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Research Consultations and Co-Location Adds Value to the Reference & Information Services and Instruction Continuum: Towards to Holistic Learning Experience at the Singapore Management University Library

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Abstract:

Research Librarians at the Li Ka Shing Library perform multifunctional roles in the areas of collection, information, learning, research and outreach. In this presentation, participants will learn more about the information and learning roles where the former includes the provision of reference and information services and the latter involves the design, development and delivery of instruction and information literacy programmes as part of their student and faculty engagement strategy. They will also learn more about the library's grounded service offering through a learning roadmap for every student which encompasses the following components: Matriculation [Orientation] > In Class Instruction [Information Literacy] > Research Consultations [Small Group Facilitation] > Thematic Training [Topical Knowledge]. In mid-2014, a library space transformation project became a surprise catalyst for change management impacting the Reference and Information Service (R&IS) where a new service model of a single desk replaced the separate information desks. This also warranted the team to start thinking about an enhanced service offering given the declining number of enquiries and upskilling of the para-professionals. Research Librarians were doing more in class instruction and information literacy sessions for courses and the amount of Research Consultations began to increase as a result. The presenter will share a personal case study how he curates a Research Consultation for a writing class for the Centre for English Communication (CEC) that forms a nexus between the information literacy session and R&IS. He will elaborate upon Wayne Bivens-Tatum's (2011) blog posting in which the latter noted that "I tend to think of a research consultation as something in between a standard reference transaction and an instruction session" – an ensuing discussion calling for the need to revisit the Research Consultation as part of R&IS. Scaffolding this, they will hear how through collaboration a new co-location service with the Communication Coaches from the CEC shared the then Information Desk with the Research Librarians and provided the students with a one-stop service within the library. Results from a review of this service will help participants identify practical tips for their own institutions. The presenter will close with parting thoughts on the need to start correlating and triangulating services and data to demonstrate the value and impact of information literacy and instructional classes on reference enquiries where evidence using analytics from self-help tools such as Research Guides, FAQs and online courses in the learning management system help us in our thinking about, we are teaching, but are they learning? and the measurement-value-impact conversation which has already started at the Li Ka Shing Library.

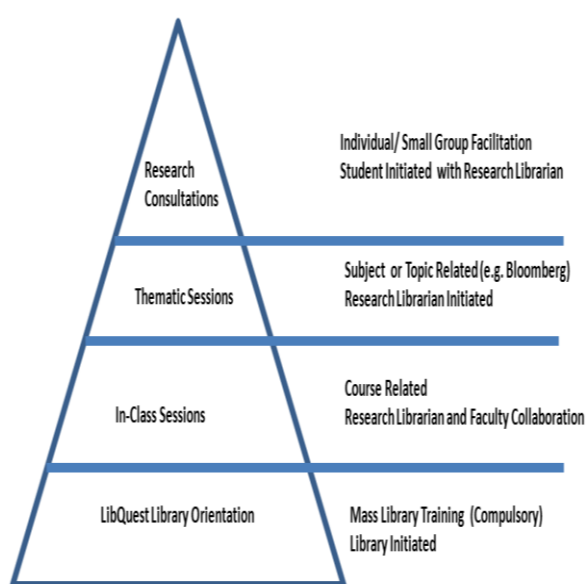
Keywords: information literacy, academic libraries, learning, instruction, case study

1 Introduction

Mitchell, Comer, Starkey, and Francis (2011: 360) referring to their institutional context noted that their “current reference service model has been shaped by five major interrelated factors:

- Increased demand for teaching and instruction;
- Changes in usage of reference services;
- Increased demand for research appointments;
- Changes in the research behavior of undergraduates; and
- Changes in the library’s physical environment.”

Reflecting on their comments the same can be said of the transformations at Li Ka Shing Library in the recent years. In 2014, two significant activities set in motion the process of change. The first was the engagement of an external consultant to review the Information and Learning Services (ILS) and the other was the library space revamp. Both will be elaborated upon in this paper. The ILS Team, comprising of Research Librarians and Librarians curate their services around five key areas of collection, information, learning, research and promotion and outreach as liaisons for faculty and students. In their information role, they provide reference services at the desk and in their learning roles they design, develop and teach research skills workshops and information literacy classes, most of which are one-off. This hybrid role has created a continuum of value-added services built around learning programmes and faculty and student engagement. At the Li Ka Shing Library, every new student has a learning road map that encompasses: Matriculation [Orientation] > In Class Instruction [Information Literacy] > Research Consultations [Individual/Small Group Facilitation] > Thematic Training [Topical Knowledge]. This is grounded with research support and tools such as Research Guides and FAQs to help them in their academic journey. The instructional pyramid in Figure 1 best represents this which is mapped against the fifteen week term (Figure 2). In this paper, the author who is Head of Learning Services and Research Librarian, Business, will highlight through a case study and experiences, how he curates his services as the coordinator of a university-wide course, Programme in Writing and Reasoning (PWR) adding value to the reference or information and instruction continuum.



