as we evaluate shifting student academic behavior.³

Literature

Much of the literature dealing with personal research assistance offers positive results from student feedback, and though there is no question that academic libraries are moving more toward individualized research service, there aren't specific examples of bigger changes in reference departments overall due to that shift. A tiered approach to reference started decades ago, particularly with the Brandeis Model. A *Journal of Academic Librarianship* study (Stalker & Murfin 1996) analyzed the structure and success of this model compared to two other more traditional models of reference in use at the time. In terms of parallel desk service and personal service, some libraries offer appointments to supplement physical reference desk assistance, while others are moving away from desk coverage and replacing it to some degree with individual reference.

Our focus centers on recent developments in the effects of personalized service on a traditional reference desk schedule. There are several articles published before 2000 that speak to the seed of that change being planted: Caroline E. Rowe in 1991; Schobert in 1982; Bergen and MacAdam, and Gillian Debreczeny, both in 1985. Brandeis' account (Herman 1994) of their tiered reference service, while more drop-in than appointment-based, does begin the conversation about alternative approaches to reference that leads to more structured programs along the same lines in other libraries around the country. In 1995, Ewing and Hauptman explored the future of traditional reference service asking, among other questions, "What are the key characteristics of reference departments that are making a successful transition?" We argue

³ At the same time, campus administration has begun to focus on the library as a whole with a committee commissioned with reporting on best practices in building renovations: The Dinand 2020 Committee. http://www.holycross.edu/sites/default/files/files/libraries/dinand2020_report_4-30-14.pdf

here that one such characteristic is the in-depth, personal reference interview and its subsequent research inquiries and student-librarian relationships.

Magi and Mardeusz's (2013) evidence follows that same conclusion, describing University of Vermont students as clearly preferring face-to-face consultations. They cite several benefits: a relaxed, private environment, the opportunity to prepare by reviewing resources and consulting with colleagues, and a better chance to teach skills useful for students' independent research. Their qualitative study brought forth valuable results that expanded on what we already suspected about students' academic behavior: successful encounters with a librarian lead to a higher level of confidence in researching, especially when that encounter covers topics beyond typical database or catalog searching.

Cardwell, Furlong and O'Keeffe (2002) also explored the benefits of this admittedly "labor-intensive service" within bigger work responsibilities. They described the service as appealing for librarians, with "no phone calls, no line of patrons, no printers needing paper." This aspect seems to factor into many librarians' decisions about how to re-assign tasks within the reference department, specifically replacing some desk hours with personal research sessions and making better use of librarians' time. The desk itself, as Sonntag and Palsson (2007) said so well, is no longer the "sacred cow." Though typically reference staff debate about the pros and cons of holding physical desk hours as part of a regular schedule, we find increasing evidence of librarians appreciating the chance to prepare for in-depth reference questions as opposed to sitting for hours at a time, waiting for the odd in-depth question, with little return on investment of time. An illustration of this phenomenon is Drucker's philosophy of systematic or organized abandonment⁴, which appears in several librarian-authored articles, illustrating the need for

⁴ See p. 64 of Drucker's *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, Harper Business, 1999 for further discussion of this philosophy.

assessment-based decision-making in public services. For example, in 2011, Marianne Ryan and Julie Garrison quoted Drucker in their presentation of changes made at Grand Valley State University: “[he] suggests that for businesses and institutions of higher learning alike, the practice of systematically reviewing and abandoning dying or declining services and products is necessary to create change and innovate for the future.”⁵ If statistics show a dramatic drop in numbers at the reference desk, but at the same time show a rise in individual or other reference requests (like virtual, emailed, or in-office drop ins), then it is an obvious choice to embrace the chance to innovate, to change, to move forward with service that most resonates with our users.

