Extending the Reach of the Library with a Mobile Reference Program
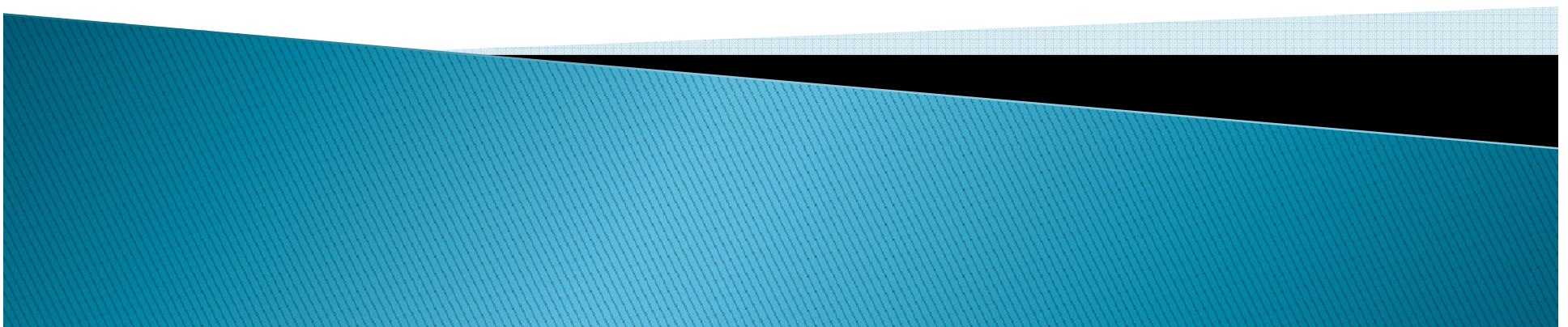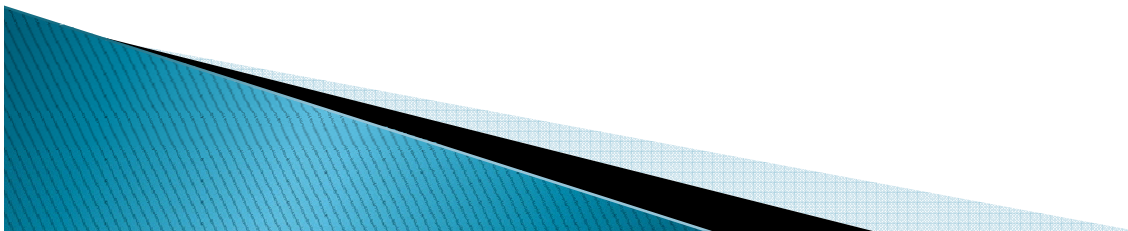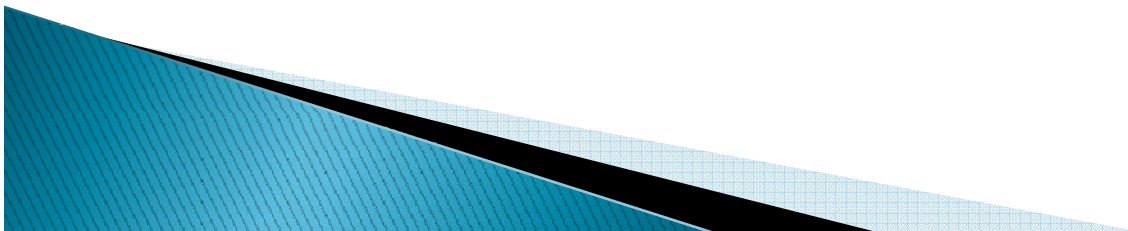
Mobile reference

▸ On-campus, remote reference service
▸ Direct (face-to-face) communication
▸ Wireless technology
▸ Bring library service to users on their "turf"

"An interpersonal touch is still the best ingredient for reference and training…"
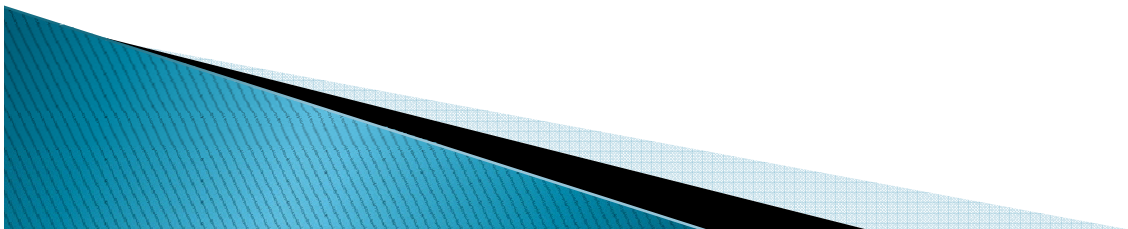
Terence K. Huwe
UC – Berkeley

