In June 2012, the Willis Library at the University of North Texas (UNT) combined its first floor reference and circulation desks, creating the Library Services Desk (LSD). The two reference desks were staffed by one librarian and one graduate library assistant (GLA) where on-the-job training for the GLA occurred. The circulation desk originally was staffed by two to four undergraduate student workers. After the merger, the LSD was staffed by three circulation student workers and one reference worker, either a librarian, a reference specialist, or, and in most cases, a GLA. The reference workers are cross-trained in minimal circulation services. The circulation workers are cross-trained in basic reference services. The primary benefit of the merger has been the centralization of services for patrons.

The GLA reference training is a combination of a comprehensive Blackboard course and weekly professional development meetings. The Blackboard course includes library organization information, database navigation skills, citation assistance, and emergency procedures. (Leuzinger, 2013).

The UNT Libraries experiment in combining the reference desk with the circulation desk has been successful because we have qualified reference GLAs and the student assistants are trained in basic reference service. Reference training is ongoing and provided using multiple formats: classroom instruction, on-the-job training, online training, and a reference training manual.

The first training challenge is preparing the GLAs to provide exceptional reference service to patrons. The second training challenge is providing instruction to the entire LSD staff to deliver circulation and reference services that appear seamless to patrons while maintaining a distinct division of labor behind the desk.

The student assistants at the Library Services Desk are undergraduates from diverse disciplines. In order to teach basics reference skills, a Basic Reference Skills training manual was designed by a librarian, a reference specialist, and a student assistant. (Campbell, McCabe, and Whitmer, 2013).

Due to budget challenges and space allocation, UNT’s Willis Library recently combined the reference desks with the circulation counter. Where there were two reference desks staffed with a librarian and a GLA, there is now one reference chair at the Library Services Desk staffed with a GLA as the major source for walk-in reference assistance.

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