Week	Programs/Activities	Approaches/Tools
15	Exams	Self-Directed Learning Using Research Guides
12-14	Research Consultations	
9-11	Thematic Training Research Consultations	Blended Learning
8 Recess	Thematic Training Research Consultations	
1-7	In Class Training Academic Writing Research Consultations	
0	Library Orientation	Pre-Survey

Figure 1: Learning Programmes Pyramid

Figure 2: Programmes Mapped to Term Weeks

2 Case Study: WRIT001 Programme in Writing and Reasoning (PWR)

WRIT001 Programme in Writing & Reasoning (PWR), previously called Academic Writing, is a course offered by the Centre for English Communication (CEC) where students are taught the different writing techniques for scholarly, business and professional settings. On average over 1,500 first year students complete this course over two terms. The course is taught by multiple instructors and is centered around different themes ranging from topics such as food, globalization, happiness, networked society and finding love. Students have 3 assignments to complete which scaffolds upon resources for three assignments culminating in an analytical business report that must include 8-10 sources. The CEC also provide a Communication Coaches (Comm Coaches) peer-student service to supplement writing help.

The CEC has been partnering with the library to offer a 1.5 hour library workshop over the last five years where about 30 sessions are taught by a team of 5 Research Librarians and 3 Librarians. The Head, Learning Services, together with the programme manager meets with the PWR coordinator in a pre-and post-meeting where the course and instructor needs are gathered first and then after the sessions, a debrief forms part of the review. To support the library team teaching these classes, a ‘teaching pack’ is prepared that includes a Research Guide (Figure 3) with embedded resources for the different topics, a set of common PowerPoint slides and printed activity sheets. The customised classes typically covers identifying keywords, searching the discovery service, industry and market reports databases, evaluation of resources and citation techniques. During the in class sessions students are introduced to other services provided by the library including research consultations as the students may need individual help for their research topic or might not yet have thought about their research question or business idea.

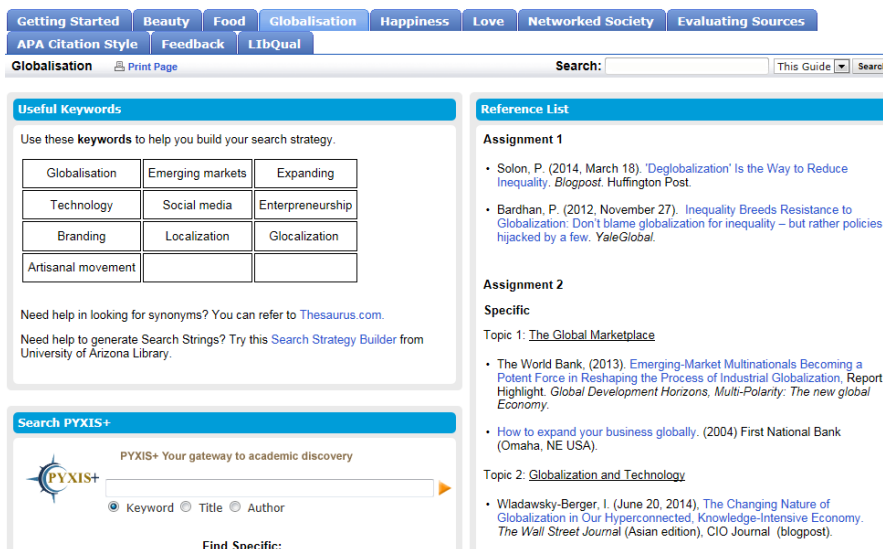


Figure 3: Screenshot on the topic of Globalisation from PWR Research Guide

During the debrief with the instructors they shared that they found the sessions very useful and students too, expressed this via the survey administered after the class. However with the library’s emphasis on continuous improvement and the need for student and faculty engagement more Research Consultations were encouraged and a co-location service of the Comm Coaches was piloted in 2013. This will be elaborated upon in the next sections.