ARL Spec Kit 285
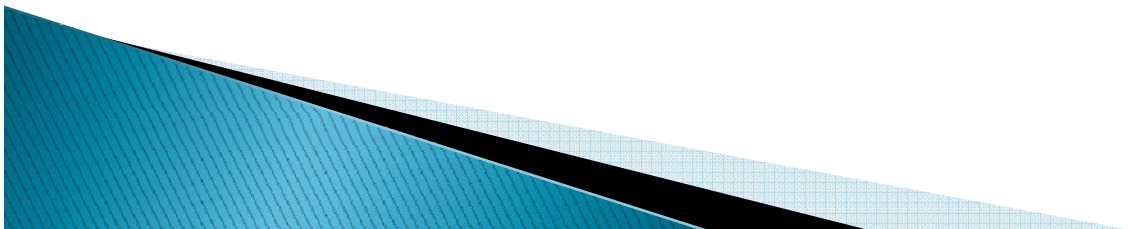# Library Services in Non-Library Spaces

November 2004

http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/spec285web.pdf

Mobile reference - goals

- Provide onsite reference service for students, faculty, staff
- Improve library support for research and scholarship
- Cultivate and strengthen on-campus relationships
- Enhance marketing and delivery of library resources and services

University of St. Thomas Libraries Learning & Community Group

- New ways to engage students
- "Learning outside of the classroom"
- New ways to promote library resources
- New skills for "blended librarians"
- Provide mobile library training
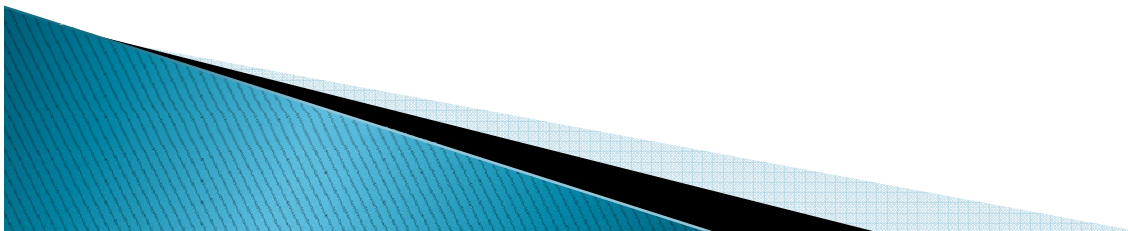
Mobile reference equipment

- Wireless local area network
- Laptop computer (Wi-Fi enabled)
- Identification/directional sign
- Personal name tag
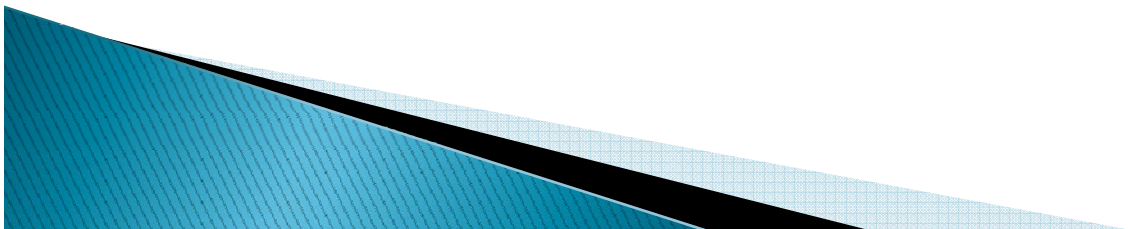
Librarian/staff mobile reference - key attributes

