From Dawn to Desk
Finding the Sparkle in Everyday Reference Practice

BACKGROUND

Who? All RIS staff/faculty who worked at the research desk
What? Study to analyze research desk traffic
When? “Typical” week in fall 2018 and spring 2019
How? Qualtrics survey
Why? Do our current staffing levels align with the difficulties of questions asked? Do our current statistics gathering techniques capture the information we’re most interested in?

TOP LEVEL RESULTS

• 401 total questions recorded
• Nearly 90% questions took less than 5 minutes
• Over 60% were either print, supplies, or library information questions
• About 2/3 of questions involved no teaching at all
• Nearly 90% of questions were rated not challenging at all
• Overall READ scale average was 1.8
• Reference READ scale average was 2.7

The overall average READ scale rating was 1.8 on a 1 to 6 scale.

The READ scale ratings aligned with how challenging we found questions: Higher rated questions were deemed more challenging.

The overall average READ scale rating was 1.8 on a 1 to 6 scale.

Over 60% of questions involved print, supplies, or library information.

Analysis

We used the READ Scale to analyze the “difficulty” of each question. Scale categorizes questions on a 1-6 “difficulty” ranking (http://readscale.org/).

We coded separately first, then met to calibrate how we coded. Finally, we averaged our final ratings and reconciled those questions that we coded differently.

To follow up on scaling, we used specific content tags for each question type, which helped us understand the content and substance of the questions beyond the broad categories of reference, directional and technical.

Actions Taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous desk model</th>
<th>New desk model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly equal staff and faculty hours</td>
<td>Faculty hours reduced, staff hours increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate assistants in evening hours</td>
<td>Increased GA hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desk closed at 12 midnight</td>
<td>Desk closes at 10 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM chat shift from 10 am – 4 pm</td>
<td>On-call shifts substituted for back-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next Steps

• Emphasizing teaching moments in more interactions
• Additional trainings for RIS staff and faculty
• Focus on research desk as extension of library instruction
• Continue desk study in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020
• Develop survey for students to complete judging satisfaction with transaction

Walter Lanham, Library University Technician, East Carolina University
lanhamw17@ecu.edu

Meghan Wanucha Smith, Health & Human Services Librarian, UNC Wilmington
smithmw@uncw.edu