## Individualized Instruction for Undergraduates: Term Paper Clinic Staffed by MLS Students

Ethel Auster, Rea Devakos, and Sian Meikle

In academic libraries, shrinking budgets and expanding enrollments are forcing reference librarians to explore innovative ways to provide individualized services to their clients. Meanwhile, library schools are seeking ways to enhance the educational experience of their students and to provide them with a competitive advantage in a tight job market. At the University of Toronto, the Sigmund Samuel Library and the Faculty of Library and Information Science joined forces to mount a Term Paper Clinic for undergraduates that was staffed by MLS students. This service provided research strategies to first- and second-year undergraduates working on term papers. This article describes the planning, implementation, and assessment of the TPC and provides recommendations for similar undertakings in the future.



roviding quality service to undergraduate students at large urban universities has become a goal that is increas-

ingly difficult to achieve. On the one hand, the prolonged economic downturn has led to increased enrollments as people return to the university in the hope of becoming better qualified for the job market when the economy finally improves. On the other hand, university libraries have pared staff to the minimum to meet the exigencies of shrinking budgets. Today a situation exists in many university libraries where increased demands are made upon resources already taxed to the limit. This was the state of affairs at the Sigmund Samuel Library, the undergraduate library at the University of Toronto, Canada's largest postsecondary institution, when the librarians decided to do something about improving their service to undergraduates.

Meanwhile, across the campus at the Faculty of Library and Information Science, the instructor of the advanced reference course was searching for ways to provide the MLS students with handson experience. A meeting between the instructor and the coordinator of library instruction led to the development and implementation of a program that provided a solution to both sets of needs: a Term Paper Clinic whereby MLS students would provide individualized instruction to first- and second-year undergraduates under the overall supervision of professional staff.

#### RELEVANT LITERATURE

While the literature on bibliographic instruction is abundant, the literature on term paper clinics (hereafter, TPCs) is

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sparse. Basically, the TPC is a form of individualized reference service and user education whereby students receive one-on-one instruction on how to locate and use resource materials relevant to their term paper topics. The student may receive a written search strategy including examples of the types of resources available, the appropriate indexes, and the specific subject headings to use. Sometimes a more complete list of citations is provided.

In the literature, the names for this service vary. Patricia Donegan, Ralph Domas, and John Deosdade call it term paper counselling. Tim Schobert refers to it as individualized bibliographic instruction. Gillian Debreczeny uses individualized term paper consultations. For Jamie Coniglio the name that provides the best description is term paper advisory service, while Kathleen Bergen and Barbara MacAdam prefer term paper assistance program. Caroline Rowe opts for individual research consultations while Samuel Rothstein likes point of need/maximum service.1-7 The literature that describes using library science students to provide this service is even more limited. The classic article by Rothstein, recalling his experiences at the University of British Columbia in the 1970s, is the most detailed and instructive for those who wish to design and implement such a service.

The benefits of the Term Paper Clinic approach are many. Tim Schobert points out that though course-related subject seminars are given at the University of Ottawa, some students are not exposed to library instruction.8 For them, the TPC offers an opportunity to come in at their own initiative and on their own time to learn about resources specifically related to their own research topic. Bergen and MacAdam suggest that the in-depth and uninterrupted assistance that the TPC program provides greatly reinforces a student's comprehension.9 They also present persuasive arguments for the psychological and social appeal of individualized instruction and suggest that this type of instruction leads to a more trusting and comfortable social interaction between the student and the librarian. The result is a more positive learning experience for the student. The library and librarian also benefit. Librarians think that the more personal form of service is intrinsically more satisfying. The profile of librarians in general is raised and the library receives positive PR. Nothing is perfect, however. Debreczeny, though she calls individualized reference "probably the most effective library instruction technique," reminds us that it consumes a great deal of the librarians' time, reaches a limited number of students, requires in-depth subject knowledge, and may create scheduling and staffing problems.10

