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## **Providing Mobile Librarian Service to a College of Nursing to Increase Interactions and Transactions: One Wayne State University, Science and Technology Librarian's Experience**

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### **Abstract**

A mobile librarian service to the Wayne State University College of Nursing was developed to provide in-person reference and research support. This service has been successfully used for eight semesters by College of Nursing faculty, graduate students, and some undergraduates for support of research and course work. This article will address the details and provide a description of the service.

### **Keywords**

College of Nursing; embedded librarian; mobile librarian; nontraditional reference service; nursing; nursing faculty; nursing students; outreach; reference; research support; science librarians; Wayne State University; Wayne State University Library System

## Introduction

In recent years, the College of Nursing faculty and students have visited the Wayne State University Science and Engineering Library (which houses the Nursing Collection) less frequently to obtain reference assistance and research support. Ferguson & Ferguson (2005) mention that, “In the past, information seekers have come to the library, where librarians have guided them in their use of the best resources to satisfy particular information needs” (p.44). Access to electronic resources and time constraints have changed the information seeking behavior of faculty and students.

Now, Nursing faculty and students are working remotely and using online resources for their research. These patrons still need to learn navigation of the library website, and ask questions to obtain clarification about a variety of research topics, such as: database search strategies, electronic journal access and full-text document delivery.

Ferguson & Ferguson (2005), further explain:

Moreover, only a small percentage of students telephone their information librarians, with the result that the Library is not reaching the whole student body and many are being left on their own to handle what appear to be complex information resources. (p. 47)

To address these important resource and service issues, the Nursing Librarian Liaison has been offering reference service and research support in person, onsite in the Wayne State University College of Nursing office building. This Mobile Librarian Service, as it is called, began in Fall Semester, 2006 and continues to the current Fall, 2010 semester, for Nursing faculty, Doctoral, M.S.N. and B.S.N. students. Faculty and students come into this service individually or in small groups to ask specific questions, obtain an overview of a library resource, or for group research project discussions. This service takes reference and research support directly to the building where Faculty offices are located, and where students gather for lectures, appointments and study groups. The Librarian is “on site” rather than waiting for the patrons to come to “our site”. As subject specialist Librarians, we must become more accessible to faculty and students by being where they spend the majority of their time.

Those of us in the library profession can readily observe what Ferguson & Ferguson (2005) have mentioned:

The role of the librarian has shifted from that of an information gatekeeper to one that encompasses a far greater responsibility for empowerment of the client through one-to-one instruction, or through user education classes, on the use of Web-based resources. (p. 44)

The primary idea of this remote service is to provide reference directly to users in a more convenient setting. Some other librarians, who provide this type of service, may refer to it as *embedded librarianship*. Dewey (2005) explains, “The metaphor of “embedded librarian” is inspired by the recent phenomenon of embedding journalists into various military sectors during the Iraq war and its aftermath” (p. 5-6). An embedded librarian, in the sense of being present in an academic department or college, is not like the total assimilation of a journalist into a military unit, but rather a concerted effort to be periodically present to offer in-person reference and research support.

Whatever the service is called, it essentially means placing oneself in the department or college where one wants to offer on-site library services such as reference and research support. Dewey (2005) has recommended, “Embedding oneself at as many venues as possible will ensure that library staff, collections, and services are more fully integrated into all aspects of campus life” (p. 5).

Going out to a college, program or academic department to offer reference or research support, also enables the librarian to develop a bond or alliance with the faculty and students. They then know their librarian liaison by meeting in person on a regularly scheduled basis.

Kesselman & Watstein (2009) further expand on this:

Traditional academic environments pose different challenges to the librarians who seek to embed themselves in academic departments. Outreach and marketing, particularly by subject liaison librarians, are key to successful integration. (p. 390)

The Mobile Service also allows the Librarian to become involved in faculty research projects that sometimes lead to publication opportunities. Being physically present or “embedded” in the venue of a specific academic discipline, also affords opportunities to suggest and schedule course-integrated library instruction sessions. Direct library services for patrons have changed, and Librarians need to spend time the department or college where the faculty and students “live”.

