Ask Us

a UoG Pilot Project

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TUG Conference, April 19, 2013
User Services Review - 2010

- role of the Library’s service desks was reviewed in the context of:

- behaviours and needs of users
- usage data
- emerging trends here and elsewhere
- changing organizational structure of the Library
- strategic directions of the Library and the University
USR report - Spring 2011

- Main recommendation – By Fall 2012 create a new service model around a single service desk integrating circulation and reference functions and existing staff.

The model should:

- Reduce complexity for our users
- Enable our users to be self-sufficient
- Make it easy for our users to know where to go to get the help they need
- Provide the level of help our users need when and where they need it
By Fall of 2012 !!!

The User Services Review created an organizational structure to allow us to implement the recommendations:

- Steering Committee and 6 Working Groups:
  - Service Philosophy, Standards, Competencies and Training
  - Research Help Referrals and Appointment Booking
  - Data Collection and Service Assessment Scheduling
  - Self-Service
  - Facilities and Space
So what happened?

• Not all the working groups started working
• We tried to work in the framework provided but there were very big issues facing us
• The main one was what did “staff integration” look like
• How do we merge two very different staff groups together at a single service point
• Ultimately we ended up negotiating a different path
Fall 2012

• Phase 1 of our changes

• Physical redesign of the first floor:
  • Consolidated Circulation Services
  • Removed the Research Help Desk
  • Created a triage point
  • Created research help space
  • Developed a new approach to research help
  • Did not integrate the staff
Ask Us Service

Model embraces existing “reference” activities

✅ A tiered service model

• Triage point = Ask Us Desk (AUD)
  • Directional, routine and reference
  • Working to a 5 minute interaction time
  • Meet the user’s need and help them succeed

• Research Help Appointments (on-call staff) (RHA)
  • In-depth reference questions
  • Immediate or later at user’s need
  • Working to a 20 minute time limit

• Appointment-based Consultations with librarians
  • Grad students, faculty, upper undergrads
Ask Us Desk, September 2013
Stats comparison

Level I & II questions increased by 367.3%.

Level III & referrals decreased by 80.1%.

Red = Reference or Level III/IV
Blue = Dir & Routine or Level I/II


So does it work?

- Branding and location important
- AUD becoming a “central hub” for the library
- Shorter questions / higher volume
- The “get them started” philosophy works
- Much closer connections with library units
- Ask Us is the front end for all library located services
Student perceptions

• Research help / reference is NOT a high priority
• Physical space and the environment is a high priority
• Students do not differentiate between the functions of various desks – they just want help
• AUD gets positive reviews
  • Easy to find and approachable
  • Students feel comfortable asking anything