Development of a Peer Research Consultant (PRC) Program

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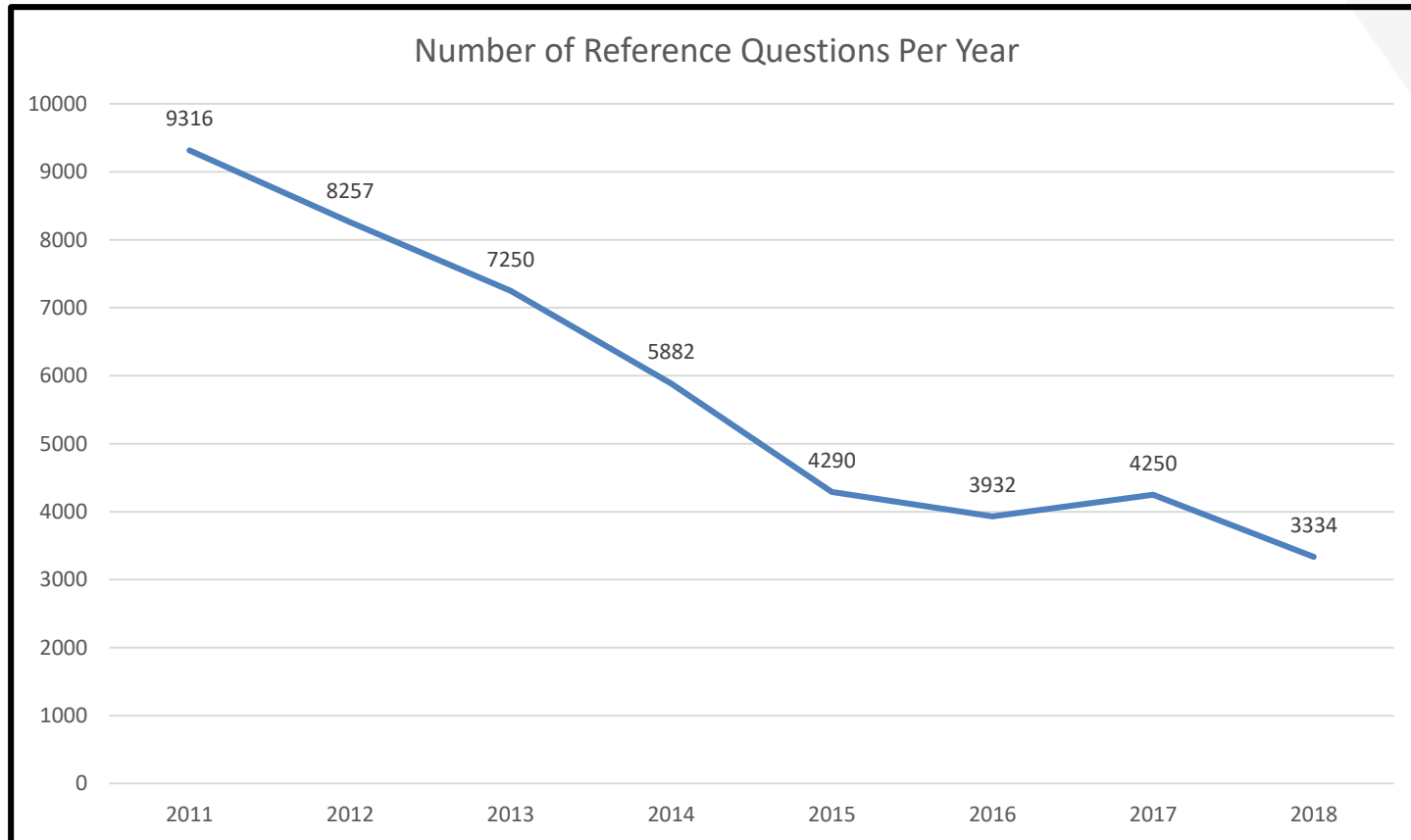Holly Gabriel, MPH, MLS, Business & Government Documents Librarian

NDLA Annual Conference
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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
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The Starting Point

ACRL reported that at U.S. university libraries

– 57% decline in reference questions

from 2001 to 2012

Chester Fritz Library, UND

Number of Reference Questions Per Year

Responsibilities and Priorities

Librarian responsibilities

- Staff desk
- Library instruction
- Collection development
- In-depth research appointments
- Serve on committees

Start a PRC Program

Two main reasons:

1. Stop tying up librarians' time in a declining service
   - Librarians will stop staffing desk
   - More time for library instruction
2. Implement High Impact Practice (HIP) of peer mentoring
   - Value students' contribution
   - Prepare students for the workplace

PRC Timeline

- 2015 – Initial Idea

- 2018 – Information Gathering

- Spring 2019 – Built Framework

- Summer 2019 – Program Development

- Fall 2019 – Pilot begins

- Fall 2020 – Knowledge Commons Integration
  - Writing Center
  - Academic Support
  - Career Services

Information Gathering

- Literature Review
  - Student autonomy
  - PRCs and supervisor
- Discussions
  - Administration
  - Librarians
  - Student library employees

Discussion with Administration

- Must have buy-in
  - Library Dean
  - President / Provost
- Aligns with UND Goals
  - Liberal arts foundation
  - Increase graduation rates
  - Enhance discovery
- Paying PRCs
  - Justify higher wages
  - Find funding

ONE UND STRATEGIC PLAN

https://und.edu/about/strategic-plan/

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Discussion with Librarians

- Buy-in from librarians
  - Start with core group
- Losing a favorite task
- Concern about students taking over their job duties
  - Knowing when to refer?
  - Knowing boundaries?
- Creation of PRC expectations document

Rebranding Services

Ask A Librarian changed to Ask Us

Background

- Access Services
  - Strong training program
  - Student promotions
    - Evaluation of Learning Outcomes
    - Strong customer service skills
    - Reference training
- More prepared

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Discussion with Student Workers

- Expressed desire to:
  - Be more helpful for students using the library databases and online resources
  - Understand library research better
- Going beyond triage at the desk
  - offer more in-depth, personalized sessions
  - role in instruction
- Understand the struggle - taken some of the same classes.
- "There is a lot of information that I wish I knew as an undergraduate. My overall goal is to make you a better researcher."

