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MICHIGAN
VIRTUAL
REFERENCE

Training Newsletter

Inside

Meetings: Past, Present, Future

- Would you like to review the December 3, 2010 Annual RHN meeting held at Washtenaw Community College? All notes and slides are available on the RHN Intranet. (Login required)

- The next online MegaMeeting is set for Monday, February 28 at 11am. Topics include QP User Updates as well as Librarian training.

- Reminder! Our 2011 Annual RHN meeting will be held at Washtenaw Community College, April 8th, from 9-1. Presenters (either singly or in groups) are welcome. Please contact Sandy McCarthy.

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Winners of the 2010 Best Transcripts Contest: Ben Oberdick and Deborah Margolis

The winning transcripts displayed unique characteristics. The award winning librarians thought creatively and acted resourcefully.

At the same time, the winning transcripts illustrate some basic best practices we can all use.

Both librarians:

- Were warm and inviting in their tone.

- Restates the student's question in some way.

- Kept the student engaged in order to get important feedback and confirmation.

- Explained terms when needed.

- Pointed the student to several places for information.

Please read on for Mary Kickham-Samy's interview with one of our 2010 Best Transcript Winners, Deborah Margolis (MSU).

Mary: Hi Deborah. You were one of two winners of the "Best Transcripts Contest for the year 2010. Could you share your approach to virtual reference with us? When a call comes in, what are your thoughts? How do you prepare to answer the question?

Deborah: First I check which institution the patron is coming from, and get ready to send the right "greeting" script (the one for patrons from my institution vs. the one for patrons from other institutions). Even though I have a welcome script with my name, I try to follow that up with a personal greeting that includes their [first] name, and say something that bides me a little time and lets them know that I am attending to their question (Hi there Jason, let me take a look at your question…).

The next question usually is a paraphrase of their question, maybe with a little probing into what exactly they need. (So you need to find the gross domestic product of Colombia (the country in South America)? What years do you need that for?) I think it's important to set a personal tone and start building the relationship as a back and forth exchange, and make sure they know that I am interested in helping them.

After that I would confirm that they are from *x* college or university (So you're from Macomb Community College?), and I would open the "policies" page of their institution, and start seeing what databases they have that will answer the question….

Mary: How important do you think it is to mention the patron's name? I know that mentioning the patron's name is listed as one of the "best practices," but I feel that I am too personal - too intrusive when I use the patron's name. Do you think I should dismiss this concern? How does using the patron's name affect the transaction, do you think?

Deborah: I do feel it's important to use the patron's name, after giving the scripted greeting, to establish a relationship. Of course, you have to do what you're comfortable with, and the most important thing is to convey to the patron that you are interested in and attentive to their question. I tend to use exclamation points a lot, to make up for the lack of a smile that someone would see if we were in a face-to-face reference transaction, and also to make up for lack of friendly tone of voice. I think using the person's name is also a way of making up for the lack of visual and auditory cues, again a way to establish and maintain the relationship between librarian and patron.

Mary: About confirming the patron's home institution, that is probably a good idea. Why do you find this important? Do you frequently find that students are not enrolled in the institution that they log in through?

Need to learn more about Virtual Reference Best Practices?

Don't forget to look for VR Research Best Practices Checklist available through the RHN Intranet. (Login required)

Deborah: I find that confirming the patron's home institution is important…mostly to save myself figuring out one institution's website, databases, and policies when the patron is really asking about another institution! We make assumptions (not always correct, of course) based on the question and type of institution, which can lead to taking a certain tone, level of instruction, or type of resource provided. I did have a patron on Research Help Now that had a fairly academic type of question, had come in through MSU's website, and I was calling her attention to a specialized MSU-licensed resource, only to find out she was not affiliated with MSU. So it can be important in knowing whether to focus on subscription databases vs. freely accessible web resources. When I worked in public libraries, we focused on directing patrons to "good" free resources. Here I find I immediately go to the databases of whichever institution, surely overlooking some quality free sites…

Mary: Could you give us some tips on how to close a session? I often struggle with this. I don't want to close too abruptly, and risk losing the rapport that I may have created. On the other hand, maintaining contact with a student that lingers on the chat with you can be an inefficient way to use the time, especially when I am busy.

Related to this, when the research question is complex, sometimes I want to get the student started, and then suggest that the student return to the chat later when he/she is ready to complete the next level of research. In other words, how do you feel about piecemealing chat reference sessions?

Deborah: I am a big fan of completing the task at hand and inviting the student to return to the chat service later. I remember in library school learning to think about the librarian as helping the patron get across this particular information gap. Once you've helped the patron cross the gap, then you can ask them if they have any more questions/need further help, and invite them to return later. If they have had a positive experience with the transaction, then they will come back the next time they have an information gap. You can say something like "do you think you're on the right track here?" or "do you want to read that article and if you have more questions later you can always sign back into the service?".