2.1 Research Consultations for PWR Students

During the in class session as a follow-up, students are invited to email the Research Librarian (RL) for a one-on-one Research Consultation, typically a block of one hour. Students also approach the Service desk to request for an appointment. Below is an example of a 3-part session facilitated by the author.

Part 1: White Board Activity

- RL facilitates the discussion in a booked Research Consultation Room
- Student does most of talking; RL asks open-ended questions
- RL deconstructs the research question/topic/problem using PESTLE (C) as guide to highlight issues/implications/considerations
- Student and RL brainstorm for keywords, synonyms, related concepts, controlled vocabularies or subject terms
- Student do 5Rs – reflect, review, refines, rephrase, rewrites



PESTLE(C)	Political
	Economic
	Social
	Technological
	Legal
	Environmental
	(Cultural)

Part 2: Resource Identification and Search Practice

- RL probes to determine sources already used providing some recommendations; Student describes search experience
- Student and RL creates search strings using keywords identified; Student uses prior in class knowledge for techniques e.g. Boolean, phrase, truncation. RL uses recall.
- RL uses discovery service as starting point; Student practices applying search strings; RL points out clues such as subjects or keywords from the citation, abstract and reference list
- Student's confidence increase; Anxiety reduced with some useful results
- RL provides a quick overview of the other key databases/ resources recommended; Student may request for help on a specific database but also practices accessing on their own for more complex searches

Part 3: Strategies

- RL closes the session which tips, techniques and approaches such as 'begin with the end in mind' (presentations vs. reports; weightage and effort tradeoffs)
- Time management tips
- Working in a team (for group consultations); Member roles
- Resource allocation amongst group members ('divide and conquer' - 5 key databases can be searched by each member and results shared)
- Recommend information management tools e.g. emailing and sharing articles, saving searches strings. Dropbox and Google Docs
- Report structure and outline
- Student and RL agree on follow-ups if needed

Figure 4: An example of a curated Research Consultation Session for PWR

Students have the sessions useful based on anecdotal email feedback received. Instructors too have commented that students had used better quality resources based on the rubric provided. This demonstrates the value and impact of the in class sessions and research consultations. However, students still needed more help to write their business reports.

2.2 Communication Coaches (Comm Coaches) Co-Located in the Library

The Comm Coaches Project started off as a pilot in September 2013 to complement the writing conferences students had with their instructors where students can request for additional writing assistance from a team of coaches throughout Terms 1 and 2, typically between the 3rd to 13th weeks. The programme coordinator provides training for the Comm Coaches on key resources for students to use and they are given a database comparison chart ‘cheat sheet’ for their reference. A follow up email with useful information is sent to the coaches that identifies intervention for a Research Consultation:

- If the student lacks evidence or you see content/information and ask ‘where is this from?’ or if you cannot see a source or reference
 - If the student’s reference list is missing or lacking
 - If the student needs to ‘beef’ up the content and need more resources
 - If the student has not used additional resources from those provided
 - For a research consultation email: library@smu.edu.sg. Subject line: PWR Research Consultation
- Table 1 provides a snapshot of the usage of the Comm Coaches service over a two year period.

	Academic Year 2013/14		Academic Year 2014/15	
	Term 1	Term 2	Term 1	Term 2
Total Number of Students	20	79	112	107
Number of Sessions	20	79	100	89
Number of Coaches	3	9	8	7
Co-Location in Library	Information Desk	Study Carrel	Study Carrel	Project Room

Table 1: Usage of the Comm Coaches Services

The library helped promote the service in the library too using posters and the digital signage. For the first run in 2013, the coaches sat next to the Research Librarian at the Information Desk on Level 3 (Figure 5) which assumed greater visibility, ease of finding the coaches and immediate referrals to the Research Librarian on duty for assistance. Results from the pilot indicated that students found the session useful and they would use it again and also recommend it to their peers. Students requested for a longer duration. However some students voiced their concern over the suitability of the library as a venue citing difficulty in holding a discussion noting that, “*The library is a bad meeting place as we have to speak quietly*”, “*I think the consultation can be held somewhere else to facilitate the discussion and coaching to voice more opinions because we have to stay rather quiet in the library*”; “*change the venue*” (Tan, 2014). The feedback was taken into consideration and after the renovations a dedicated study carrel was set aside but this was also in the open. For the 2014/15 sessions, a dedicated Project Room was used and this proved more conducive as there were no feedback regarding the use of the library as a location.

