


Good, Fast, and Cheap:
The Pioneering Reference Chat Service at the
University of North Texas

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Considerations When Establishing an Online Desk

- What level of technology is appropriate for your service?
 - How much do you want to spend on the service?
 - Who will staff the online desk?
 - Where will the online desk be staffed?
 - How will the staff be trained?
- 



Considerations When Establishing an Online Desk

- What will be the hours of operation?
 - Who are you targeting to use this service?
 - How will patrons access your service?
 - What level of assistance and how long do you assist a patron?
 - How will you market the service?
- 


University of North Texas Libraries



- Fourth largest university in Texas with over 30,000 students
- Aggressively providing access to computer and database resources
- Each year expanding offsite and distance course offerings




Background

- Began our e-mail reference service in 1998
 - Began our chat service on May 17, 1999
 - The UNT Online Reference Help Desk appears to be the second oldest online library reference desk
- 




Goals

- To answer questions and assist patrons in a synchronous online environment
 - To reach the largest number of UNT patrons
- 




Designing the Service

- Chose to use the simplest technology
 - The more basic the technology the less that could go wrong with it
 - Provide a service that would not require patrons to purchase or download any additional equipment to access
 - Use technology that patrons were using already
 - Did not want to spend a lot of money
- 



Software

- ConferenceRoom Professional Edition from WebMaster
 - Can be accessed by up to 1000 concurrent users
 - Web server is designed to serve out the java client
 - Able to install and customize in-house
 - Works with NT/Windows2000
 - Cost \$495.00
- 



ConferenceRoom Professional Edition

- Allows for private interviews with patrons
 - Channel Operator Panel provides an easy way to manage room and users
 - Can post dynamic URL links
 - <http://www.conferenceroom.com/home.shtml>
- 



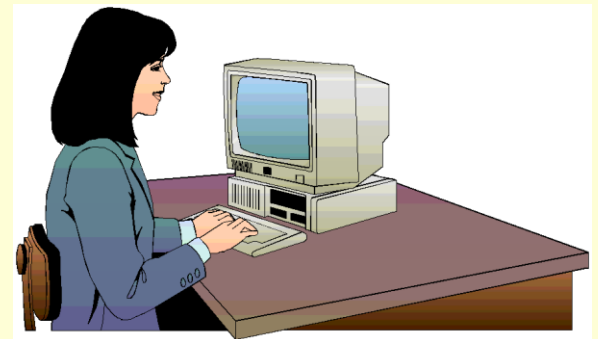
Additional Equipment

- Speakers and Sound card
 - Needed to hear a patron enter the Online Reference Help Desk
 - Allows staff members to utilize their time constructively




Staffing

- Librarians, full-time staff members, and graduate assistants
- Three separate locations: Willis Library, Science and Technology Library, UNT Dallas Library
- Use a formal weekly desk schedule





Location of Online Desk and Staff

- A link can be found on numerous library web pages including the Libraries' home page
 - Librarians staff the desk from their office but it can be staffed from anywhere
 - Found it did not work to staff the Online Desk from our physical reference desk
- 


Training

- Instructions should be in writing
- Does have a learning curve
- Skills are transferable
- On going process






Hours of Operation

- Based upon needs of patrons and staff availability
 - Original hours were 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm Mondays through Fridays
 - Expanded to 10:00 am to 8:00 pm, Mon. –Thurs, Fri. 10:00 am to 5:00 pm
- 




Target Users

- UNT Community - students, faculty, and staff
 - Distance education students
 - Students taking classes using WebCT software
 - Students in computer labs and dorm rooms
 - Commuting students
- 




Assisting Patrons

- Works well for questions that can be answered quickly
 - Works well for helping patrons find information on the web or in an electronic format
 - Can “walk” patrons through searching a database
 - Print resources do not translate well in this environment
- 




Level of Service

- Is between what you can do for patrons over the telephone and what you can do in person
 - Some patrons may want you to do their research for them
 - Important to try to teach users how you found the information
- 




Marketing

- It is an ongoing process
 - Try different ways to let people know about your service
 - E-mail
 - Posters
 - Articles
 - Web pages
 - Library instruction sessions
- 



Statistics

- From May 17, 1999 to April 26, 2002
 - 537 questions answered
 - March 2001 vs. 2002
 - 11 vs. 31
 - April 2001 vs. 2002
 - 18 vs. 51
 - Usage fluctuates depending on the time of the semester
- 



UNIVERSITY of NORTH TEXAS

LIBRARIES

QUICK LINKS

- ★ [UNT Library Catalog](#)
- ★ [Electronic Resources](#)
- [Library Services for
UNT Off-Campus Users](#)

HELP

- [Ask a Librarian](#)
- [How Do I Begin?](#)
- [How to Find Books & Articles](#)
- [Site Map](#)
- [Search This Web Site](#)

◀ Research assistance in person, by e-mail, by phone, or via the online reference help desk.