Along the same lines, but in a spirit of inclusion of all types of service, Jastram and Zawistoski’s chapter in “The Desk and Beyond: Next Generation Reference Services,” (2008) marked the reference desk as once the “cornerstone” of reference service but now as part of a “suite” of reference services designed to more effectively and aptly provide research assistance to users. They echoed other articles in describing the benefits of personal service: working together, uninterrupted, with the student not only on finding articles but also on strategies for researching and on principles of critical thinking and information literacy. The marketing and assessment of the program is discussed, and the authors end by asserting that individual research service can even be a protection of sorts, helping to maintain librarians’ relevancy on campus. Similarly, Gale and Evans, in 2007, embraced the “suite” idea, with personal research as a complement to desk service. They explained one-on-one instruction as a necessary reinforcement of newly learned information-seeking skills. Similar to our findings through end of semester surveys, the assessment of student satisfaction from Gale and Evans’ research sessions revealed a

⁵ Garrison’s colleague Doug Way (with Colleen Lyon at UT Austin) furthered those ideas in “Good enough: The new face of reference,” http://works.bepress.com/doug_way/18

high level of satisfaction, and they found that marketing the consultation service through instruction sessions and through faculty members was most effective. Though Gale and Evans are librarians at a much larger university (16,000 undergraduates at Missouri State vs. Holy Cross' 2900), their findings mimic ours. One excerpt particularly resonates with our philosophy:

Perhaps the most valuable finding in the surveys is that both students and librarians embrace the research consultation service as highly valuable. It is worth it....The primary role of academic librarians is not simply to provide research materials, but to assist students in their process of becoming competent, independent users of information.

(p. 95)

Hua Yi's case study (2003) at California State University San Marcos illustrated the same idea of complementing one service with another. She showed that Individual Research Consultation Services, through careful monitoring and archiving of requests, was a valuable addition to library instruction and other reference services.

And Lizah Ismail, in "What net generation students really want" (2009), doesn't speak directly to personal research, but instead studies the habits of students and what form of help (mostly online) they respond to. After trying online chat, "reference on the road," and embedding a personal librarian into Moodle courses, Ismail's reference department sought to establish a model that best fit their student body. She refers to a common finding in the literature - that one size does not fit all - when figuring out an optimum information literacy strategy. Theresa Arndt (2010) addressed the "one size does not fit all" philosophy at Dickinson College, where she asserts that personal reference service is one of a cadre of services, and she offers a checklist of questions to consider when restructuring a reference department: What is the effect of the service

model on staff morale, for example? What about online services for commuter students (if you have them)? How do your users prefer to ask for help?

In a direct complement to Ismail's article, Deborah Lee (2004) discussed a program at Mississippi State where sessions were offered beyond the typical undergraduate research requests to pre-dissertation student requests and even faculty refresher sessions. Lee's article is an expose on the structure, performance expectations, and marketing of the program, and she explains that while it was a success overall, improvements might include two major components: addressing the labor intensity for librarians, and assessing thoroughly the experiences of participating students.

Finally, the closest example to our model from recent literature is Oberlin College's Library. Oberlin's size and scope of curriculum is similar to Holy Cross: +/- 2900 undergraduates, residential, liberal arts, and library services "built around a popular and well-established research consultation service." Mitchell, Comer, Starkey, and Francis (2011) describe their students in this small liberal arts college as expecting personal attention, engaging in ambitious research projects, and often pursuing primary source materials. These characteristics describe our own students as well, and have driven much of the decision-making in our reference department. Elements of other articles appear here too: the desk is the "centerpiece"; services are "now built around a popular and well-established research consultation service"; and like us, they have "shifted professionals' time toward teaching and research appointments". As we've seen in much of the literature, and as is evident both with Oberlin and with us at Holy Cross, the "paradigm shifts" come from librarians' reactions to changing student behavior. Major increases in appointment requests prove the newer service a success in achieving a higher return on investment of time.