- Willingness to participate
- Outgoing personality/approachability
- Knowledge of electronic resources
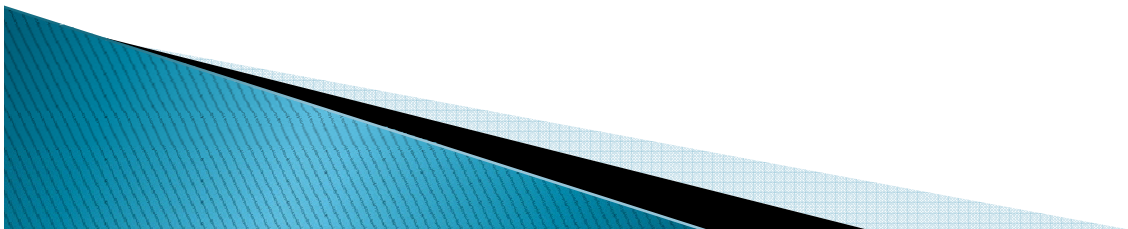- Ability to perform reference interviews
- Fearless!
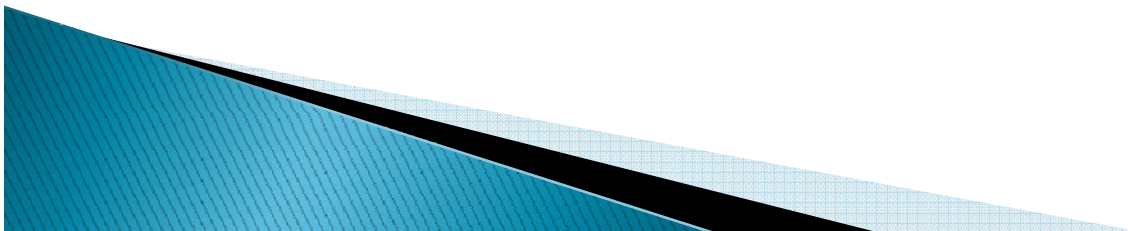
Mobile reference locations

- Campus centers/commons/public spaces
- Career Center
- Writing Center
- Commuter lounge
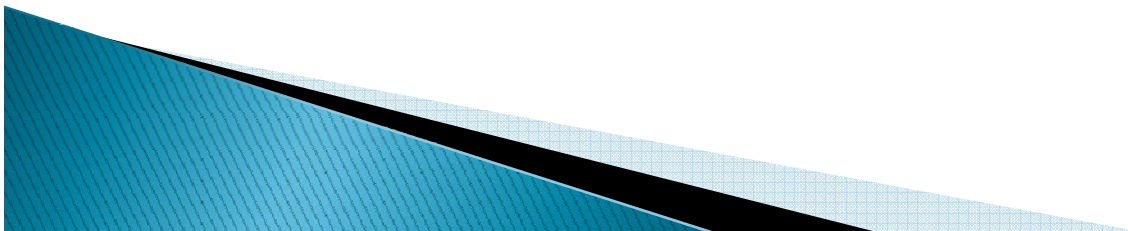- Offices
- Computer labs
- Events
- Library – remote floors
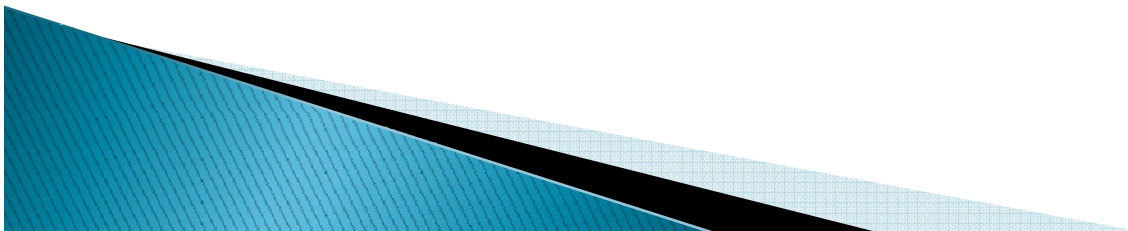
Mobile reference locations (cont.)