- [Resources for Library Research](#)
- [Library Services](#)
- [Exhibits & Collections](#)
- [About the Libraries](#)
- [New & Noteworthy](#)

! **Let us know** what you think of our site. [FILL OUT FORM](#)

(Does not search the [UNT library catalog](#) or content of individual databases)

Ask a Librarian: Reference Assistance at the UNT Libraries

- [Reference Desks](#)

[brief overview](#)

- [E-Mail Reference](#)

[brief overview](#)

[General Reference Questions](#)

[Government Information Questions](#)

- [Reference by Phone](#)

[brief overview](#)

- [Reference by Appointment](#)

[brief overview](#)

- [Online Reference Help Desk](#)

[brief overview](#)

ONLINE REFERENCE HELP DESK

[Ask a librarian for help in real time,
using chat room technology.](#)

The service is now available
Monday through Thursday
from 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.
and Friday from
10:00A.M. to 5:00 P.M.,
Central Time.

ENTER



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

LIBRARIES

Online Reference Help Desk

Get help from a librarian at our Online Reference Desk.

**The Online Reference Help Desk is open
Monday through Thursday
from 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.
and Friday from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.
Central Time.**

For after hours assistance visit the [Ask a Librarian](#) web page.

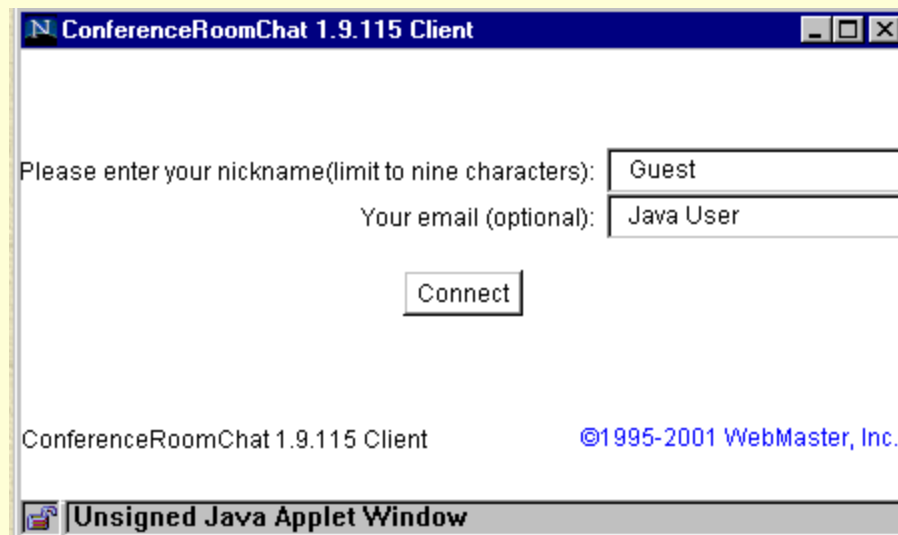


Basic Instructions:

1. Type your **name** (required) and **email address** (optional) in the pop-up window.
2. Click on the **Connect** button.
3. Press **Return** or **Enter** after typing your comment/question to post your comment/question.
4. If the pop-up window disappears, check the task bar at the bottom of your computer screen.
5. Click on the **Page a Librarian** button to summon a librarian.
6. To exit, type **/quit**

ConferenceRoomChat 1.9.115 Client is running in separate window

Chat Pop-up Window



ConferenceRoomChat 1.9.115 Client

#helpdesk: Please page me if you need some help.

3 Use X

@Librarian_Beth says, "Hi Debbie! Do you need some help?"
You said, "Yes, I want to know how to renew my library books online."

@Librarian_Beth says, "Let me look that up for you. Do you have time to wait?"

You said, "Yes, I can wait."

@Librarian_Beth says, "Be right back."

@Librarian_Beth says, "To renew your books go to this web page:
<https://www.library.unt.edu/eforms/circ/renewal.htm>

@Librarian_Beth
@Librarian_Bot
Debbie



Commands

#helpdesk

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Unsigned Java Applet Window



Questions?