History of Research Support in Dinand Library

Until fairly recently, the Holy Cross Libraries relied on a traditional “just in case” model of reference service, centered on the Reference Desk in the main branch, Dinand Library. For the past decade, the desk had been staffed by a professional librarian most hours from 9:30am until 10:00pm, Sunday through Thursday. The desk, itself almost fortress-like, is situated at the head of Dinand’s Main Reading Room -- an imposing, two-story space, with large columns -- and beneath a large, decorative crucifix (Figure 4). The desk’s location at the front of a popular study area, combined with the acoustics of the space, ensures that students cannot approach without being seen and/or overheard by their peers. While we were still seeing a reasonable amount of traffic at the reference desk (though with a gradual decline in extended questions), we recognized that its context and format were likely deterrents to students with serious research needs.

By the close of the 2010-11 year, our reference team had already been investigating a number of additional methods of providing reference service. Holy Cross had introduced local virtual reference in 2001, which was then expanded in 2005-06 with the launch of a consortial Virtual Reference Project through the Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities -- enabling us to offer 24/7 service. Student workers, previously absent from the reference program, began to be assigned to the desk alongside librarians in 2006 (albeit with minimal training), in the hope that students might be more willing to approach their peers even at an intimidating service point. And in 2010, with a new Reference/Instruction Librarian --and a fresh approach to the reference program-- in place, we were able to add a text reference service to our repertoire of virtual services.

However, with the problematic context of the reference desk in mind, we began to additionally consider alternate physical spaces for research assistance, alongside the virtual ones. The Access Services Librarian attempted roaming reference in the campus center for a semester, and the reference team offered a drop-in “Researcher’s Workshop” on selected evenings each week for several years. Unfortunately, neither of these initiatives resonated with students (the former, in fact, garnered somewhat of a negative reaction - students felt that the librarians were invading their social spaces), and both were abandoned after one semester and three years, respectively. These efforts were launched in conjunction with other efforts to further integrate the library in the curriculum, particularly via the optional First-Year Program (FYP; now replaced by the required Montserrat program), and to expand what had previously been a minimal bibliographic instruction program.

The library had also begun to note increased requests for instruction in the form of one-on-one consultations. Coming sometimes from faculty on students’ behalf, and sometimes from students themselves, these consultations began on a drop-in basis as part of the Researcher’s Workshops, but eventually grew enough that librarians began to think of them as a separate format of reference service. Consultations were initially combined with the continuation of full reference desk coverage, and scheduled on an individual basis via e-mail. However, as interest in and demand for these consultations grew, it became apparent that a different model would be needed in order for the program to remain sustainable.

Consultations began to take a more significant role in reference service in Fall 2011, when the Reference/Instruction Librarian rolled out a formal Personal Research Consultation program administered through Springshare’s LibCal product. Rather than needing to reach out to an individual librarian and coordinate schedules, students could now book an appointment

using a simple online form, and could identify a convenient appointment time from a list of pre-selected slots (Figure 5). This format seemed to be less intimidating for students who did not want to be seen asking for assistance, and required less time and effort on their part than e-mail arrangements. From the standpoint of reference staff, the LibCal system also significantly diminished the burden of organizing the consultation program, shifting its management from individual e-mails to a centralized online system. A single staff member could now collect, upload and manage 60-minute appointment slots across all participating staff. As a further benefit, the presence of a single, online calendar made it easier to promote consultations as an identifiable and branded service offered by the reference team.

After the launch of the LibCal calendar and branding of the Personal Research Consultation program (later renamed Personal Research Session or PRS), the number of individual consultations expanded from an estimated 45 in 2010-2011, to 159 appointments in the 2011-2012 academic year. The Head of Reader Services began to note in annual reports that the physical desk perhaps wasn't the right venue to handle these appointments, particularly considering the noise and privacy concerns inherent in the Main Reading Room location. The reference librarians' offices at that time were not a viable alternative for appointments: they were cramped, hidden in the stacks, and due to their remoteness posed potential safety issues during evening and weekend hours. It was determined that a new location was key to the program's continuing success. To meet this need, the library constructed two new cubicles specifically reserved for research consultations (Figure 6). The introduction of this new Research Consultation Area, along with the increasing popularity and apparent effectiveness of the PRS program, marked a turning point in the Libraries' approach to reference service, and initiated thoughts of bigger, future changes.