- Available/accessible
- High volume of traffic
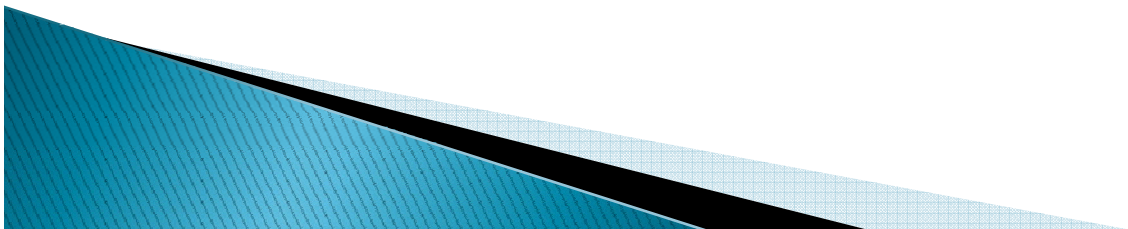- Furniture is good
- Check wireless signal strength first…

Mobile reference challenges

▶ Fear factor
▶ Acceptance
▶ Formal or informal sessions?
▶ Effective locations/times
▶ Knowing electronic resources
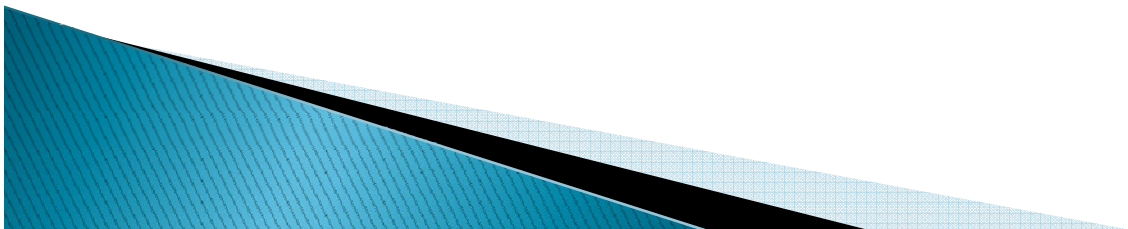▶ Clever promotion

Mobile reference promotion

- Campus media
- Library website
- Collaborative websites
- Treats?
- Attention-getting signs
- Use "Wow factor"

UST Career Center
Mobile reference – formal setting

‣ Weekly, scheduled session

‣ Subject specific – company research

‣ Promoted on CC website

‣ CC staff refers patrons

Testimonial

"I've been seeing that employers were emphasizing the need for students to do more thorough research of companies prior to their job interviews… it has been an added value to the career counselors because we can recommend the on-site librarian when working with a student…it provides resources for students to use prior to their interview that are convenient, effective and educational."
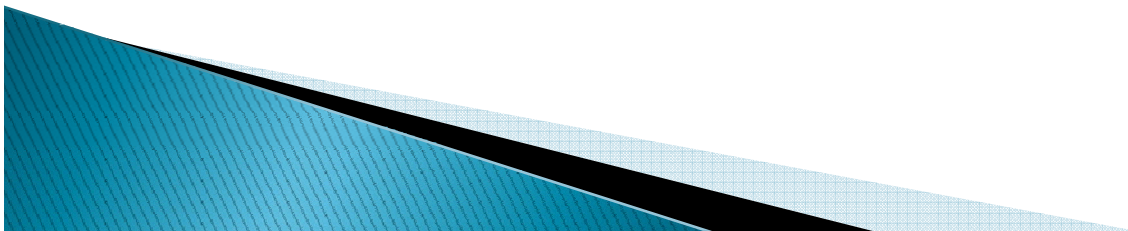
Becky Durham – UST Career Specialist
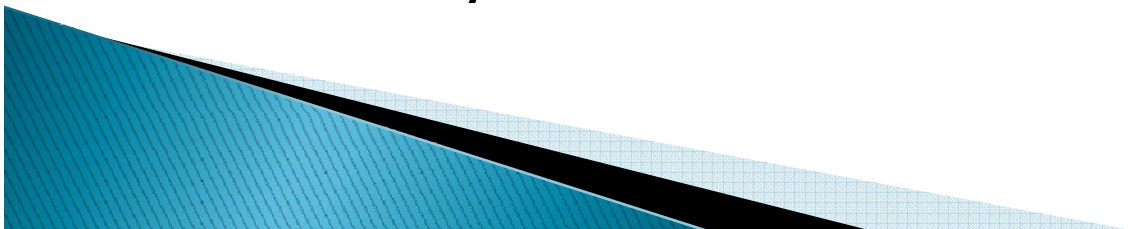
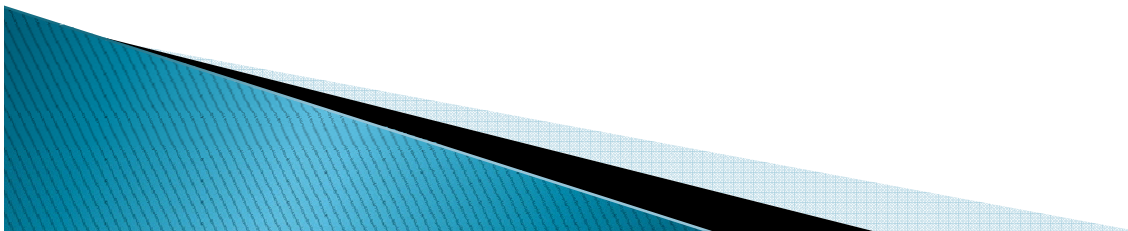# Company Research