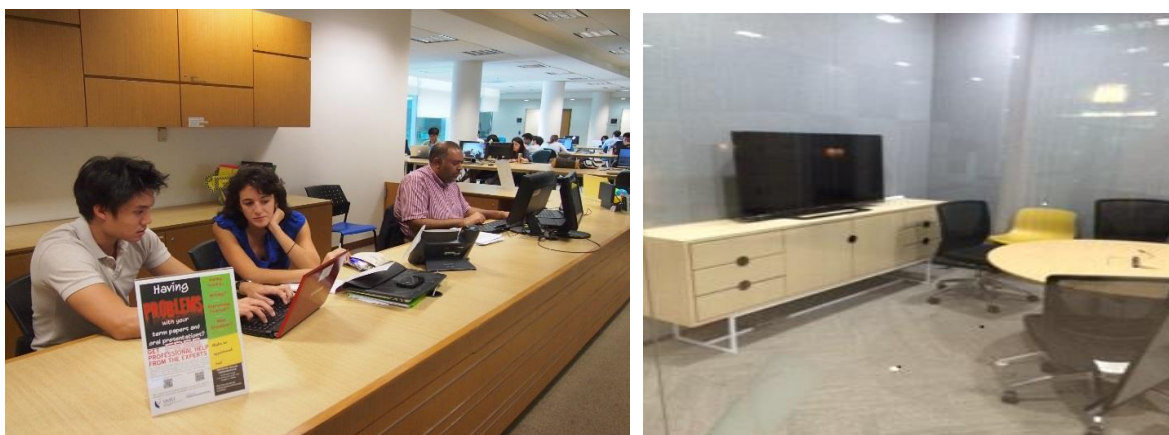


Figure 5: Co-Location before (Info Desk) and after the debrief (Project Room)

3 Space as a Catalyst for Change: Evolving and Emerging Services

In mid-2014, the library undertook an express three month renovation of selected spaces that had to be completed in time for the start of the new academic year in August 2014. The main impetus for this was the 2013 LibQUAL+® customer satisfaction survey results students requested to increase study spaces and to provide a variety thereof. The results has a lot of surprises for the library. Thus the theme “Envisioning the 5Rs: Renovation, Revamp, Refurbishment, Repurposing, Re-engineering” was adopted that involved key stakeholders within the library and also the wider SMU-community. The re-engineering component was aligned to an earlier 2012 university-wide initiative for business improvement and a culture of excellence where the Office of Business Improvement (OBI) embraced the Lean methodology for problem solving and process improvement. These guiding frameworks were noted for the library’s culture of assessment where measurement, value and impact is used as a catalyst for change too. The renovation provided an opportunity to use data to reflect, review and make decisions. More surprises emerged as staff began to work on projects applying their knowledge and skills to practical workplace issues. A case in point being to re-engineer two separate desks to create a single desk. In the past the Research Librarians provided R&IS from a separate desk on a different floor and the Circulation Team located on the entrance level provided mainly transactional and directional information such as loans and general enquiries. The Single Desk project team was set up to establish a new service model and tasked to review the enquiries received by Research Librarians at the Information Desk.

3.1 Finding Correlations and Consequences

Whilst there is caution about solely relying on data to make decisions, a review of the literature acknowledges that over the years libraries have experienced a drop in reference enquiries and there is need to rethink R&IS and the role of librarians associated with these services. Mitchell, Comer, Starkey, and Francis (2011: 363) noted how a decline in the number of enquiries began to impact the way they staffed and provided reference services at their institution resulting in a new service model based on a single desk. At the Li Ka Shing library too, the Research Librarians through their statistical recording (Figure 6) have also seen a decline in simple and detailed enquiries especially in the last two years where the latter, typically research type enquiries dropped from 1003 to 753. The 2337 general enquiries categorised as mostly directional could be attributed to the library renovations in 2014 where the graphic design and way finding for the new spaces was not yet completed. However, the amount of Research Consultations increased from 124 in 2013 to 143 in 2014. The probing question around these statistics is what is causing this? Do students know how to use the library, its services and resources independently? Has the library trainings made any impact, if at all? There has been no empirical research done in the library to ascertain this but a parallel overlay to this has been the increase in the number of students receiving some form of library training as can be seen in Table 2.

