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Making reference personal: Student and faculty outreach through Personal Research Sessions

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Making
Reference Personal:
Student and faculty outreach through Personal Research Sessions

Jennifer L.A. Whelan,
College of the Holy Cross Libraries

Bridging the Spectrum 8th Annual Symposium
The Catholic University of America
February 12, 2016
BACKGROUND: OUR LIBRARIES & PRS
Holy Cross……..and Our Libraries

• Undergraduate-only, Jesuit, liberal arts college in Worcester, MA

• ~2,900 students, student-faculty ratio 9.7:1

• No specific sequence of required courses; first-year program (Montserrat) is not standardized

• 5 libraries:
  – Main (Dinand)
  – Branches (Science, Music, Visual Resources)
  – Art museum library (off-site)

• Currently 3 reference generalists, plus 4 subject specialists in branches
How Did We Get Here?

- **2001**: Chat introduced. Librarians staff desk 9:30am-10pm Sun-Thurs
- **2002**: Some faculty request consultations as alternate form of instruction
- **2006**: Student workers begin to join reference desk with limited training

But where are the Extended Reference questions? …Is the desk too intimidating?
Personal Research Sessions (PRS)

- Originally informal, via e-mail; formalized Fall 2011 with addition of LibCal
- Originally 60 min (now 30 min) slots submitted by librarians each week
- **Generalists** - subject specialists booked separately
Personal Research Sessions (PRS)
# Personal Research Sessions (PRS)

## Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6pm</td>
<td>Appointment with Professor Danielson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30pm</td>
<td>Appointment with Jennifer Whelan, Dinand 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30pm</td>
<td>Appointment with Jennifer Whelan, Dinand 208</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Forwarded message

**From:** alerts@mail.local.com  
**Date:** Sat, Dec 12, 2015 at 1:29 PM  
**Subject:** You have a new scheduled appointment

---

Hi,

You have a New Appointment!

When: Sun Dec 13, 2015 7:30pm – 8pm (EST)

Where: Jennifer Whelan, Dinand 208

Who: Unknown Organizer

Please tell us a little bit about your research:

Are you coming with a group?:

What class is your research for?:

Is this a Montserrat class?:

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

---

7:30pm Sunday, December 13, 2015 Jennifer Whelan, Dinand 208

I am researching the medical response to chemical weapons during World War I.

No

Historian's craft

No

Professor Etoke
SUCCESS?
Encouraging Growth…

**Annual PRS Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th># of PRS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>159</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>375</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>571</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>472*</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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</table>

*Slight decrease attributed to staffing changes*
...And Positive Feedback

• “What would have taken me an afternoon of bumbling around in the library's shelves took only a half hour and I left with better sources than I had anticipated.” (PRS Survey 2011)

• “The librarian helps you find sources in places you would never even think to look, and I've had some experience with research. “(PRS Survey 2013)

• “I enjoyed being able talk through problems with someone who is really knowledgeable, but is not my professor. The librarians make really helpful source lists that are specific to the class and are very willing to go through the basics of the databases.” (PRS Survey 2015)
Instruction & Faculty Collaboration

- Can serve as extension of in-class instruction OR an alternative when faculty can’t fit us in

- PRS ‘patterns’ help us identify/contact faculty whose courses would benefit from instruction

- Multiple requests each year to host ‘required’ PRS for all course levels

- And -- most students say they learned about PRS from a faculty member
LOOKING FORWARD
Assessment in Action

- Part of Cohort 3 (2015-2016) in ACRL’s Assessment in Action Program

- Evaluating freshman research papers for ability to properly integrate research, comparing students with PRS vs. students with no PRS

Stay tuned!
Rethinking Reference Service

Comparing Extended Research Assistance, 2002-2016

- **Reference Desk**
- **PRS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reference Desk</th>
<th>PRS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2016**</td>
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</table>

* No data available
** Estimated
Rethinking Reference Service

• Shifting primary emphasis from reference desk hours to instruction and PRS

• Splitting time between on-call and on-desk

• Resuming evening hours after mid-semester break, and cutting back from 10pm to 8pm

• Ramping up training program for reference students

• Continuing to assess needs from observation, surveys and conversations with our students
Know Your Campus Community

• Our faculty…
  – Hesitate to lose class time
  – Overestimate student skills
  – Expect self-directed learning

• Our students…
  – Are comfortable with “office hours”
  – Hesitate to be seen asking questions
  – Do not make extensive use of services like 24/7 chat, reference desk, or roving reference
Keep it Sustainable

• Automate administration as much as possible

• Be realistic about appointment availability

• Spread the PRS ‘wealth’

• Worksheets help standardize preparation

• And of course…
Communicate!

Reference & Instruction Group

Student Workers

Join the
LIBRARY STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

be an advocate
share your ideas
boost your resume

Student Advisory Committee
Thank You!

Questions? Contact: jwhelan@holycross.edu