In her survey of bibliographic instruction in the 1980s, Teresa B. Mensching found that the use of Term Paper Clinics in United States academic libraries declined by 4 percent from 1979 to 1987.11 Administrators may not regard this method as cost-effective and therefore may be reluctant to maintain and increase support for it. Those who have implemented such programs, however, tend to feel positive about them. There is a profile of who will constitute the most likely users and who may benefit the most: freshmen or sophomores writing papers on social science topics who have attempted to do some preliminary research on their own. According to Bergen and MacAdam, more women than men tend to use the service.12 While much of the evidence presented tends to be anecdotal, the wealth of experience that has been accumulated and presented in the literature ensures that those undertaking Term Paper Clinics can avoid problems and select only those aspects of programs that have met with success. Those wishing to use library school students to staff the Term Paper Clinic are fortunate to have Sam Rothstein to guide them. Of all the articles on TPCs-with or without students-his has the most to offer. It details virtually every procedure that needs to be put in place. It presents drawbacks as well as benefits and generously provides copies of the documents that will be needed by library school instructors and students as well as service recipients. We turned to this earlier work for inspiration in planning, implementing, and evaluating our own TPC program.

#### AIMS OF THE TERM PAPER CLINIC

The instructor of a course entitled Reference Organization and Administration thought that practical experience was an indispensable component of training to become a reference librarian. While students were taught about the reference interview, information needs of specific user groups and reference sources, they had no opportunity outside the classroom to practice their newly acquired knowledge and skills under the experienced guidance of seasoned professionals. From the instructor's point of view, one aim of the Term Paper Clinic was to provide the students with the real-life experience of providing reference service, in this case, to firstand second-year undergraduates. Other aims were to provide the students with an opportunity to test their skills, to interact with real users, and to acquire the taste of working in an academic environment. Finally, the TPC was also seen as a way of providing a course assignment for MLS students that was somewhat more interesting than the usual midterm paper.

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From the library's instruction perspective, the Term Paper Clinic was intended to serve several other purposes. It would provide in-depth individual consultations and instruction to undergraduates, thus extending the existing consultation service provided to graduate students and faculty in a time of fiscal retrenchment and increasing service needs. It would foster cooperation between Central Library's library instruction services, the Faculty of Library and Information Science, and the Sigmund Samuel Library, the main undergraduate library. It would explore the efficacy of providing an alternative form of library instruction delivery and provide a model of library instruction that would parallel that of the campus writing labs. It would support the university's emphasis on the undergraduate experience and promote the role of the Sigmund Samuel Library as the gateway

for undergraduates.

The Sigmund Samuel Library was suited to the Term Paper Clinic concept because it allowed enhanced reference service at one of the busiest times of the academic year. In the Term Paper Clinic, the MLS students were able to offer relatively unhurried one-on-one and indepth service to users that resulted in a written guide to research. This was a welcome contrast to the inevitably brisk pace of service at the reference desk. The service was also attractive as an alternate form of individualized library instruction, which would help to accentuate the role of the Sigmund Samuel Library for the undergraduate student. Both the instructor and the librarians had some slight reservations about the project. The instructor hoped the students would take their commitment seriously and not jeopardize the future prospects of the program. The librarians worried about the ability of the MLS students to interpret correctly and meet appropriately the information needs of the undergraduates without placing an undue burden on the reference desk.

#### SETTING

The site chosen for the Term Paper Clinic was the Sigmund Samuel Library. This is the primary library at the University of Toronto serving the undergraduate Arts and Science student body of approximately 20,000 students. It is one of 49 libraries in the University of Toronto Library system, which in total has more than 7.8 million volumes, serving a community of roughly 60,000. The Sigmund Samuel Library has a collection of about 210,000 volumes, and

makes about 250,000 loans annually. Because it is a library for undergraduates, reference service at the Sigmund Samuel Library emphasizes introducing the student to the methods and complexities of university-level research, using resources appropriate to the undergraduate researcher.

### PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

MLS students were given both a twohour in-class and a one-hour in-library orientation session before the Term Paper Clinics began. During the class orientation, the MLS students were introduced to the philosophy underlying reference service at the Sigmund Samuel Library. In particular, emphasis was placed on the need to explain the basic structure of information resources; to present this information so that it could be applied to other research projects; to use tools appropriate to the undergraduate; and to provide the undergraduate with research strategies, rather than a finished body of research, in order to encourage self-teaching. A major focus of training was on the use of UTLink, the University of Toronto's online information system. It contains the University of Toronto library catalog comprised of 4.5 million records, 7.8 million bookforms in 49 libraries, 7 Wilson periodical indexes, a computer-assisted tutorial in library and research skills, Medline, CINAHL, Health, and connections to the Internet. For undergraduate use, we emphasized the library catalog and Wilson as primary resources. Most MLS students were adept users of both the library catalog and the Wilson files. Their training concentrated on pointing out the problems with both the search interface and the respective files and the proposed solutions. Needless to say, given that the library celebrated its one hundredth year in 1992, the union catalog contains a wealth of resources, errors, cataloguing styles, classification systems, and the like.

Effective catalog search strategies and methods of finding materials appropriate for TPC clients were important components of the UTLink training. NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, was used as a sample search. This search led quite naturally into a discussion of how to gauge the completeness of the search versus the ease with which undergraduates might replicate it. The other focus of training was to discuss how extensive a search was to be conducted and what types of materials were appropriate for undergraduates. In the library orientation session, the MLS students were shown the layout of the Sigmund Samuel Library facilities, and introduced to the major tools available in the reference area. They were also given a brief written summary of the Library of Congress classification, with the important reference works in each area noted.

The Term Paper Clinic was scheduled to run in two-hour time blocks over a three-week period during the busiest part of the 1993 spring term. The exact times were selected, based on the reference statistics of previous years, to coincide with the busiest times of the day and the week, and also to make the service available to part-time students by offering some evening and weekend sessions. The service was designed for, and advertised to, students enrolled in preuniversity, first- or second-year undergraduate Arts and Science courses. Two MLS students staffed each session; each graduate student was assigned a total of three sessions. A desk near the reference desk at the Sigmund Samuel Library was designated as the Term Paper Clinic Desk during the clinic sessions. The desk was marked with signs advertising the clinic; basic guides to the Sigmund Samuel Reference collection and reference books in general were available to the MLS students at the desk. Service was provided on a walk-in basis. The MLS students were instructed to spend roughly twenty minutes negotiating the reference questions raised, in each initial session, using a Term Paper Clinic Library Research Guide Form (see appendix A) to record pertinent information. Then, as appropriate, a follow-up appointment was made between undergraduate and MLS 554

student, preferably within twenty-four hours and at the convenience of each, to deliver the finished Term Paper Clinic Library Research Guide. At the conclusion of the interaction, each undergraduate student was given a Term Paper Clinic Survey (see appendix B) and asked to assess the service and return the survey form to the reference desk as soon as convenient. The MLS students were asked to photocopy all Guide forms twice (for their own and Sigmund Samuel's records) before giving them to the undergraduate students.

Advertising costs were negligible. The TPC was advertised through flyers and posters distributed in the forty-nine campus libraries, by the student associations, and by the writing labs (see appendix C). The schedule of the TPC was mounted on the opening screen of UT-Link, the university's online information system. Public announcements prior to the start of each time slot were made in the Sigmund Samuel Library. Librarians at all public service points were encouraged to refer students to the TPC. Announcements were also sent to the student and university papers, but none of the papers picked up the copy or chose to feature an article: One paper did, however, offer to run the public announcement as an advertisement.

#### TPC CLIENTS ASSESS THE SERVICE

In all, 80 students used the TPC service which was available for 36 hours over a three-week period in the middle of the spring term of 1993. This number was more than enough to keep the 11 MLS students busy. Indeed, most of them reported that each initial query resulted in an additional one to three hours of work following the reference interview. Thirty-nine of the TPC users returned their completed Term Paper Clinic Survey for a response rate of approximately 49 percent. While the response rate is less than we might have wished, it does provide impressions and patterns on which to assess the TPC, and it is on just such information that administrators base their decisions. Survey data are bolstered by the evidence sub-

TABLE 1
ACADEMIC LEVEL OF
RESPONDENTS WHO USED
THE TPC SERVICE

THE IT C BERVICE					
Level	Number	%			
Pre-university	3	7.7			
Transitional year	1	2.6			
1st year	11	28.2			
2d year	11	28.2			
3d year	9	23.0			
Other (special)	4	10.3			
Total	39	100.0			

mitted by the MLS students on their Library Research Guides, evaluation forms, and term papers. Predictably, the response rate for the MLS students was 100 percent. Although originally the librarians designed the TPC for first- and second-year students, others were also drawn to it once the clinic was in operation. Not surprisingly, first- and secondyear students, the target audience, constituted the majority of users and respondents (56 percent). Third-year students (23 percent) also sought help as did pre-university, transitional year, and other (i.e., special) types of undergraduates (see table 1). It became clear that although first- and second-year students might need individualized help the most, other students were also in need of in-depth assistance and should not be denied help if it were available.

