Distributed Reference

Sue Davidsen

Lisa Raymond

Walden University

Walden University

- App. 31,000 students
- Degrees in
  - Health
  - Public policy
  - Education
  - Psychology
  - Management and technology

Walden University

- Completely online
- Accredited by North Central
- Walden began in 1971 as a way for educators to earn doctorates
- Mission of social change
- First distance ed institution to be categorized as research intensive by Carnegie Foundation
- Purchased by Laureate Education, inc in 2004

Walden University Library: 1991

- In 1991 the Walden Library was established at Indiana University

- Students are mainly in the U.S.

- Only PhDs and Master's degrees

- 5,000 students

- 2 librarians, later 6 students at IU's school of Information

Walden University Library: 2009

- Students and faculty are globally distributed
- 31,000 students
- B.S. degrees added
- 3 Librarians (Director, Information Literacy librarian and Reference Coordinator), one library tech (document delivery) in Minneapolis
- Reference staff of 6 part-time librarians is distributed throughout the U.S. and Europe

The Walden Library

- Completely online
- Reference
- Document Delivery
- Information Literacy, including residencies
- Tutorials and help

Walden Library

- 31,000 full-text periodicals
- 14,000 ebooks
- 144,000 dissertations
- 43 databases
- Meta-search using Webfeat
- 360 Link Open URL Resolver

Walden Library Home Page

Reference Services

- Average 300 questions a week
- 70% of questions

  library instruction

  full text retrieval

  research

Reference Services

- Open 113 hours a week
- Monday: Friday 8am – 1am
- Saturday: 10am – 1am
- Sunday: noon – 1am

- Virtual staff works 3-4 four hour shifts per week

Reference Services

- Ask A Librarian web form
- Phone
- Email
- Chat (trial in April)

Reference Technologies

- OCLC's Question Point
- Ring Central VOIP
- PB Wiki
- Google Calendar
- Yahoo IM

Ask A Librarian

Question Point

Ring Central

Document Sharing

Challenges

- Managing people remotely
  - Walden does everything from hiring to holding meetings remotely
  - Monthly phone meetings
  - Weekly check-in emails
  - IM
  - Projects
  - Laptop from Walden with Lotus Notes

Challenges

- Sheduling
  - Part-timers are harder to schedule
  - Looking into scheduling software
  - Second job limits daytime availability
  - Covering shifts due to illness and vacation

Challenges

- Time zones
  - Eastern
  - Central
  - Pacific
  - Germany (EST +6)

Challenges

- Maintaining a sense of community
  - Few social activities that work
  - Wiki - more business related
  - Facebook page - do you really want your employees or coworkers to know what you did last weekend?
  - FTF at residencies

Challenges

- Training
  - Training remotely is different
  - Scheduling training is difficult
  - Asynchronous communication takes more time
  - Extra review of reference questions

What Works Well

- Productivity has gone up
  - Our inbox is often empty
  - We can now do collection analysis projects and add to our subject guides

What Works Well

- Can cover our student and faculty time zones
- One day we'll go 24/7 to cover our international students better

What Works Well

- Save significant budget $
  - No offices, no benefits

Broadens our job pool

- Work from home, no commute
- Flexible staffing - can add hours when needed

Virtual Staff: Benefits

- "Without someone standing right in front of you, you can take some more time to explore alternative sources of information, and try to formulate a better answer for the patron."

- "I enjoy working independently, yet still being a part of a team."

Virtual Staff: Challenges

- "You are completely dependent on technology all working right for you all the time. There are quite a few pieces to the puzzle and one going wrong can be frustrating."

- "In virtual reference it is not immediately apparent to patrons that there are other patrons being served when they call. They don't understand delay as easily and can become frustrated."

Questions?

WALDEN UNIVERSITY

A higher degree. A higher purpose.