



Assessment Annual Report

Service

Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC) Reference and Research Support via Zoom Consultations during the COVID-19 Crisis, March - June 2020

Fiscal Year

FY20 (2019-2020 academic year)

Overview

SCARC Public Services

The SCARC Public Services Team covers the constellation of public services offered by the Special Collections and Archives Research Center. These services include in-person reference, reading room operations, remote reference, facilities support, instruction support, planned and drop-in tours, permissions and publications requests, and interlibrary loans of special collections.

These services are provided by an approximate total of 1.55 professional FTE. At present, the position description for the Public Services Archivist includes .6 FTE devoted to public services; the position description for Rare Books and History of Science Librarian devotes approximately .25 FTE to public services; the position description for the .5 FTE Processing Archivist allocates .25 FTE to public services; the Senior Faculty Research Assistant devotes a .20 FTE portion of their position to public services; and from September 1 through March 15 of this academic year, .25 FTE of a .5 FTE funded position (Processing Archivist) was devoted to public services. Between 8 and 10 Student Archivists make vital contributions to the reference, arrangement and description, and collection management work undertaken in support of public services. On average, Student Archivists work between 8 and 12 hours per week; half of this time is devoted to providing public services support in the Reading Room and related tasks.

SCARC Public Services in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis, March - June 2020

This report specifically focuses on and summarizes the response by members of the Public Services Team to the COVID-19 crisis during March through June of 2020. The Valley Library closed to the public in mid-March. In an effort to continue to support patron research during COVID-19, and inspired by other institutions' experimental responses to the crisis, public services and instruction staff offered patrons one-on-one Zoom consultations and drop-in "virtual reading room" hours during spring term 2020. The reason for the focus of this report on the assessment of virtual reference services is the fact that this form of reference service will be the most likely used during FY21.

The success of the virtual reading room service offered during spring term 2020 functioned as an unintentional proof-of-concept, revealing the opportunity for ongoing use of Zoom for one-on-one research consultations. Having tested the service and seen its utility, we plan to offer this as a service in the future. It will be especially useful in the short-term during our by-appointment-only onsite collection consultation hours beginning in fall term 2020, as well as in the long-term for patrons travelling to Corvallis from out of town (or state, or country).

Strategic Significance:

The content of this report has direct bearing to all strategic goals of OSULP, including emphasizing high quality services and expertise. In the actions described below we also show our dedication to building and strengthening our relationships with OSU students, faculty, staff, OSULP colleagues, and the wider global community of scholars to support their research with our collections. SCARC's Public Services staff is proud to find creative and innovative solutions to complex challenges in the day-to-day, but even more so in the face of the crises faced this past year.

Takeaways:

Reference and Research Support: Zoom Consultations during COVID-19, spring term 2020

- The virtual consultations offered a personal and intimate way to connect and establish rapport with researchers. From initial contact to research plan, our entire attention could be devoted to the interaction with the patron, without Reading Room distractions, facilities interruptions, or security concerns. Moreover, anecdotally, patrons seemed to react positively to interacting with staff in this way; one patron remarked that chatting with the public service staff member "really made my day." Staff experiences were equally positive.
- The consultations allowed staff to lead patrons through difficult-to-learn and difficult-to-teach discovery techniques for archival materials. A visual tour of complex, diverse discovery tools has proven much easier and less time-intensive than an emailed narrative in comparison to a remote reference response; Zoom illustrates in a new way that live demonstration is often the best way to teach archival research concepts. The time spent is more productive for the researcher and the archivist.
- Public Services staff also believe that one-on-one interaction in Zoom may reduce patrons' level of "archival anxiety," as there are no outside observers or external stimuli to process, thereby improving focus of both archivist and researcher.

Next Steps:

- Collect feedback and assessment about this service and use it to continue to adapt and respond to changing service needs (e.g., continue zoom consultations, implement DocuSign for registration and other documentation).
- Continue re-visioning remote services during and after the pandemic, with an eye towards better understanding policy, services, research service boundaries, and safety generally.
- Utilize newly purchased tabletop scanners as tools to better support onsite patron research.
- Continue to support instruction and seek deeper integration between research services and instructional services.

Assessment:

Approximately 15 hours of virtual reference assistance was offered weekly beginning March 30 (week 1) through mid-June. No appointment was required for these drop-in virtual reference hours; the hours selected mirrored the public services staff original spring term desk shifts. Staff members worked on a variety of other projects during the designated virtual reference hours but were at the ready to respond to researchers when they joined the Zoom meeting room. This new service was promoted via various methods including adding information about virtual reference hours to the Library's COVID-19 LibGuide and SCARC's home page, posting to social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), and word of mouth.

Public Services staff met with four patrons during the drop-in virtual reference hours in spring term 2020, for a total of 4.25 hours of reference assistance (including follow-up emails).

After holding drop-in virtual reference hours during specific hours each week, we assessed the traffic level and felt that offering consultations by appointment will give patrons more options and allow for participation on a wider scale. During FY21, we will be tracking the number, length, and complexity level of the virtual consultations throughout each term, as well exploring follow-up surveys and other patron assessment methods as we fine-tune this service.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Lilley
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