Kesselman & Watstein’s (2009) study found:

Embedded librarianship is a major focus for the future for our profession. The physical library will continue to provide a major role for students and others as a place for research, for study, and for group work. But, with the dramatic increase in electronic resources and technological capabilities, bringing the library and the librarian to the user, wherever they are – office, laboratory, home, or even on their mobile device – is at the forefront of what it means to be *embedded*. (p. 385).

At the 2010 Special Libraries Association (SLA) Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA, a poster was presented on the Mobile Librarian Service at the “All Sciences Poster Session” on June 15, 2010. These poster sessions were sponsored by the following SLA Divisions: Biomedical & Life Sciences, Chemistry, Engineering, Food Agriculture and Nutrition, Physics-Astronomy-Mathematics, and Science-Technology. The Mobile Librarian poster session described the experiences of offering reference and research support in a non-traditional setting over a four year period. Issues related to this type of remote service that were presented, include: office space provided, scheduling and advertising, and data regarding faculty and student contacts. Other issues that were addressed included: evaluation, benefits, challenges of the service and future plans. A diagram of the poster session presented is on the following page (Figure 1).

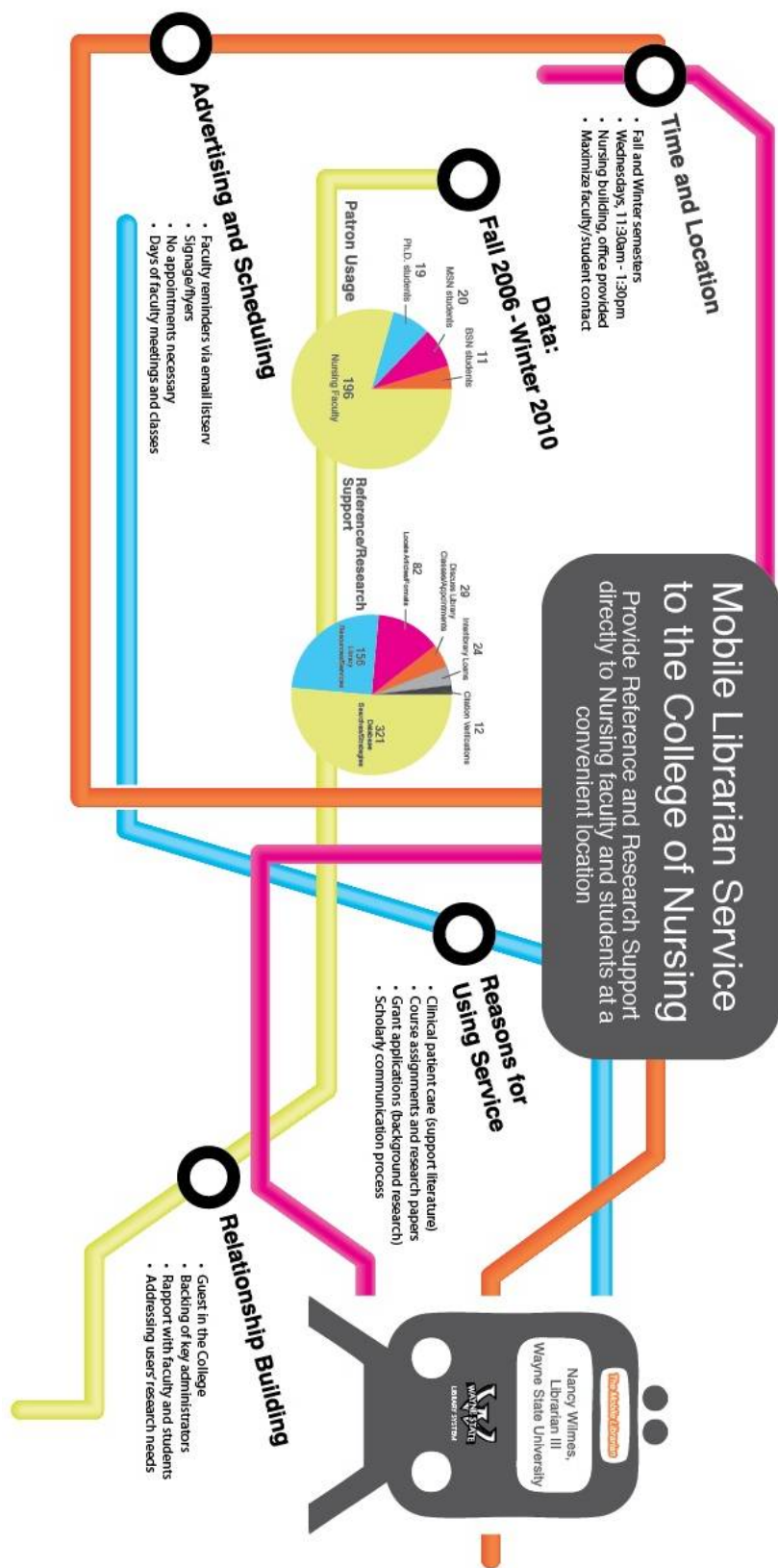


Figure 1 Poster Session

## Overview and Description of the Nursing Mobile Librarian Service

The College of Nursing Mobile Librarian Service at Wayne State University is offered one day per week for two hours in College of Nursing's Cohn Building in a room with a computer provided by the College. The location of the room is critical for faculty and graduate students using this service. The first two semesters the room was located near full-time faculty offices. After those initial semesters, a room was assigned on other floors, which was less easily accessed by faculty and students. If the room assignment is located near faculty offices or graduate student classrooms, they are more likely to use the service, and become accustomed to the presence of the Mobile Librarian.