As part of the PRS program, but also as part of a larger movement in academic librarianship in general, the Libraries began looking more seriously at the need to increase outreach to our community and to the student population especially. The Reference/Instruction Librarian's position was revamped upwards into a "Coordinator of Research & Instruction Services" position, whose role would be to take the lead in marketing and organizing the PRS program to complement a still-full desk schedule. At this point, four full-time librarians were providing reference desk coverage from 9:30am to 10:00pm, five days a week, separately from individual research appointments. In the year between May 2012 and May 2013, the number of these appointments more than doubled, and it became apparent that the rising numbers of appointments combined with expanding outreach efforts were straining the resources of the existing reference team. The Libraries sought and were granted the ability to create an additional position for a "Research, Instruction & Outreach Librarian," who began her duties in August 2013. Almost simultaneously, the Head of Reader Services retired, highlighting an opportunity to further re-envision the reference department. A revised job description was posted and then filled in October 2013: "Head of Research & Instruction Services."

After the new positions had settled in for about a year, the reference team reviewed the reference schedule and began to think through new trends in service. A few things were clear to the team: 1) PRS was a highly successful and effective program. 2) We wanted to protect a sustainable workday as professionals, to support work-life balance as well as to enable us to serve on committees and participate in faculty-driven projects, first-year cluster responsibilities, and instruction opportunities. 3) College of the Holy Cross students are particularly attracted to one-on-one service, and a system of PRS along with open office hours in librarian offices matched the kind of academic behavior our students already recognized and responded to.

In response to these realizations, beginning in Fall 2014, librarians adopted a new schedule for reference service: evening hours would be held five nights a week until 8pm, rather than 10pm, and “desk” hours during both daytime and evening hours would now be held on-call in librarian offices. Librarians committed to ‘checking in’ with circulation and student reference staff at the start of each shift as well as to maintaining an open office presence and a schedule free of other commitments. We knew it would be important to regularly review statistics and feedback to make sure things were still progressing smoothly, which, in the first semester, they seemed to do. Adding to our confidence in this choice was the presence of student workers on the reference desk throughout both daytime and evening hours, who we felt were well-trained in customer service and the basics of research -- and, more importantly, in recognizing questions that might require a higher level of expertise than theirs, and in being comfortable calling on that expertise.

We were prompted to make new adjustments for the Spring 2015 semester: statistics did not support the need for librarians to be present five nights a week throughout the semester, and the existing model felt less sustainable following several staffing changes. Instead, evening and weekend reference would begin at the midpoint in each semester⁶, and would be offered only on Sundays and Mondays (two of our busier evenings). Our daytime model would remain the same for the Spring 2015 semester, with on-call shifts from 10am to 12pm and 3pm to 5pm Monday through Thursday. This model, too, seemed successful, with encouraging feedback from our student workers and Student Advisory Committee; however, we were prompted to make changes again in Fall 2015, in response to a cutback in our student worker budget. As this change limited

⁶ We consider fall and spring breaks, and statistics, from previous years to determine the best time to begin evening shifts.

the number of daytime hours when students would be available to cover the desk, we made the decision to reinstate one shift sitting at the physical desk, each afternoon from Monday to Thursday.

Despite extended reference statistics remaining fairly low as of Fall 2015, our staff felt it was still important to have an immediate presence at the desk during daytime hours. We now view this revived afternoon shift as a welcome compromise to an evolving schedule, and a minimal intrusion into our other responsibilities. We do recognize the value of having a professional presence at the desk into the evening hours, and have been investigating the possibility of contracting with a library school student who could provide such a presence while earning field experience. With or without that help, though, we feel that the current model provides, for the time being, an appropriate level of service given the needs and habits of our local student body.