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The majority (46 percent) of the respondents were regular library users who used the library five times or more a month. Most were not experienced in writing research papers with 2.59 papers per student being the average. Subject areas ranged across the breadth of the arts and social sciences, including East Asian Studies, Classics, Fine Arts, Physi-

TABLE 2
HOW RESPONDENTS LEARNED
ABOUT THE TPC SERVICE

Method of Advertisement	Number	%	
Posters in:	30	76.9	
Writing labs	1	2.6	
Libraries	27	69.2	
Both of the above	1	2.6	
Elsewhere on campus	1	2.6	
Referrals by:	3	7.7	
Word of mouth	1	2.6	
Writing lab	1	2.6	
Library staff	1	2.6	
UTLINK Screen	1	2.6	
Public announcements	1	2.6	
"Bumped into it"	1	2.6	
No response	3	7.7	
Total	39	100.1	

cal Geography, English, History, Political Science, and so on. Of the students who sought help, most (60 percent) received help on the spot. The remainder either returned to complete the consultation (10 percent) or received initial assistance immediately but returned for further assistance (30 percent).

Just over three-quarters of the respondents (77 percent) learned about the TPC from posters advertising the service. The most effective placement of these posters was at the Sigmund Samuel Library where the TPC was located. Other ways that respondents found out about the service were through referrals by writing lab instructors and other library staff, via the UTLink screen, through public announcements in the library and in student newspapers, and by accident or fortuitously (see table 2).

Students evaluated their TPC experience in positive terms, with most (68 percent) assessing the service as being very useful or somewhat useful (32 percent) in helping them to research their term paper. All but one respondent noted that their ability to use the library had improved. Perhaps most interesting are the user comments that describe

these improvements: the TPC "helped me find the right direction"; "got me started finding information"; "showed me how to research a topic"; "introduced me to new sources"; "showed me new places to look." Some of the users even absorbed library terminology. Most acquired what bibliographic instruction librarians term "transferable skills"; that is, where and how to look for information. The skills that respondents considered to be most important were the need to focus, the importance of using different research approaches, new computer sources and skills, improved skills in locating periodical articles, and using keywords and subject headings.

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Of all respondents exposed to the TPC, only one said that she would not recommend the service to a friend. Her reason pertained more to the geography of the campus than to the quality of the TPC experience: she thought that it was too time-consuming to walk from her college to the library when she needed every moment to write her papers. Students had a variety of suggestions for improving the service—the most popular being to increase the hours and lengthen the duration. The provision of tailor-made bibliographies and the addition of subject experts were also mentioned.

#### MLS STUDENT IMPRESSIONS OF THE TERM PAPER CLINIC

The eleven MLS students who participated in the Term Paper Clinic were asked to summarize their experiences in a three-page report. The students described what they had gained from the practicum, any problems they may have encountered or observed, and any

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recommendations they had for the coordination of future clinics. The following summary is the result of a content analy-

sis of these papers.

Overall, the students rated the project an overwhelming success and were wholly in favor of having the program continue. Students described the program as a "rewarding experience"; "intensive, draining, but very satisfying"; and "an excellent opportunity to live the library experience, and understand what is really involved in reference work." The project was perceived to be successful, not only for the MLS students but also for their clientele. One MLS student commented that "all of [the] patrons were grateful for the service provided, interested in the suggestions offered, and were often remarkably enthusiastic about researching their papers." In fact, according to this MLS student, "if the Term Paper Clinic was ... responsible for generating some of this enthusiasm, on these grounds alone it can be deemed a success."

