

Kelvin Smith Library: Reference/Research Services for 2007-08

Background

Kelvin Smith Library offers reference assistance at three main service points:

- Reference Desk in the Kelvin Smith Library
- Kulas Music Library (Haydn Hall)
- Special Collections (Housed in Kelvin Smith Library)

Supplemental remote services offered from two points:

- Case School of Engineering, Nord Hall 509/510
- Weatherhead School of Management, Peter B. Lewis Building lobby

The Kelvin Smith Library is the main library for Case Western Reserve University. It houses collections and services for Case faculty, students, and staff in of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Case School of Engineering, and the Weatherhead School of Management. Reference service is provided in a variety of formats.

- In person reference assistance is provided at the KSL Reference desk during the semester on Monday - Thursday 9am-10pm, Friday 9am-5pm, Saturday 9am-5:30pm, and Sunday 1pm-5pm.
- Chat Reference service began 4 years ago. Within the last year hours were expanded and now include Monday - Thursday 1pm-10pm, Friday 1pm-5pm, and Saturday 9am-5:30pm.
- E-mail service continued. Questions can be sent to our e-mail box (ulrefer@case.edu) at any time and replies are made within 24 hrs.
- Instant messaging (IM) reference service – began in August of 2007. Offered the same hours as chat reference.

Kulas Music Library is a satellite library of Kelvin Smith Library. It houses Case's library collections in the area of music. The library contains 45,000 items, including music scores, books on music, sound recordings, video recordings, microforms and music periodicals. Reference service is provided all of the hours that the Library is open

Monday: 8:30am-9pm, Tuesday: 8:30am-5pm, Wednesday 8:30am-9pm,
Thursday-Friday: 8:30am-5pm, Saturday: 10am-4pm, Sunday: 1pm-5pm

The Department of Special Collections houses the rare books, manuscripts, and special collections of University Library. These areas of the Library were designed to provide protective and controlled environments for such materials which, because of their rarity, value, fragility, ephemeral nature, or because they are part of a distinctive subject or author collection, require special care and handling. Reference assistance is provided all of the hours the department is open.

Monday through Friday: 9am-12pm and 1pm-5pm

Discussion

For the academic year 2007-2008 in-person reference assistance continued to make up the major portion of our interactions with our community. We experienced a drop of 12% in the overall number of reference transactions, with the number of queries declining at the formal service desks being the major factor (26% drop). We experienced a 56% increase in direct consultations with librarians. We saw requests to the email Reference account drop but a similar number of transactions were gained from our chat services.

The reduction of transactions at the formal physical service points can be explained by a two factors.

- We began using a new technique for collecting data. Staff had to get used to using it on a regular basis. Also the software had to be adjusted several times throughout the year to accurately reflect the types of questions received and patrons served.
- The tendency being found across all academic libraries for patrons to conduct more of their research from a remote location (such as office, home or dorm room).

Of note:

- Reference staff observed that questions they receive are more in depth and complicated. It seems that patrons are beginning research on their own and then asking for assistance when they encounter a problem or don't know how to proceed. They are becoming more research intensive.
- Special Collections recorded a 34% increase in consultations.

As would be expected with more work being done outside the library, reference assistance provided through the Reference e-mail account and chat has grown to 9% of our total number of questions for 2007-2008 (7% in 2006-07 and 6% in 2005-06). If you include emails direct to librarians, 27% of all transactions are occurring online. We expect this trend to continue. We also increased our presence on campus blogs, wikis, and forums, which may have caught the attention of those to whom e-transactions would be most appealing.

Interesting Observations

- The busiest date was Monday, March 3, 2008 with 113 questions, which was 37 questions more than the next busiest day.
- The 6 busiest days were all Mondays.
- 22% of all questions occur on Mondays. The other days: Tuesday and Wednesday are next at about 18% each; Thursday 17%; Friday 14%; Saturday 6%; and Sunday 5%.
- We received questions on 96% of the calendar days.
- 80% of the questions occurred within the top 55% of the busiest days.
- 57% of help went to students; public 13%; faculty 12%.

- 64% of questions are in-person; 15% phone; 13% direct email to librarian; 7% Reference email account.
- 2pm-5pm are the 3 busiest hours and account for about 1/3 of all questions.