This Mobile Service has been offered for eight past semesters: Fall, 2006; Winter, 2007; Fall, 2007; Winter, 2008; Fall, 2008; Winter, 2009; Fall, 2009; Winter, 2010; it is also being offered during the current, Fall, 2010 semester. The service starts each semester a few weeks after the semester has begun, and ends before final exams. In the Fall semesters it begins in mid-October and continues until mid-December; and, in the Winter semesters it begins in mid-January and continues to mid-April. During Spring or Summer sessions this service is not offered due to less faculty and students on campus and in the College of Nursing Building.

The day of the week chosen is Wednesday, and the time is from 11:30am-1:30pm. No appointments are necessary to use this service. The reason Wednesday was chosen is because the College of Nursing Faculty Association Meetings are scheduled on that day, many Nursing faculty have office hours, and many classes are offered in the building. Optimally, this means that the numbers of Nursing faculty and students available would be higher on Wednesday, thus bringing more people to the Mobile Librarian location in the building. This maximizes faculty/student contact.

The main reasons faculty and students use the Nursing Mobile Librarian Service are:

- support literature for clinical patient care
- course assignments and research papers
- background research for grant and funding applications
- various other aspects of the scholarly communication process.

Most contacts by faculty and students using the Mobile Service were for the following specific reference or research inquiries:

- Questions about specific library resources: access to specific research databases or the online catalog



- Assistance with search strategies and database searches in the most frequently used databases for Nursing which are CINAHL (*Cumulative Index to Nursing & Allied Health Literature*) and PubMed (*Medline*)
- Accessing electronic, full-text journal articles
- Assistance with ordering books or journal articles via ILL (Interlibrary Loan)
- Questions about submitting articles for publication and author instructions
- Questions about which journals to submit articles

The majority of the people using the Mobile Service are: Nursing faculty, Doctoral students (Ph.D. and DNP) and M.S.N. students. Occasionally, BSN (undergraduate) students come into the service who have been referred by faculty. Many graduate students are also usually referred by their faculty advisors to this service. Many of the individual contacts are repeat users of this service.

Nursing faculty have become accustomed to this service being offered in the College of Nursing Building. Some faculty now inquire, before a semester begins, if the service is returning for another semester, and when the service will begin.