UST Reference Librarian
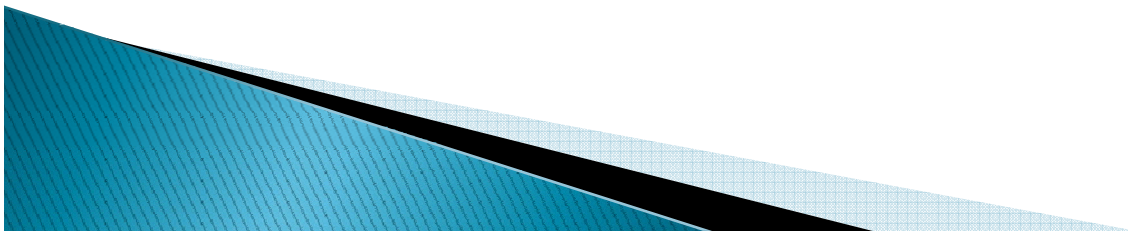
Commuter lounge
Mobile reference – informal setting

- Drop – in
- 1 hr. sessions
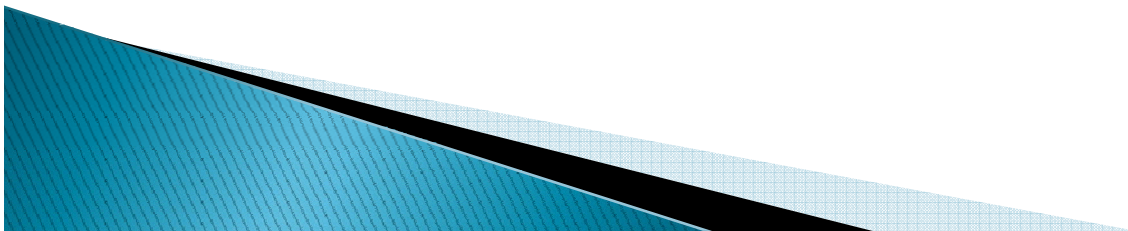- Bagel morning
- Ask-a-Priest

THE LIBRARIAN IS "IN"

UST Libraries Staff

ASK ME ANYTHING!
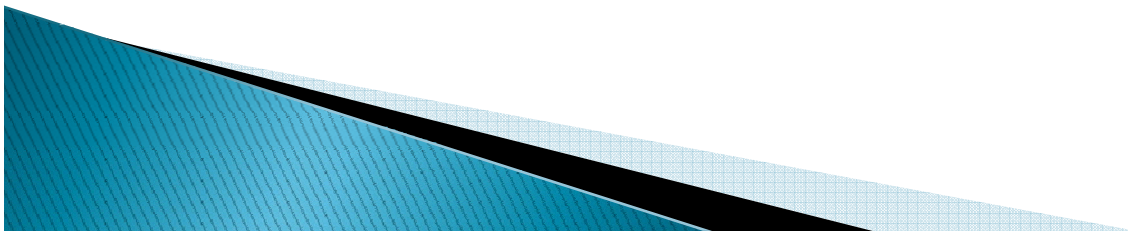## (really, anything)