## WHAT WAS GAINED FROM THE EXPERIENCE

The MLS students considered the practicum a worthwhile experience for a number of reasons. Many of the students thought that this practicum was by far one of their most rewarding assignments at library school because it afforded them the opportunity to gain valuable practical experience. The importance of complementing theory with practice in the learning experience was repeatedly emphasized. As one student succinctly put it: "Theory and passive viewing will not give anyone a genuine understanding of the demands of working the reference desk."

The MLS students thought that the practicum allowed them to test and develop their skills and knowledge, especially in these three areas: question negotiation, reference tools, and bibliographic instruction. Providing reference service gave the students practice at interviewing and refining queries. It also gave them an indication of their strengths and weaknesses in these areas and an idea of where they needed to

improve. The MLS students noted that the experience introduced them to various reference sources previously unknown to them, and compelled them to become familiar with the materials in order to be able to tailor specific search strategies for their clients.

For most of the MLS students, this was their first attempt at providing bibliographic instruction, and for this reason alone it proved to be an enlightening and challenging experience. One MLS student noted that he quickly discovered that "as easy as it may be to learn to use a reference tool, teaching this tool to someone else is another matter entirely." For another, the experience prompted her to ponder the significance of this pedagogical aspect of librarianship: "As future librarians, is it enough to learn how to use the reference tools without learning to teach the reference tools?"

For many of the participants, this experience taught them the importance of teamwork in librarianship. The MLS students enthusiastically described the interaction between librarian and client as a team effort, "with both sides working together." As well, the cooperation between librarian and colleague "indicated the importance of teamwork in librarianship and the ability to share knowledge and experience." For another student, this experience was a chance to meet with professional librarians in the field: "The opportunity to discuss the reference process with practicing librarians was part of what made the project successful in my mind."

Clearly, the Term Paper Clinic experience enabled MLS students to gain a new and refreshing perspective on the nature and challenges of everyday reference work. As one student realized: "From the difficult questions I learned one very important thing: reference librarians are not omniscient." The Sigmund Samuel Library also gained from the TPC experience. The load on the reference desk was somewhat eased, and it was apparent that the undergraduate students appreciated the specialized service. The MLS students largely were able to provide the service independently

of the reference desk staff. On the whole, the Library Research Guides provided were useful and appropriate tools that were gratefully received.

#### **PROBLEMS**

Although the project was, in general, considered very successful, there were some minor problems and concerns. Lack of confidence on the part of the student librarians, because of inexperience and unfamiliarity with various subjects and disciplines, was perceived as a barrier to providing adequate service to clients.

Of course, delivery of the service was not always simple. Some TPC interactions were complicated because the clients came to the clinic unprepared, or with overly broad topics, or were not informed on the subject they wished to research. Other clients required very basic library instruction in the use of library tools before they could even begin to do research, or had topics that were so obscure that information and resources were difficult or impossible to locate.

One recurring problem was clients who misunderstood the purpose of the clinic. Many clients thought that the Term Paper Clinic would provide essay writing assistance rather than library research assistance. For this reason, some clients had expectations that could not be satisfied. This confusion was most likely the result of the potential ambiguity of the clinic's name.

Finally, there were also some problems with the location of the clinic. The clinic itself consisted of a table and two chairs, and was located near the reference desk and the OPAC terminals. It became apparent that other students were not aware that the area had been designated for the Term Paper Clinic. Consequently, if the student librarian and client momentarily vacated the area to use other library resources, other students would spot the empty table and move in. Also, the close proximity of the Term Paper Clinic to the photocopiers created a noisy distraction.

These concerns, however, were not unduly troublesome and from the Sigmund Samuel Library's perspective, the benefits of the service certainly outweighed the drawbacks. The enhanced service and the individualized library instruction were both very attractive and created positive public relations for the library.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The MLS students who participated in the clinic were able to make several suggestions for the improvement of future Term Paper Clinics. To give the students greater confidence it was suggested that there be more training in bibliographic instruction and question analysis prior to the start of the Term Paper Clinic sessions. The name of the clinic was considered problematic, because it led some clients to believe that this was an essay writing service. It was therefore recommended that a more specific name such as "Essay Research Clinic" be used. In addition, brochures and posters advertising the service could be used to inform clientele of the scope of the clinic to avoid misguided expectations.

