

Coming to You: Face-to-Face Reference at a New Affiliated Library



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ABSTRACT

Plant sciences departments at the University of Florida are situated nearly 2 miles from the Marston Science Library in the campus center. It can be difficult with full class schedules for these faculty and students to use face-to-face reference services offered at the science library. The Plant Diagnostic Center (PDC) is located adjacent to three plant science departments. The PDC facility includes a multipurpose room for lab, classroom, conference, and library activities. In Fall 2019 the Liaison Librarian began offering reference hours each week at the new PDC Affiliated Library. These continued into March 2020, when all campus facilities were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Entrance to Plant Diagnostic Center

Efficient, centralized delivery of library services and virtual reference does not meet the needs of all university patrons. There are merits and considerations of developing in-person reference services at facilities convenient to underserved scholars.

BACKGROUND

University of Florida Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Plant Pathology Department's Plant Diagnostic Center identifies diseases on samples submitted from throughout Florida, the southeastern U.S. and the Caribbean. Reference materials in the PDC aid staff in diagnoses. The PDC Director wanted to also make these materials accessible to plant scientists.

The Plant Sciences Liaison Librarian and the PDC Director began a collaborative collection development project to create a new Affiliated Library in close proximity to students of Environmental Horticulture, Horticultural Sciences, Microbiology and Cell Science, and Plant Pathology departments and the Plant, Cellular & Molecular Biology Program. An agreement was signed, a student hired, and inventory assessed and catalogued. Circulation policies for library materials were established. This required development of appropriate procedures, modifications to the catalog system for this location and staff training.

The PDC became an Affiliated Library in 2018 with a special collection of over 1,400 items. It is the first Affiliated Library at UF to use the online catalog system to circulate its collection.

The PDC Affiliated Library offers two computer stations with access to the online library catalog, circulation of its special collection, seating for 20, and ample outlets. The library is occasionally closed for instruction or large sample processing.



Postcard publicity

OBJECTIVES

- Promote use of new Affiliated Library
- Outreach library services to patrons underserved by Marston Science Library

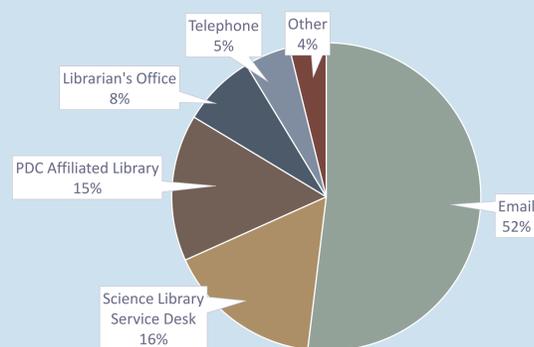
METHODS

- Pilot Reference Services at PDC Affiliated Library
- Fall 2019: 2 hrs/wk; Spring 2020: 1 hr/wk
- Promote walk-in reference service
- Use of reference service was assessed through statistics & comments



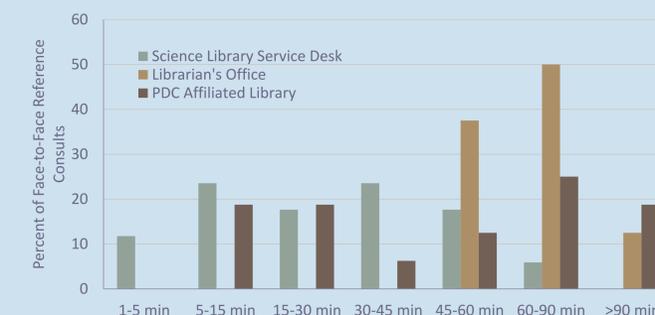
PDC Director welcomes visitors at Open House

RESULTS



Reference Service Delivery Mode: The Plant Sciences Librarian provided 104 hrs of reference service between August 22, 2019 and March 12, 2020. These consults were provided by email (52%), at the Science Library Service Desk (16%), in the Librarian's office (8%), via telephone (5%) and at the new PDC Affiliated Library (15%). All reference transactions were recorded with Springshare LibAnswers.

RESULTS



Reference Consult Duration: The duration of face-to-face reference consults with this Liaison Librarian varied, somewhat, by location. Nearly 53% of walk-up consults at the Science Library Service Desk were concluded in less than 30 min. 56% of the walk-in consults at the PDC Affiliated Library lasted longer than 45 min. All scheduled consults in the Librarian's office were over 45 min in length. Reference at the Science Library Service Desk is in a high-traffic, conspicuous location. Reference services at the PDC is typically quiet and inconspicuous, although all visitors to the PDC are required to sign in.

CONCLUSIONS

While online reference is growing, this project demonstrated ongoing benefit of offering face-to-face reference, particularly to scholars who underutilize the library due to distance. With appropriate facilities and staffing, face-to-face reference in an affiliated library can engage underserved students, including many international students. Librarian colleagues are also implementing "office hours" at remote locations in the Center for Undergraduate Research and the Center for Teaching Excellence.

Key components to success for remote reference include:

- Enthusiastic host partner
- Convenient location to underserved patrons
- Facility that is staffed & secure
- Bonus: compelling special collection
- Bonus: events for good introductions

Considerations:

- Publicity required
- Selecting convenient reference hours



Local TV station covered Open House featuring 6 librarians and their research-centered services [live link to interview].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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