Administrative challenges

At the time of this writing, we have a team of librarians in the main library as well as branch librarians actively participating in PRS. This means we can offer research assistance in music, STEM, and visual arts, as well as the core curriculum, with all hands on deck. Our schedules are not saturated, and we enjoy a high level of professional satisfaction with the intellectual stimulation we gain from working with each student. We have strong communication with our student assistants and circulation staff, so that on-call hours are a welcome and effective alternative to the reference desk. With more responsibility at the desk, student assistants have a bigger stake in customer service, and the student training program, which we continue to ramp up each semester, adds some weight to their rank and credibility as peer researchers.

There have been bumps in the road with our Personal Research Sessions. Starting in 2013 we noticed a few occurrences of faculty requiring PRS following or in place of an instruction session, resulting in an overload of requests that occasionally overwhelmed librarian schedules. The workload associated with this type of service is well recognized in the library literature. Cardwell, Furlong and O’Keeffe (2001) mention both overall time commitment and the balance of staff time vs. value of consultations among the factors libraries might consider in implementing and/or continuing such programs; Attebury, Sprague and Young (2009) reference similar concerns both in their own experiences at University of Idaho and in their review of the literature. Faix, MacDonald and Taxakis (2014) addressed similar issues at Coastal Carolina University from a different perspective, attempting to determine the relative benefit of consultations for students in different class years and to use this data to prioritize scheduling when the number of requests became unsustainable. In our context, we welcomed the growing interest in our PRS program, and so far have not come to a point of turning students away; however, we began to wonder about the best way, if not prioritizing, to address future request ‘overloads’ -- and came upon only one real solution. In instruction sessions, our librarians now emphasize the availability of the reference staff as a whole (rather than a ‘personal librarian’ model), and encourage students to schedule appointments through the LibCal calendar rather than contacting the hosting librarian directly. Students value the ability to meet with a librarian who is already familiar with their assignment, so to offer that level of personalization, our instruction librarians now make a point of sharing syllabi, assignments and other class information in a ‘repository’ accessible to the entire team. This allows us to safely point students to the calendar, knowing that any one librarian will have access to their class materials and be able to meet the student’s needs even if they did not host the class themselves. We would

recommend this system of sharing materials and distributing PRS to any libraries experimenting with a consultation model; it has certainly made a difference in keeping our workloads and schedules sustainable.

Looking back to 2005, the current role of the librarian in research and instruction has changed dramatically at College of the Holy Cross. Benefits to this increase in pedagogical practice include better relationships with students and faculty, as we are seen more as peers in the intellectual sphere of higher education, contributing to student learning outcomes. This goes hand in hand with the College's "Report from the Dinand 2020 Committee." The Dinand 2020 Committee, though convened to look at best practices in library building renovations, offered ideas and recommendations applied to the service and program initiatives within the library as much as the library building itself. The report cited that improvements are needed to establish Dinand Library as "the intellectual hub of the College.....support[ing] current and future pedagogical needs.....and reaffirm[ing] the active and critical role Dinand plays in our pursuit of academic excellence." It is with this committee and report that the college is paying full attention to progress, innovation and academic leadership in the library. The Holy Cross research librarians have an opportunity to excel in that role and to match our professional positions to best practices in the structure of reference programs in academia today.

Looking forward: Assessment in Action

At the time of this writing, we are participating in ACRL's Assessment in Action Cohort Three (AY 2015-2016). "Personal Research Sessions and source selection in freshman papers" is a project that applies a rubric to freshman research papers. A team of five Holy Cross librarians designed the rubric under the guidance of our Office of Assessment. We will judge students' selection of research sources, after experiencing a PRS and/or instruction session, compared to

those students who did not experience a PRS. The rubric targets citation technique, an appropriate evaluation of sources, and a demonstration of sophisticated independent thinking about source types.

If the project yields significant results of PRS translating into better source selection, then we will have the evidence to push forward with a reference plan centered on personal service. This may include shifting of duties, training of more librarians to conduct PRS, refining of the sign-up process, or even a programmatic approach to addressing more than one student from the same class, a phenomenon that periodically will overwhelm our librarians. Conversely, if we discover that PRS are not significantly aiding in better research skills, that too may affect how we organize our time, physical presence, and on-call hours.