Each semester this service is advertized using emails sent to the Nursing faculty listserv. Flyers have been designed, and are posted at strategic locations in the College of Nursing's Cohn Office Building. An example of the advertising flyer used during the Winter, 2010 semester can be viewed on the following page (Figure 2).



Mobile Librarian  
Service *to the*  
WSU College of Nursing

Wednesdays:  
11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
Cohn Room 349




Figure 2 Advertising Flyer

One reason this service has been successful is due to the positive support from the Associate Dean for Academic and Clinical Affairs in the College of Nursing, and also the College of Nursing's Information Technology (IT) Department. There has also been very positive support and encouragement from the Dean of the WSU Library System and the Director of Public Services.

## Mobile Librarian Service to the College of Nursing | Nancy A. Wilmes

Data is kept on a weekly basis on the number of faculty and students who use the service; the types of reference/research support transactions; databases uses and searches performed; and the average length of time per patron. Here is an example of a data collection sheet used for the Winter, 2010 semester (Figure 3):

Mobile Librarian Service -- College of Nursing, Cohn Room 349 Nancy A. Wilmes, Nursing Librarian Liaison Wednesdays, 11:30am-1:30pm, Winter, 2010 Semester						
Date	No. of Faculty	No. of Ph.D students	No. of MSN students	No. of BSN students	Type of Res Sup/Ref Transaction	Average time mins. per patron
24-Feb	2		1		3LAP, 3SD, 8DB	22
3-Mar	1		3		3LAP, 2SD, 10DB	33
10-Mar	1		2		9LAP, 2SD, 9DB	38
16-Mar			Spring Break		0	0
24-Mar	4	1			5LAP, 9SD, 4ILL 5DB	27
31-Mar	4				4 SD	19
7-Apr	3				1SC, 3SD, 2DB	20
14-Apr	3		2		1SC, 5SD, 9DB	23
21-Apr	4				4SD, 2SC, 1DB	23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>26</b>
* some are return faculty						
<b>Key to Type of Research Support or Reference Transaction:</b>						
<b>DB=database searches:</b>						
						13
						4
						2
						16
						9
						<b>44</b>
						4
						20
						4
						32
					<b>TOTAL**</b>	<b>104</b>
					<b>**all types of patron contact</b>	

Figure 3 Data Sheet

A summary of all user Contact Data (all types reference and research support transactions) for this service in College of Nursing (Faculty and primarily Graduate Students) for **eight semesters** is:

Winter, 2010 = 104

Fall, 2009 = 77

Winter, 2009 = 52

Fall, 2008 = 60

Winter, 2008 = 84

Fall, 2007 = 79

Winter, 2007 = 85

Fall, 2006 = 83

**Total = 624**

As these data show, there has been a change in the number of Nursing faculty and student user transactions during the eight semesters this service has been offered. This is due primarily to room reassignment within the College of Nursing Building. Location of the Mobile Librarian room, close to faculty offices and classrooms, is a critical factor.

This Reference/Research Support Data is broken down by specific types of transactions and illustrated Figure 4.

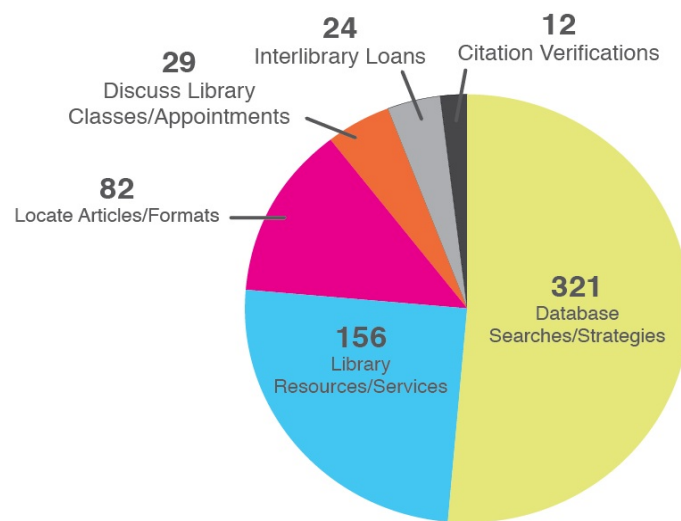


Figure 4 Reference/Research Support Data (8 semesters)