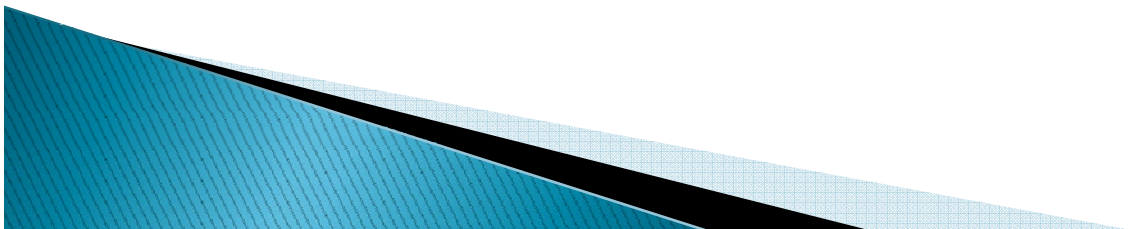# UST Libraries Staff

UST LIBRARIAN
AT YOUR SERVICE

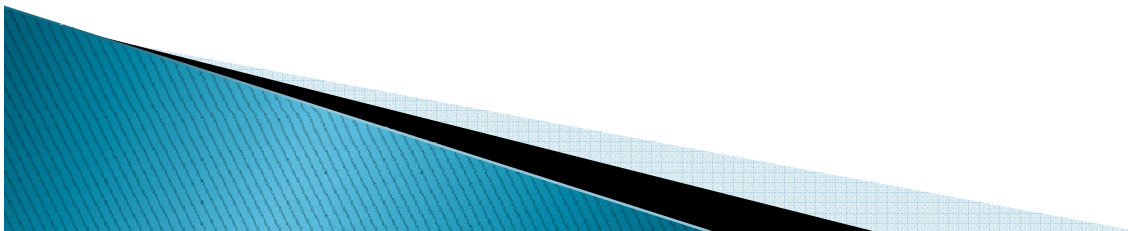## (Doesn't bite…)

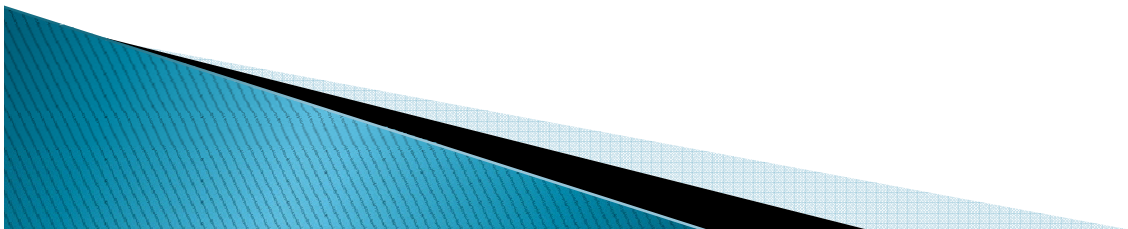# I'M YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND!

RESEARCH HELP

UST LIBRARIES STAFF
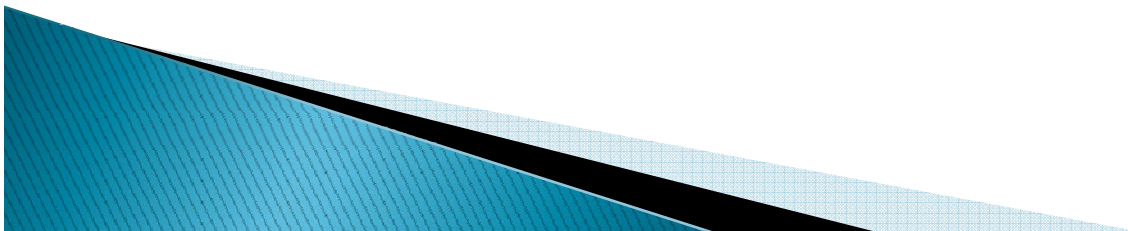
FREE ANSWERS!

Provided by UST Libraries Staff

Mobile reference – for training

- Formal or informal
- Brief
- Individual or small group
- "Just-in-time"

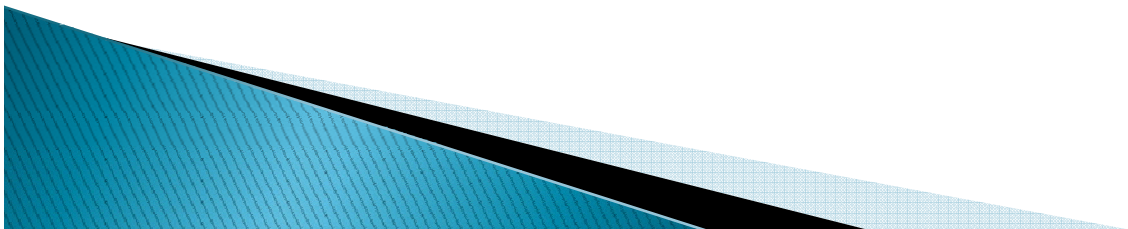# UST Experience – Fall 2009

- 28 mobile sessions – 92 questions
- Variety of locations (12)
- Staff "buy-in" mixed
- Collaboration is good
- Formal sessions get more in-depth questions
- Informal sessions get more traffic

UST experience (cont.)