Future of the reference program

As our reference staff becomes more stable with new hires and solid PRS participation, we look to the future of our program with increased assessment of PRS, ever-growing training for our reference student workers, and other assessments that will inform the renovation committees tasked with library space changes in the next 5-6 years.

We know that our reference student workers embrace the challenges of handling research questions; our goal is to push their knowledge even further, taking advantage of some of the training ideas we've seen in the literature. Games, treasure hunts, co-teaching instruction sessions, writing original pieces for a blog or book review: all of these ideas point toward a more robust model of training our students. And, with a successful Library Student Advisory Committee, we have the potential of gaining valuable insights from our students too, as we assess and act upon those compliments and concerns that students forward to us. As far as assessments of PRS, we hope to avoid survey-saturation; we survey sessions regularly and

quickly, and then conquer longer assessments by piggybacking onto already existing surveys sent out by our Office of Assessment. In addition to seeking out opinions of our students, we have also started to document our own work (what we covered in each PRS) and own opinions of what might be missing, what we could improve, what we are doing well. And, in the context of all this lies simple concern for customer satisfaction. With less coverage hours on the physical desk, we must ensure a level of customer service that meets the needs of our constituents. All of these assessments must point us toward actions that will lead us to a goal of providing excellent research service while making the best use of our time either at or away from the reference desk.

Concurrently, in reading the literature and in speaking with several academic librarians at professional conferences, the issue of holding office hours and staffing fewer hours at the reference desk is still under scrutiny. Many librarians comment that they miss being part of the action if they're not at the desk. They worry about missing the serendipitous reference interview that winds up forging a new relationship with a student, and believe that the face of the library includes the faces of reference librarians offering help at a physical desk. However, based on the level of instruction and support we offer through PRS versus the types and quality of the questions we receive at the desk, our staff has unanimously decided that it is more valuable to invest that time fully engaged in PRS. We believe our decisions reflect the needs of the Holy Cross student body. As we found in several other libraries' articles, a few philosophies apply here: We have made program decisions according to the changing behaviors of our students; PRS is a valuable complement to other information literacy instruction components; and after a successful marketing strategy and demonstrated buy-in from faculty and students alike, we believe that our reference model as it functions now is entirely worthwhile.

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The screenshot shows the 'Ask a Librarian: Research Assistance' page on the Holy Cross Library Services website. The page features a navigation menu with 'Research Assistance', 'Frequently Asked Questions', and 'Research Librarians'. A search bar is located at the top right. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column, titled 'Schedule a Personal Research Session', includes a text box explaining that appointments are made with Dinand Library Reference and provides instructions on how to schedule a session. Below this, there are 'Select Date' and 'Select Time' sections. The 'Select Date' section shows a calendar for December 2015, with the 10th highlighted. The 'Select Time' section shows a grid of time slots: 9:00am, 10:00am, 10:30am, 11:00am, 11:30am, 1:00pm, 1:30pm, 2:00pm, and 2:30pm. The right column, titled 'Schedule a Science, Music, or Art Research Session', contains three buttons: 'Schedule Music Research Session', 'Schedule Science Research Session', and 'Schedule Art & Architecture Research Session'. Below these buttons is a red button for 'Schedule a worcester art museum Research Session' with the website 'www.worcesterart.org'. At the bottom, there is a 'Contact Us 24/7' section with a chat window titled 'HC Libraries Chat' and contact information: text at (508) 784-1685, call at (508) 793-2289, email at libref@holycross.edu, and a note to visit the library. A footer note states that the chat service is available 24/7 and that the library is available to Holy Cross students, faculty, and staff only.