I almost always end a session with a thank you and an invitation to return to the service "thanks for using this service, and feel free to log on again if you have further questions" and often followed by an unscripted "bye, have a nice day". Here at MSU we try to stay on until the patron ends the session, even if they are lingering. I will tend to pick up another session at that point, and hope that the two chats aren't active at the same time! If that does happen, then it is just important to let patrons know what is going on, e.g. I'll be back with you in a couple of moments, I'm finishing up helping another customer". The more general principle is that whenever I am taking a few moments (or a few minutes) to find information for a patron, I will send a message to let them know I'm still there, but just working on their question. I know some librarians can feel very rushed when helping patrons on chat, but if you keep in contact with the patron, you can relax a little bit.

10 things to know about Lansing Community College, Rachel Minkin (LCC)

1. WRIT 121 -Comp I (intro level college writing) students are the heaviest user of RHN. For many, this is the first time they've ever been asked to use outside sources, to use a research database to access those sources, and then to cite those sources. To best assist WRIT 121, visit the Research Guide at http://libguides.lcc.edu/WRIT121.

2. WRIT 121 and WRIT 122 are required to submit a portfolio of 4 essays to a group of outside readers at approximately week 14 of the semester. They must pass portfolio to pass the course. You will see a marked increase of WRIT 121 and WRIT 122 queries specific to portfolio at this time. Please refer them to their instructors if they are confused on the process or concerned about their writing style.

3. Research Guides for select classes are available from a link on the LCC Homepage. Our 3 most popular guides are:
   a. Fire Science
   b. Nursing
   c. WRIT 122: Comp II

LCC in a Nutshell.

- Nervous composition students may need help with concerns about the grading process or their writing style at week 14. Refer them to their instructors.

- Research guides are useful, especially for three subjects: fire science, nursing and WRIT 122: Composition II

- LCC Librarians promote Films on Demand (educational videos) and CRCnetBASE ebooks

- 46% of LCC students are taking online course, and therefore can be expected to use the VR service.

- Nearly 250 courses and 28 certificates or associate degrees can be earned completely online.

For information on MSU and EMU in a nutshell, see the Feb. 2009 issue of the Newsletter

4. Besides the old stand-by research databases such as ProQuest Central and General OneFile, LCC Librarians like to promote Films on Demand (educational videos) and CRCnetBASE ebooks (covering the topics of engineering, alternative energy, environmental issues, materials and criminal justice and forensics)

5. Of the 21, 650 students enrolled for spring semester, 9,862 (46%) are taking classes online and may never visit the library in person, but may turn to our website and virtual chat for assistance.

6. LCC offers nearly 250 online courses and has 28 certificate or associate degrees that students can earn by taking all of their courses online.

7. 75% of regional allied health professionals were trained at LCC.

8. The University Center at LCC offers students the opportunity to earn bachelor and master degrees without leaving the campus. Although you might be thinking "Community college patron…", you may actually be serving an upper level undergraduate or graduate student!

9. LCC has one library serving:
    a. Downtown (Main) Campus (Library located in the TLC building)
    b. West Campus (Delta Township)
    c. East Campus (East Lansing, just east of MSU campus)
    d. Clinton County Center in St. Johns
    e. Livingston County Center in Howell
    f. The Aviation Center at Capital City Airport
    g. The Truck Driver Training Center at Fort Custer near Battle Creek

10. LCC is the third largest community college (in enrollment) in Michigan, serving more than 30,000 students a year.

Best Practices in Cooperative Virtual Reference:
Reminders from the Quality Control Committee,
Submitted by Christine Tobias (MSU)

One of the responsibilities of the Quality Control Committee (QCC) is to review chat transcripts and identify strengths and weaknesses. After reviewing chat transcripts from the past few weeks, the QCC has some recommendations for keeping your virtual reference skills sharp and providing the best possible customer service to our patrons.

Verify the patron's institution and affiliation/status

The patron's institution and email address appear in the Info tab of the chat monitor, but it is best to confirm this information with the patron after picking up the question. With the popularity of Yahoo email and Gmail, many patrons will provide a non-institutional email address. Do not assume that a non-institutional email address implies that the patron is not one of our current students, faculty, or staff members.

Email addresses appear in the Info tab of the chat monitor

QuestionPoint fixed the bug that was keeping email addresses from appearing in the Info tab of the chat monitor. If you are still not seeing patron's email addresses in the Info tab after you pick up a question, you will need to update your Qwidget on your institution's web site. The VR manager for your institution should be able to do this for you.

Lost Call vs. Follow Up by Patron Library

It is important to understand the difference between these two Resolution Codes when coding questions in circumstances when there is no communication beyond the patron's initial question. **Basically, the difference between the two codes lies in whether or not an email address has been provided: If** *Yes***, use** *Follow Up by Patron Library***; If** *No,* **use** *Lost Call***.**

Lost Call should be used **ONLY** when there is no communication from the patron beyond the initial question AND no email address has been provided. Questions marked as *Lost Call* are automatically closed by QuestionPoint. If the question is incorrectly marked as *Lost Call*, we would not see the question and would miss the opportunity to follow up with the patron.

For further explanation of the appropriate usage of Lost Call, please read the post on the QuestionPoint blog, *Quality Tip: What does 'Lost Call' REALLY mean? Not what you may think!* (http://questionpoint.blogs.com/questionpoint_247_referen/2009/10/quality-tip-what-does-lost-call-really-mean-not-what-you-may-think.html). This blog post also contains a link to a very useful Resolution Code Flow Chart.