

Amigos Fellowship Program Final Report

The Reference Ref: How to Referee the Assessment Process for Virtual Reference Services

September 17, 2010

Karen Biglin and Karen Docherty successfully presented a 1.5 hour workshop titled, “The Reference Ref: How to Referee the Assessment Process for Virtual Reference Services,” at the Reference Renaissance 2010 conference on August 9, 2010 in Denver, CO. Generous support from the Amigos Fellowship Program allowed us to cover travel related expenses, registration fees, and service items, such as photocopies and candy for one of our hands-on activities.

The purpose of the workshop was to provide librarians with an outline and tools to conduct an assessment project for virtual reference at their own libraries using a successful model from the Maricopa Community Colleges. As stated in the Reference Renaissance 2010 program, and similarly stated in our Amigos Fellowship application:

Librarians have long struggled with a way to assess reference services. Do we provide quality, accurate answers? Are we approachable? Do we give our patrons a reason to use our services instead of Google? Couple these questions with a library environment that increasingly demands measurable results to show that we are meeting our goals, and it is clear that there is a need for a tool to help in assessment efforts. The use of a rubric provides a solid foundation on which to evaluate the quality of a virtual reference transaction. Using the methods of a recent Maricopa Community Colleges virtual reference assessment project, participants in this workshop will learn about the importance of continuous assessment, develop a reliable scoring tool, and evaluate and score a virtual reference transcript for interrater reliability purposes. Participants will have a hands-on introduction to conducting a meaningful assessment study at their library.

Using the Amigos Fellowship Program application as our guide, we followed this outline in our program:

1. Brief introductions and overview of Maricopa Community Colleges: 5 minutes – Presenters will discuss this topic through the use of PowerPoint’s and/or video.
2. Brief history of virtual reference and Ask assessment project at Maricopa Community Colleges: 5 minutes - Presenters will discuss this topic through the use of PowerPoint slides and/or video.
3. Transcript Scoring/Inter-Rater Reliability Training: 40 minutes - Participants will break into groups, and each group will read and score the same virtual reference transcript; however each group will have a different transcript. After scoring, each group will share results of the discussion at their table. Presenters will facilitate a brief discussion of critical elements of a rubric, which will be continued in item #4.
4. Rubric development: 35 minutes – Presenters will continue discussion on how to develop a rubric. Participants will then break into groups and work on developing their own rubric, with

assistance from the presenters. Each participant will be given a worksheet that will be a blank rubric they need to complete. After the worksheets are completed, several participants will share the rubric they have created with the entire group.

5. Questions/Wrap Up: 5 minutes – Presenters will summarize results of the workshop, and answer any remaining questions.

Early in the session we also incorporated an activity where attendees evaluated candy (provided by the presenters) to stimulate thinking about rubric categories and scoring levels. This fun and yummy activity stimulated energy levels, participation, and discussion among the group.

Throughout the entire workshop attendees appeared engaged in the various activities, discussed transcript scores and rubric development with their table-neighbors and the broader group. Participants asked great questions both about the process of assessment in general and about the finer points of interpreting various categories in the rubric. One great idea that sprung from the group discussion was to encourage virtual reference librarians to use a rubric to self-score or self-assess their effectiveness in a chat session. This would be a great solution for those environments where the act of librarians reviewing other librarians' reference transactions meets with resistance.

To determine the whether or not project objectives were accomplished; we conducted a post-workshop assessment using a brief, 5-question survey using SurveyMonkey. Results were predominantly positive. Complete survey results are attached.

- 14 out of 17 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the session met their expectations.
- 13 out of 16 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they accomplished the objectives of the workshop.

Selected responses to the question, "What was most valuable about the workshop?":

- getting the same rubric - those can be tough to create and having a starting place will really help out
- Small group activities and then sharing and discussing all groups outcomes with moderators and audience. And drafting an assessment for a personal scenario.
- rubric exercise and hearing how assessment process worked at your library
- It gave me more insight into how a rubric may be used and provided resources to check out. The workshop was very interactive and engaged the group. Karen and Karen did a great job!

Selected responses to the "Comments" box:

- EXCELLENT PRESENTATION - one of the best I attended at Ref Ren!
- This session provided a great foundation developing VR assessment for my own organization. Thanks!
- Excellent session! I went home and immediately started making plans to implement the process at my library.

- I enjoyed my conversations with many librarians. It was encouraging to talk about the rapid changes in an academic library and how to offer more with less.
- this was a really useful workshop, thanks for hosting it! (And candy never hurts!)

We are grateful that this workshop gave us the opportunity to bolster our professional development by examining and enhancing our workshop content in preparation for being able to share it with others, and by polishing our presentation skills. Months of preparation went into the workshop, and we believe it was time well spent with the end result a smoothly orchestrated event with positive feedback from our attendees, some of whom were from the Amigos region, and many from beyond. We are in the process of writing an article about our session for the Reference Renaissance 2010 juried conference proceedings in which we acknowledge the generous support from Amigos Library Services.

Attached you will find:

- The documents used in the workshop
- The financial statement
- Full survey results

Respectfully submitted by Karen Biglin and Karen Docherty