with burnout must also be addressed. How does and should a librarian spend time when not on the desk? Is there a morale problem in most reference departments and are opportunities needed for personal growth? Is there a growth of specialization of reference service and reference librarians, with more traditional reference desk service being handled by students and clerical or paraprofessional staff? Should there be?

What will the role of the reference librarian be in this changing environment? What will the future be? Will the traditional reference desk pattern continue? Should it continue? The years ahead in reference service will be challenging and require the courage to try new approaches while defending old approaches that meet the needs of library users. Reference librarians must serve as advocates for library users to be certain that needs are met and responded to in the most appropriate manner possible.

The future of reference service: A response

By Larayne Dallas

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For a reference librarian a natural corollary to the question, "What is the future of reference service?" is "What is the future of reference librarians?" With so much change in our recent pasts and with everyone expecting much more of the same, we justifiably wonder what will happen to us. My answer is that, at least for the intermediate future, reference librarians—and a need for them—will continue.

When considering research libraries and the future, despite the difficulty of predicting what will come, at least one possible scenario comes easily to mind. That is the vision of former library users working at their computer work stations, able to retrieve what they need from that location, and not having to go near a library. This is not a scenario that bodes particularly well for librarians, but I have to wonder about the likelihood of this vision coming true very soon.

For one thing, I have trouble seeing the producers of the various computer files getting together to offer their information compatibly. Only a few years ago the Wilson Company decided to go its own way in making available the computer-database version of its indexes. They did this instead of making it easier for us by offering the files through BRS or DIALOG. Also, what about the limitations of current computer equipment, and the interest of users in seeing graphics and advertisements?

Additionally, there is the question of money. Much concern has been expressed in recent years about the future and equal access to information. Usually we think of this concern as it relates to the poor, but it will be a problem extending to the middle class. Will students or even researchers be able to afford to subscribe to all the services they may need? Will students know which files they are going to need for their general-requirement courses or even for their major courses? There may eventually be networks or package deals available—perhaps through arrangements made by universities—but again I think that we are a long way from it.

And what about older materials...old journal runs, for example, and NTIS technical reports? In the library where I work, we have at least 400,000 NTIS reports on microfiche and that is, of course, only a partial set of the total available. Who is going to go to the effort of putting all those into machine-readable form? Who is going to pay for it? Even science and technology people do not ignore the past.

So it is appropriate to think of future libraries as warehouses for the materials and as an increasingly important source of computer-based files. And, librarians will still be needed to help guide users through the mists. It seems some time distant when computers can answer questions. So-called "expert systems" answer only in the sense that the questions are already known. Changes do seem inevitable—we have seen too many to think otherwise—but no matter the new formats and new materials, guidance will still be needed. Which index, which computer database, what source for materials not held are questions which will remain.

I am concerned, though, about reference librarians gaining more things to do and know, without giving up—or perhaps without being able to give up—the old. I like to think that librarians are renaissance women and men, but I do worry about quality and sanity. There are the latest DIALOG changes, those new directories, the recent developments at the main library, and that something new with the document delivery service. Sometimes I think that we are apt to get users to an answer be-

cause of the sheer bulk of materials available, but that means we have more to forget to mention. I am much taken with a phrase that Herbert White used in a recent letter to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. He used it in a different context; he was speaking of the weight of pressures that are being felt especially in large libraries as staff members try to have everything on site for everybody and "feed the dinosaurs."[16] It seems that in reference we have like problems; we try to take on the present and future but still have to feed the dinosaurs of the past.

The suggestion that departmental-library-like work groups might improve reference service has the appeal of possibly improving staff and user interaction. As a librarian currently employed in a departmental library, I know that this sort of arrangement encourages regular contact and getting to know faces. On the other hand, I know that it often seems that departmental library staff members have to know about everything—what to do when the ceiling leaks, how to put paper in the reader-printers, circulation policies, demonstrating the fax machine, and so on. Librarian overload is not helped by a departmental arrangement.

[16]Herbert S. White, "Librarians, Not Users, Should Identify Needs," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 34, no.23 (February 17, 1988): B3.

But, though I find it easy to criticize the suggestions of others, I do not know what the answer is to the question to how we can best do our jobs and work out current problems.

Scheduling appointments with librarians may be a helpful device, but this would require a lot of adjustments on both sides. When I worked at the Douglas-Cook Library at Rutgers University, we did this in a limited way by making appointments with students to assist them in beginning research for term papers or other such projects. The arrangement worked well in its context. But, I do want a reference desk or some sort of desk to go to for short answers and for referral to appointments. When I was a student, the undergraduate library at the university I attended had no reference desk. I understand that the director thought reference staff members should be roaming the reference area waiting for questions, but the problem for me was that there was not a designated place to go for assistance.

I end with no firm conclusion except to note that we have a lot of possibilities. With all the work that needs to be done and all those users to serve, maybe not only will there be reference librarians in the future, but we will even find that a lot more of us are needed!

The future of reference service: A response

By Goldia Hester

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In a time of great nostalgia for the book, it is worth remembering that both libraries and librarians existed before books, before paper, and even before red tape. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* depicts an elaborate library with librarians a century before Gutenberg. The fact that reference librarians of all sorts have from the beginning maintained files of information, not available in book, or in some cases print, form indicates that reference librarians have seen beyond the container to the information. While the demise of the book like that of Mark Twain has been greatly exaggerated, reference librarians would do well to remember that their destiny is tied to the book only if they are inflexible.

An anonymous user sent a message through the comment screen of the UT Online Catalog the last week of February 1988: "The computer system is very helpful, but it can't compare to the reference desk. Let's try and do something about that." It's always nice to receive a compliment, but it would be interesting to know what additional features are needed to bring UTCAT up to the user's standard of the reference desk.

The Perry-Castañeda Library reference desk is one of the pulse points of this campus. Time at the reference desk can be both informative and energizing for the reference librarians, but there are more important reasons for the reference librarians to be there on a regular basis. Let's examine what goes on at the reference desk, not at the level of interview and search strategy, but in a wider context.

The reference librarian's time at the reference desk provides feedback for bibliographic instruction and printed materials. At the same time the reference librarians at the reference desk properly are answering questions on two levels: the immediate questions from the individuals at the desk, and the larger question, the metaquestions, that can be answered before the public asks:

What signs and point-of-use aids are needed?
What obstacles are in the way of the public?