After offering the Mobile Librarian Service in the Wayne State University College of Nursing for **eight semesters**, it is definitely a worthwhile endeavor, as reflected by these specific Nursing user statistics:

196 faculty

19 Ph.D. students

20 MSN students

11 BSN students

**Total users = 246**

This Patron Usage Data is also illustrated Figure 5.

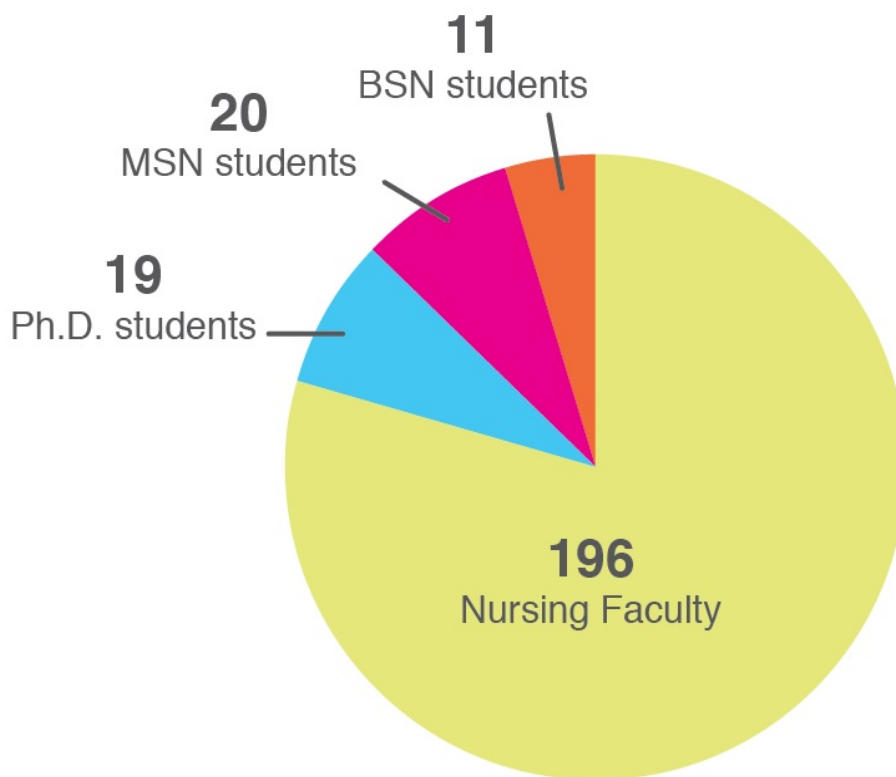


Figure 5 Patron Usage Data (8 semesters)

## Summary and Conclusion

Nursing faculty and student users come into the Mobile Librarian Service due to the convenient location, and also because of their need for a variety of information related to research and course work.

The Mobile Librarian Service has provided improved library service to College of Nursing patrons. The Science & Engineering Library is located several blocks from the College of Nursing, and is more difficult for Nursing faculty and students to access. They are also frequently off campus engaged in clinical experiences. Nursing users actually have reduced time on campus that would allow them to come into the Science & Engineering Library for in-person reference or research assistance.

The Mobile Librarian Service has also afforded the Nursing Librarian Liaison an opportunity to develop good rapport and interpersonal relationships with Nursing faculty and students. These are, in themselves, the best reasons for continuing to offer this service, in addition to providing convenient, subject-specific reference and research support.

As Academic Librarian Liaisons, we can follow the good advice offered by Dewey (2005), “The embedded librarian, who is truly integrated into the academic, administrative, athletic, cultural, research, teaching, and learning arenas of the university, provides quality and depth to the total campus experience” (p. 16).

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