It was also suggested that there be cooperation between the Term Paper Clinic and the writing lab staff, in several ways. The MLS students could receive training from the writing lab staff in order to help clients narrow and define the topic of their paper. Also, the Term Paper Clinic should have information available on the writing lab in order to redirect and refer students who are looking for writing rather than research assistance. And yet another suggestion was to offer both kinds of service, writing and research assistance, in tandem. Finally, it was recommended that the area set aside for the Term Paper Clinic be clearly marked, to avoid having tables used as a general work area by other library users. Large, visible signage, such as a poster on an easel next to the table could be used to designate the area. MLS students also suggested moving the clinic away from the noise of photocopiers and other diversions, to create a less distracting environment. Though commendable, this last suggestion may reflect an unrealistic image of the environment in which undergraduate reference services occur.

#### CONCLUSION

Was the TPC worth doing? Absolutely. It largely fulfilled the aims set for it by the instructor and the librarians. Certainly it enlivened the reference course and gave the students a taste of actual reference work. Some were confirmed in their career preference; others realized that academic librarianship was

not their strength. The librarians were able to provide an in-depth, labor-intensive learning experience for their students that would have been difficult to do otherwise. Finally, everyone learned a great deal about cooperation, public relations, and team work—lessons that will undoubtedly prove valuable the next time the Term Paper Clinic is offered.

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#### APPENDIX A

TERM PAPER CLINIC LIBRARY RESEARCH GUIDE				
Name:	Year:			
Phone:	Course:			
Term paper topic (be as	xact as possible)			
	The same of the sa			
Term paper due date:				
Suggested reference mat	≥rials:			
1.12				
Suggested search strateg	y for finding books in UTCat:			
- 88	a distribution of the second second second			
74 182 July 1				
Suggested journal index	es and search strategies:			
Other suggested librarie	and sources:			

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# APPENDIX B Term Paper Clinic Survey

Pl	lease complete and leave at the Sigmund Samuel Reference Desk.
1.	How did you hear about the Term Paper Clinic?  Posters in the library  Newspaper article  Library staff  Other. Please specify:
2.	(a) Are you in:  Pre-U TYP 1st year 2nd year Other. Please specify:
	(b) How many other research papers have you written?
	(c) How often do you use the library?  less than 1 time/month more than 5 times/month 1-5 times/month
	(d) Have you ever used a writing lab? Yes No
3.	For which course did you use this service?
4.	Did you receive help on the spot? And/or return for a guide?
5.	Has this service helped you in researching your essay topic?  Not at all Somewhat Very much
	If so, how?
6.	Has this service changed your ability to use the library?  Not at all Somewhat Very much
	If so, how?
7.	Would you recommend this service to a friend?  Yes Yes, with reservations No
	List any reservations:
8.	List the most important skill you learned from the clinic:
	or, I didn't learn a new skill
9.	How can we improve this service?
0.	Would you be willing to answer a one-page follow-up survey after you've written your essay? If yes, please complete:  Name:
	Address:
	City: Postal Code:

#### APPENDIX C

# Term Paper Clinic

Have a paper due? Would you like help getting started with the research?

A Faculty of Library and Information Science graduate student will discuss your topic with you. A brief guide to research in the library, designed especially for your essay topic, will be prepared. Your guide will be ready the next day; immediate research advice is also available. You'll be off to a great start in researching your essay, and you'll learn how to get the most from your library.

#### Where:

Sigmund Samuel Library Reference Area 9 King's College Circle

#### When:

First three weeks of February (see calendar)

#### Who:

This drop-in service is available to any pre-university, first- or second-year Arts & Science undergraduate.

#### Cost:

Free

F	E	В	R	U	A	RY
Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	4–6 p.m.	2-4 p.m.	4–6 p.m.		a seed or	3–5 p.m.
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
2–4 p.m. 6–8 p.m.	4–6 p.m.	2–4 p.m. 6–8 p.m.	4–6 p.m.			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
2-4 p.m. 6-8 p.m.	4–6 p.m.	2-4 p.m. 6-8 p.m.	4-6 p.m.	19174		3–5 p.m.