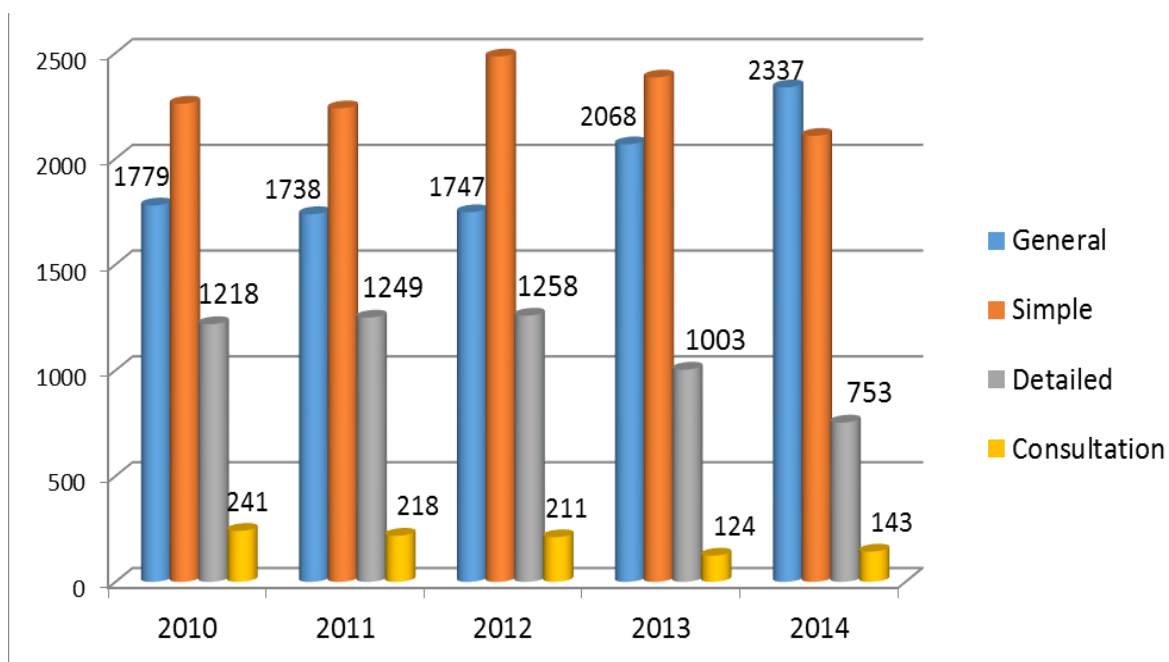


Figure 6: Information Service Statistics, 2010-2014

Source: Ishak, Y.W. Email communication to Information Services Team, 19 December 2014

In 2014 more students benefitted from faculty collaborations (6318) as compared to 2013, where 6061 students had a Research Librarian come into their classes. There has been increased emphasis recently for faculty engagement and collaboration for Research Librarians to design, develop and deliver more teaching and learning programmes by the library management and the again the external consultant. Due to the library renovations in 2014, there was no on-site new student's library orientation or matriculation activities. But it provided an opportunity for the team to develop an online course, LIB001 - Library Research Skills 2014-15 that was embedded in the learning management system. Students were required to complete three learning activities whereupon the successful completion, that course appeared in their co-curricular transcript. This collaboration between the Integrated Information Technology Services (IITS) and Office of Student Life (OSL) not only highlighted the synergies between the cross campus departments but also recognised and rewarded the students for their learning time and effort again demonstrating the library's value.

Year/Type	Faculty Collaboration	Library Organised	Total
2012	7179	3254	10,433
2013	6061	3920	9,981
2014*	6318	3094	9,412
*2014 Excludes 1820 students who completed online LibQuest in August 2014 (due to the library renovation)			

Table 2: Learning Services Statistics, 2012-2014

Source: Abdullah, R. Email communication with Munoo on the IL Statistics Project, 24 February 2015

Even though most categories of reference enquiries have dropped, the slow rise in Research Consultations coupled to campus-wide collaborations and partnerships show promise for Research Librarians to revisit, rebrand and strengthen their service offering.