- Support from IRT partners
- Some patrons crave direct communication
- Created PR and goodwill for library
- Easy, fun

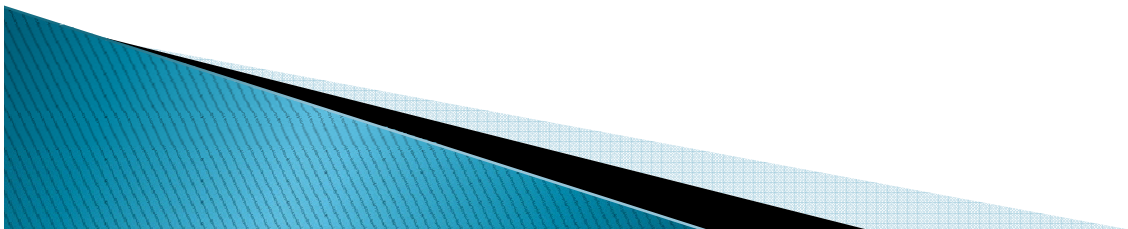# Mobile reference benefits

- Provide onsite reference service for students, faculty, staff - <u>easy, low cost</u>
- Improve library support for research and scholarship - <u>new outreach</u>
- Cultivate and strengthen on-campus relationships -   <u>new contacts</u>
- Enhance marketing and delivery of library resources and services - <u>show off resources</u>
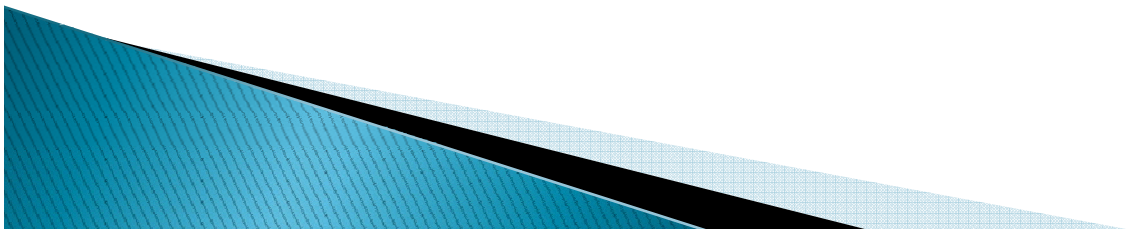
Mobile reference – checklist

- Wireless internet on campus?
- Wi-Fi enabled laptop
- Approval from library administration
- Willing, enthusiastic staffer (specialist or generalist?)
- Location(s) for mobile reference

Mobile reference – Checklist (Cont.)

- Check wireless signal before you start
- Set up collaborative arrangements before you start
- Promote mobile reference
- Supplement with library brochures/ handouts
- Keep statistics
- Enjoy!
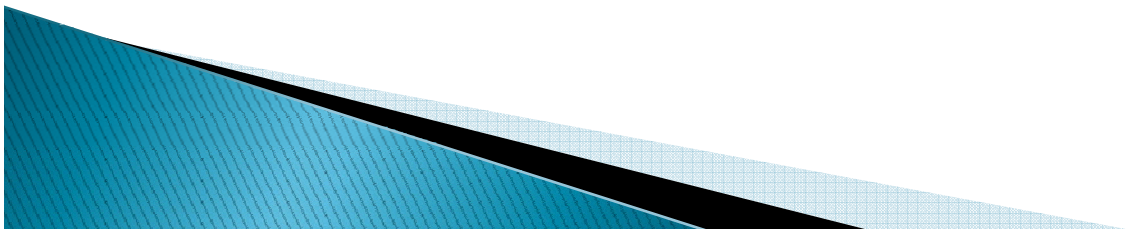
"To flourish, mobile reference services appear to require a delicate balance of entrepreneurial and dedicated staff able to absorb the additional duties without additional funding, the ability to take advantage of local opportunities, access to appropriate non-library workspace, technology and interested users."

G. Aamott, S. Hiller ARL Spec Kit 285