Figure 1. "Ask a Librarian" page for appointment booking

Schedule a Personal Research Session

Schedule a Personal Research Session

Appointment with: Dinand Library Reference [Change](#)
 Location: Eileen Cravedi, Dinand 103
 Date: Thursday, December 10, 2015
 Start Time: 9:00am

Your Details * Required field

Name *

Email *

Please tell us a little bit about your research: *

Are you coming with a group? *

Yes
 No

What class is your research for? *

Is this a Montserrat class? *

Yes
 No

Please tell us your professor's name (in case we're already familiar with your class/assignment): *

[Confirm Appointment](#)

Figure 2. Appointment booking form.

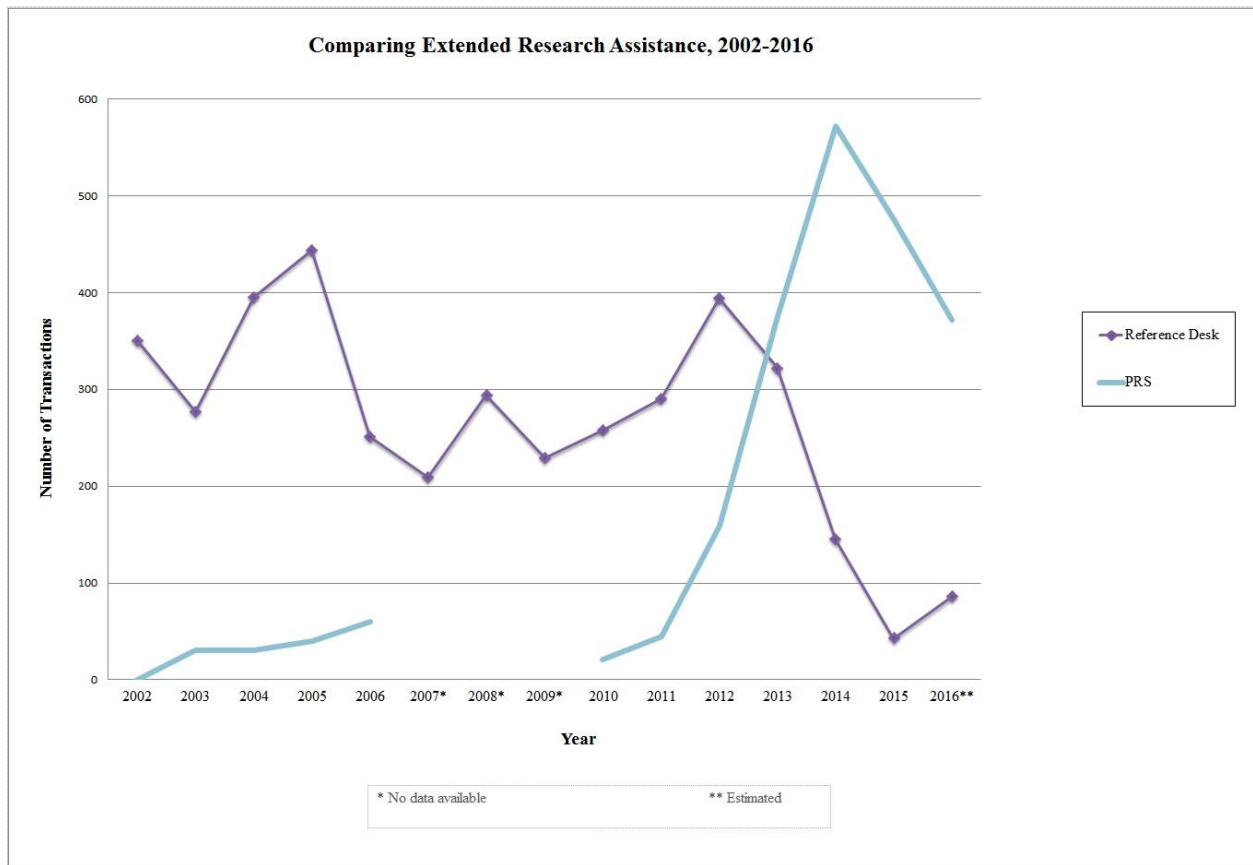


Figure 3. Extended research help (desk and PRS), 2002-2016.