4 Beyond Reference Transactions to Research Consultations



Figure 7: Single Desk after the Library Renovations: A new Service Model

In Wayne Bivens-Tatum's (2011) blog posting she shared that she "...tend to think of a research consultation as something in between a standard reference transaction and an instruction session". This then resulted in a flurry of comments, experiences and advice from passionate librarians discussing whether it is 'old wine in new bottles' or where on the continuum of R&IS this should be part of. Despite the author's lurking over the blog posting and not actively participating, it piqued his own curiosity and experience to revisit the Research Consultations provided and the opportunities thereof in light of the current changes at the library. A literature search was done using this search string "*research* consult* and library**" in the discovery service and it retrieved many articles highlighting the fact that this topic has been researched and published widely. Salient points will be shared from selected article that are useful in the author's context. Given that PWR is a 'mature' programme there is a need to assess its impact and in many instances the Research Consultations are about finding quality sources. To this effect, Reinsfelder and Anderson (2013: 263) noted that "One-on-one meetings, or research consultations, are one way to increase the level of interaction with students. This method of instruction can be quite effective and is used frequently by on-campus tutors and writing centers because the personal meetings allow for greater attention to detail and the ability to address unique concerns of each student in a way that is not possible in larger groups. When one-on-one consultations are offered by librarians, they not only provide an opportunity to assist students, they also allow librarians to benefit from learning more about how students select and use information sources." They also used empirical research to measure the impact of citation analysis on student's learning outcomes that involved assessment – something the library is exploring. However they cautioned about the time and effort involved questioning the sustainability of the whole service. The other useful article was the later work of Warburton and Macauley (2014: 167) who also noted the 'literature fog' on this topic making reference to higher degree students and their need for research consultations too especially to complete their literature reviews. The consultant's recommendation to offer more programmes and services to higher degree students is another niche area for R&IS and Research Consultations given the more manageable numbers of cohorts at the university.

Reflecting on the author's own experience in providing research consultations, he is in unison with other authors who finds it an essential and value-added service to provide that is different from generic in class instruction but also acknowledge the resources involved -both human and material. The need to perhaps focus on a specific programme or group of students would be a good start. The one-on-one Research Consultations can be considered an 'upsized' service and different from the R&IS which can be considered as daily transactions and transient in nature where very often students are pointed to a location or a resource requiring them to 'go-figure-it-out' themselves. The student then becomes just a 'statistic' or number. But this can be converted into a teachable moment where the intervention become an opportunity to express genuineness and an interest in their information and research need.

This reference interaction is then curated into an opportunity for a Research Consultation can be immediate at-the-desk, an appointment-based one, or escalated one depending on the need.

5 Parting Thoughts

The intersection of the components below in Figure 8 highlights a commonality in the services provided as being one that is offered at a point of need. The hybrid roles of the Research Librarians in the provision of R&IS and instruction at the Li Ka Shing Library has already laid the foundation for faculty and student engagement. This paper highlighted how such a curated service might look like but it requires further strengthening to determine value and impact.

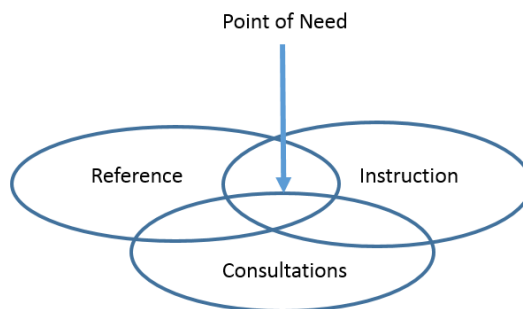


Figure 8: Services built around need

With the single desk physically established and the noted decline in reference enquiries, Research Librarians can use this opportunity to identify service ‘touch points’ and conversations with faculty and their teaching and research assistants who might have a closer ‘ear to the ground’ to refer students to their Research Librarians for a consultation. This can also include other campus-wide intervention services such as the Comm Coaches. Warburton and Macauley (2014: 171) noted that “Whilst the resource-intensive nature of 1:1 library research consultations is acknowledged, librarians might consider that they are prioritized over other activities... To be sustainable and to make the best use of staff time it may necessitate that consultations for other student cohorts are restricted (e.g. assistance with essay resources for undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students) and that such groups are redirected to online, self-help options.” Again this is in line with the recommendation for Research Librarians to reach out to higher degree programmes.

Para-professional staff can be upskilled to handle higher level enquiries and a set of tools such as FAQs or Research Guides in the form of a Reference Knowledge Base can be established for them to refer too. Being the first point of contact, conducting the reference interview in greater detail can turn a general enquiry into a Research Consultation where depending upon their comfort level they could escalate the enquiry to a Research Librarian by simply asking the name of the course and link the Research Librarian to follow up.

The library renovation and transformation has received many accolades sans marketing and resulted in higher visibility of the new spaces. It is timely that the users have a holistic library experience centred around service and the voice of the customer where a proactive service team finds seizable engagement opportunities, create teachable moments and introduce enhanced and value-added services such as the curated Research Consultation which involves faculty and supporting services equipping students with learning how to learn skills – critical for the real world of work in the 21st century.

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