

UCSD Libraries Reference Statistics Reference and Information Services Committee

This document provides guidelines for recording reference statistics at all UCSD Library service points. Departments must report statistics to library administration in two categories, Directional and Reference. These categories are defined below so that all units can record and report their statistics consistently, accurately, and in accordance with the Association of Research Libraries guidelines. Each unit may of course expand their reporting categories for internal use, in any way they find useful. However, when reporting reference statistics each unit will have to collapse any additional categories into Directional and Reference. At this point care should be taken that only transactions that fit each category are included there.

I. DIRECTIONAL TRANSACTIONS

A directional transaction is an information contact that facilitates the logistical use of the UCSD Libraries or the UCSD campus and does not involve the knowledge, use, recommendations, interpretation, or instruction in the use of any information sources other than those that describe the library, such as schedules, floor plans, and policies.

Examples of directional questions include:

- directions for locating facilities such as restrooms, telephones, photocopiers, etc.
- directions for locating library staff members.
- information concerning library hours and policies.
- instructions in using microform machines, photocopiers, photocopy card vending machines, etc.
- directions to book stacks when patron has call number.
- directing a patron to a requested title such as Books in Print, the Schedule of Classes, or a dictionary.
- assisting patrons with mechanical aspects of equipment such as card readers, switchboxes, "out of paper" error messages, paper jams, etc.
- directions (what we now call referrals) to reference desks.

II. REFERENCE TRANSACTIONS

A reference transaction is an information contact that involves the knowledge, use, recommendations, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources. Information sources include (a) printed and nonprinted material; (b) machine-readable databases (including computer-assisted instruction); (c) catalogs and other holdings; (d) other libraries and institutions through communication or referral; (e) persons both inside and outside the library. When a staff member uses information gained from previous use of information sources to answer a question, the transaction is reported as a reference transaction even if the source is not consulted again.

Examples of reference transactions include:

- assisting a patron with a ready reference transaction that involves a quick lookup in a directory or encyclopedia.
- assisting a patron with verifying an ILL citation. **NOTE: multiple requests received from the same patron should be counted as a single reference transaction.**
- assisting a patron in the use of catalogs, databases, and the Internet. etc.
- assisting a patron in selecting appropriate resources for a research paper.
- interpretation, instruction in the use of a resource (print or electronic) or printing from an electronic resource. This does not include assistance merely with mechanical aspects of equipment such as card readers, switchboxes, "out of paper" error messages, paper jams, etc. [see 7th bullet under "Examples of directional questions include:"]
- instruction on downloading to a disc which involves use of an information source such as downloading content from Current Contents, Academic Universe, JSTOR, etc.

GUIDELINES:

- 1) An information contact is defined as a single transaction between a staff member and a requester.
- 2) If a transaction includes both reference and directional components, it should be counted as one reference transaction.
- 3) If the question involves one or more conceptual topics: several questions may be asked and answered, and should be counted as one reference transaction. However, if a patron returns to the reference desk at a later time this would be

counted as a separate reference transaction, even if the second transaction were a follow-up to the first.

4) Duration should not be an element in determining whether a transaction is a reference transaction.

5) Reference transactions that take place off-desk, (e.g., mail, telephone, or faxed questions should be counted as a reference transaction). **NOTE: Each library can decide on separate forms for individuals or one form for the department as a whole. In either case, off-desk reference transactions should be reported to Library Administration along with the reference transactions counted at the reference desk.**

6) Reference transactions that begin at the desk, but that later require off-desk consultation should be counted as a reference transaction at the reference desk.

7) If the consultation is how to research a topic, it should be counted as a reference transaction (see #5 above). If the consultation is instructional in nature, it should be counted as an instructional transaction. In an instructional consultation, a librarian explains or describes information resources, and is not assisting a patron with how to research a topic. If the consultation involves both aspects of the above, librarians should make a judgment call as to where the consultation should be counted.

8) Statistics for classes, tours, and instruction consultations, are gathered separately by individual libraries **AND SHOULD NOT** be counted as reference transactions.

9) Fee-based mediated ready reference searches should be reported as a reference transaction.

III. Virtual reference transactions

Virtual reference transactions are conducted via email, a library's website, or other network communications mechanisms designed to support electronic reference. A virtual reference transaction must include a question either received electronically (e.g., via email, WWW form, etc.) or responded to electronically. A transaction that is both received and responded to electronically is counted as one transaction. Exclude phone and fax traffic unless either the question or answer transaction occurs via the manner described above. Include counts accrued from participation in any local and national projects, such as the UC chat collaborative.

Guidelines

- 1) For virtual reference statistics, a reference transaction is an information contact that involves the knowledge, use, recommendations, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources

by any member of the library staff (e.g., circulation, technical or reference service).

- 2) Each library can decide on keeping virtual reference statistics through separate forms for individuals or one form for the department as a whole, or use of both separate forms for individuals and a form for the department (depending on the projects a library is involved in and the software being used, tracking the statistics may require multiple approaches).