Job Description

- Nine months
- Peer reference assistance
- Assist librarians
- Attend trainings
- Available during business hours

Required Qualifications

- Minimum of three semesters
- Reference training
- Resume, cover letter, class schedule
- Essay
- Communication & customer service
- Critical thinking
- Understand referral process
- Collaboration
- Demonstrated accountability

Preferences

- Evaluation 35/40
- English 130
- 3.0 GPA

Hours & Wages

- 10-15 per week
- $11.10 per hour

Training Tools

- Basic training already complete
- Literature & Libraries
  - Interactive games
  - Group discussion
  - Roleplay
  - Online tutorials
  - Videos
- Student requests
  - Checklists
  - Benchmarks

Image by Gerd Altmann from pixabay.com

https://libguides.und.edu/prc_training

How to Begin

Introducing the Work

Training Projects

Exercises

Mining for In-Depth Resources

Tracking Progress

- Start them where they're at
- Give topic and list of resources to find
- Track progress on worksheet

Tracking Progress

Who:

What:

Where:

When:

Why / Issues:

Contingency Plan:

Resource	
Research Path	
Dates	
Database	
Results Retrieved	
Revised Search Terms	
Results Retrieved	

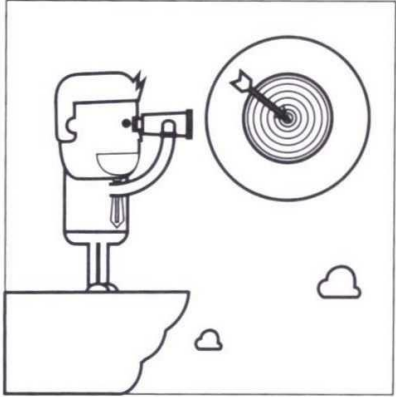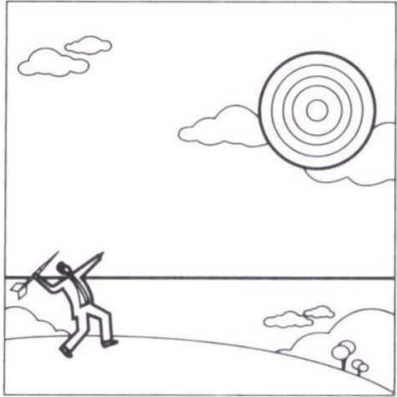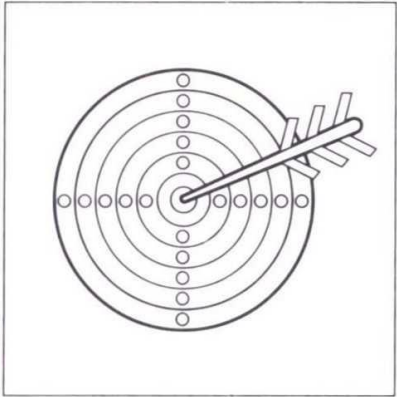| Resource	
Research Path	
Dates	
Database	
Results Retrieved	
Revised Search Terms	
Results Retrieved	

Search Results:

Getting In-depth

- Subject specific assistance
  - When to use specific database topics
  - Unique search strategies
- Sample questions from subject librarians
- Time for training from each subject librarian
- Furthered librarian buy-in for PRC program
  - PRCs could demonstrate their learning
  - Opportunity to clear up misunderstandings

Going Live

- Ask Us Desk
  - Shadow in Fall, on own in Spring
  - Primarily serving walk-up patrons
- Research Appointments
  - "Office Hours" in Starfish
- Instruction
  - English 130 Composition Courses
- Will hire 2 more PRCs

Program Assessment

Learning Goals	Learning Objectives	Learning Outcomes
See the Target	Aim for the Target	Hit the Target

Source: Barkley & Major, Learning
Assessment Techniques, 2016

Goals / Objectives / Outcomes

- See the Target   Clear vision BEFORE beginning PRC recruitment

- Aim for the Target   NACE standards / RUSA

- Hit the Target   Program Improvement / Campus Buy-in

Evaluation Tools

- Rubric based on RUSA guidelines
- Evaluations by subject librarians
  - Documenting research strategies
  - Permalinking results
  - Creation of topic maps
  - Creating a reference dialogue
- Self-reflections with prompts
- Weekly debrief meetings
- Patron feedback (*forthcoming*)

Final Thoughts / Benefits

- Highly sought-after employment skills including research, communication, leadership, peer supervision, conflict management, and critical thinking skills.

- Giving student employees increased responsibility can increase pride in their work. The energy and enthusiasm of student employees can be contagious for all library staff and increase staff morale.

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Thank You! Questions?

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