



INFORMATION SERVICE: DATA COLLECTION - A CASE STUDY

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BACKGROUND

Library of Political Sciences “Enrica Collotti Pischel”, University of Milano, Italy

Reading rooms: 5
Total seats: 250
Average daily library visits: 458 persons
Average daily loans: 118 items (loans + renewals)
Information service (3 desks): no previous data available
Bibliographic reference service (2 reference desks: 1 ½ staff units): systematic data available from 2001; average daily transactions: 7

WHAT- object of study

Quantitative statistical collection and analysis of questions asked by patrons in person

WHERE

At Library Desks:

- Reception desk: here patrons usually find general information, OPAC assistance, returns and renewals
- Circulation desk: here patrons usually find OPAC assistance, loans
- Reading room and Periodicals desk: here patrons usually find periodicals and storage books distribution, reading room assistance

WHEN

November 2007 – November 2008: 5 sample weeks

WHO - staff involved

Circulation staff (7 units) and part time working students (4 units)

WHY - study objectives

- to quantify questions
- to establish query topics
- to determine ratio of direct answers vs. referrals
- to uncover any difference between desks

in order to plan a training programme and/or re-staff information desks

HOW - working steps

1. Collection and analysis of frequently asked questions at 3 desks
2. Team discussion and literature review
3. Creation of Query Classification:
 - Category I: Directional queries (where and how nonresource-based questions)
 - Type 1: regarding the Library
 - Type 2: regarding the University Library System
 - Type 3: regarding the School of Political Science
 - Type 4: regarding the University in general
 - Type 5: regarding other libraries in Milano or elsewhere
 - Category II: Assistance and reference queries
 - Type 6: demonstration or instruction queries (skill-based questions)
 - Type 7: simple finding material queries
 - Type 8: in-depth reference and consultation queries
 - Category III: Other topics
 - Type 9: other topics
4. Creation of data sheet
5. Selection of sample weeks: requirements
 - all staff in service
 - no vacation periods
 - at least 1 busy week, 1 typical week and 1 slow week
6. Data collection:
 - each staff unit was given a data sheet pro day
 - each question asked by patrons was sorted and tallied onto data sheet
7. Data analysis

STUDY FINDINGS - summary table

Information Exchanges at Library Desks	5 sample weeks	Total: all desks	Total: %	Staff only: all desks	Student workers only: all desks	Reception Desk only	Circulation Desk only	Reading room/Periodicals Desk only
Total		3359	100,00	2327	1032	1224	1233	902
of which	Direct Answer	3143	93,57	2207	936	1121	1188	834
	Referral	216	6,43	120	96	103	45	68
Category I - Directional queries		2100	62,52	1505	595	860	754	486
of which	Direct Answer	1985	59,09	1457	528	785	743	457
	Referral	115	3,42	48	67	75	11	29
types								
1		1210	36,02	843	367	488	368	354
of which	Direct Answer	1136	33,82	801	335	448	357	331
	Referral	74	2,20	42	32	40	11	23
2		234	6,97	165	69	85	118	31
of which	Direct Answer	226	6,73	165	61	77	118	31
	Referral	8	0,24	0	8	8		
3		355	10,57	255	100	176	116	63
of which	Direct Answer	335	9,97	249	86	159	116	60
	Referral	20	0,60	6	14	17		3
4		197	5,86	151	46	87	86	24
of which	Direct Answer	191	5,69	151	40	83	86	22
	Referral	6	0,18	0	6	4		2
5		104	3,10	91	13	24	66	14
of which	Direct Answer	97	2,89	91	6	18	66	13
	Referral	7	0,21	0	7	6		1

		Total: all desks	Total: %	Staff only: all desks	Student workers only: all desks	Reception Desk only	Circulation Desk only	Reading room/Periodicals Desk only
Category II - Assistance and in-depth reference queries		1207	35,93	783	424	342	458	407
of which	Direct Answer	1109	33,02	711	398	314	424	371
	Referral	98	2,92	72	26	28	34	36
types								
6		581	17,30	381	200	194	231	156
of which	Direct Answer	570	16,97	374	196	189	228	153
	Referral	11	0,33	7	4	5	3	3
7		501	14,92	309	192	114	190	194
of which	Direct Answer	479	14,26	301	178	106	188	185
	Referral	22	0,65	8	14	8	5	9
8		125	3,72	93	32	34	34	57
of which	Direct Answer	60	1,79	36	24	19	8	33
	Referral	65	1,94	57	8	15	26	24
Category III - Queries on other topics		52	1,55	39	13	22	21	9
of which	Direct Answer	49	1,46	39	10	22	21	6
	Referral	3	0,09	0	3			3

CONCLUSION

The study findings show that the Library Information service is quite capable of handling the questions asked by patrons, which mostly deal with general information regarding the Library and the University.

The staff's previous training is more than adequate to answer directional, assistance and simple finding material queries. In-depth reference queries (which are only 3,72% of total) asked at desks are mostly and rightly referred to reference staff.

The proposed training programme should target part-time working students, who showed less confidence than expected in answering directional questions and need to be able to answer also requests of assistance.

The comparison between desks shows that patrons need a general information service at Reception desk, a finding library materials help at Circulation desk, while only in the Reading room they need a more skilled assistance (here are posted 45% of all in depth reference queries). Therefore it would be wise to have a reference librarian to cover the busiest hours of the day.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

To complete the study, it will be necessary to run a patron survey in order to evaluate how users perceive the Library Information service.

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