



Highlights

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NEWSLETTER OF THE ELIZABETH HUTH COATES LIBRARY
AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY

Fear of Reference

In the following opinion piece, reprinted with permission from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, distinguished librarian Barbara Fister of Gustavus Adolphus College offers some great insights and suggestions for students and professors regarding the use and value of the reference desk.

By BARBARA FISTER

Last year, I asked a number of graduating seniors why they thought some students were reluctant to use our library's reference desk, and what we could do to make the service more appealing. The most creative suggestion I got was to move the reference desk to a more private spot, so that nobody would face the humiliation of being seen asking for help in public. I toyed with the idea of installing a disused confessional: "Bless me, librarian, for I am lost."

Why do undergraduates find it so embarrassing to ask for help in a library? They have the sensitivity of a telemarketer when it comes to calling a professor at home to clarify an assignment due the next day. They will blithely e-mail a total stranger with outrageous requests ("Hi, Jacques. I'm writing a paper on deconstruction, but your book is sort of confusing. Could you explain exactly what you mean by difference? Thanks. P.S. It's due Wednesday.").

But displaying ignorance in a library is another matter. Surrounded by computers and books and journals chosen specifically to support their learning, students are embarrassed by those riches—or, rather, by the fact that what they need is somewhere in all that bounty and they don't know how to find it. To make matters worse, the place is full of fellow students who all appear to know exactly what they're doing.

What is it about libraries that makes students speechless with anxiety?

Those who screw up their courage to go to the reference desk often begin in a confessional mode. "I know this is a dumb question" is a typical opening gambit, followed by what the student thinks is the sort of thing one should ask: "Where do you shelve books on, like, Native Americans?" An experienced librarian knows a real question is in there somewhere, and after delicate probing finds out that the student actually wants to analyze the social and economic impact of casinos on reservations. In the next 15 minutes, the student might indeed learn where books about Native Americans are shelved, along with an idea of where else to look; more importantly, the student will have a better understanding of how to do research.

Teasing out what nervous students actually need can be tricky work. Without being too invasive, the librarian must assess what the assignment is, what level of sophistication the student brings to it, and how much information the student can absorb.

(Continued on page 3)

Inside this issue:	
Featured Resources	Page 2
Easier Access to Full Text	Page 2
Fear of Reference (cont.)	Pages 3-4
Building for Tomorrow	Page 4
Announcements	Page 5
Know Your Liaison?	Page 5
Total Student Circulation chart	Page 6
New Circulation Exit	Page 6



Quite often in *Highlights* we will promote Web resources. The Web has quickly become the medium of choice for delivering digital content. While much on the Web is questionable in terms of scholarly research, the databases and e-journals that you'll find through the library homepage are part of what's called "The Deep Web." Most of this material goes through an editorial review process as rigorous as that for print material. It is unavailable to search engine spiders and must be accessed through paid subscriptions, which the library enters into on behalf of our patrons. While the "Recommended Internet Sites" links are part of the more questionable "Free Web," they have also been reviewed by professionals and deemed worthy of consideration.

Historical New York Times

The most significant addition this summer to the Coates Library electronic resources is the Historical New York Times. Covering the period 1851-1999, this Web-based source includes indexing and access to the entire paper, including photo captions, classified and other ads, editorials, and newswire pieces, in addition to the usual editorial content. The source will continue to grow, so access will always be no more than two calendar years old. We anticipate this source will be invaluable for research in almost all majors. Faculty and students can gain access to the Historical Times from any on-campus computer and from off-campus via EZ Proxy, a service that enables the library to authenticate valid users from any Internet location.

Hoover's Online

Austin-based Hoover's, Inc. is an important source for company and industry information, whether

it's a brief overview or an extensive profile on a particular company. Detailed annual and quarterly financial information, SEC filings, news analysis and related industry information are also available. You can find financial histories, company press releases, and information on a firm's competitors. More than 90 editors update the site continuously. Click on "Databases" at the library homepage <http://lib.trinity.edu>.

Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment

This four-volume set is an example of the numerous subject-specific reference books that the librarians purchase in support of the curriculum. These works are great places to start your research. By doing some background reading in a subject encyclopedia or handbook, you get a working knowledge about your subject, become familiar with the jargon and the issues, and develop a good understanding of what and how much has been published on a particular topic. Time invested in the *Reference Collection* can save you time later.

Web of Science—Older Records

In our continuing efforts to invest in high-quality resources that have value for many disciplines, we have recently extended our coverage of the Science and Social Science Citation Indexes back to 1988. These indexes, among the largest, are a way to track the scholarship on a particular topic. Click on "Databases" at the library homepage. Remember, the Humanities Citation Index is also available from the library database page. It is called *Arts and Humanities Search*.

Easier Access to Full Text

No doubt you are enjoying the ease with which you can link to full-text journal articles through the TDNet service (See *Highlights* vol. 1, no. 1). Now access is taking another step in the direction of convenience. JSTOR, one of our largest aggregated sources of electronic full-text articles, is allowing direct linking to articles in its collections from several database vendors.

JSTOR, originally a scholarly project, is now an independent, not-for-profit organization which digitizes the older issues of many scholarly journals. Currently, there are 242 journals completely digitized within the last two to five years. This translates to nearly one million articles. If you use any of the following databases you will be able to link directly from the citation to the full text of the JSTOR article: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, America: History

and Life, Historical Abstracts, Medline, World Wide Political Science Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, ERIC (from Cambridge Scientific Abstracts), Social Services Abstracts, and the many databases available through the First Search Service.

But the article linking capabilities don't end with the database vendors. Faculty, students, and librarians at institutions that subscribe to JSTOR are also being offered these same privileges. Article level links can be established from online bibliographies, class syllabi, or other personal Web pages. For details on how to establish links, go to: <http://makealink.jstor.org>.

For more information about the JSTOR journals to which Coates Library subscribes, go to the library database page at <http://lib.trinity.edu/dbs.asp>, click on "J," then "JSTOR" and then click on "Browse

Fear of Reference (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Depending on those factors, the response to a question may become a lesson on how to construct a focused search in a specialized database. It may lead to a trip into the stacks, where the fine art of browsing can be modeled for a student who hasn't had much experience with academic forms of discourse and doesn't realize that full-text searches can be performed without a computer. It may involve looking over citations to articles, discussing what features distinguish scholarly writing from journalism. Or it may be a matter of sorting through the results of a Google search, pointing out the clues that indicate the quality of a Web site. Usually, it involves a combination of those approaches—an on-the-fly, personal research tutorial. What it rarely involves is providing an answer.

Some of our faculty members have discovered a cure for their students' anxiety. In addition to scheduling workshops in the library for the entire class, they require each student to use the reference desk as his or her work progresses. In some cases, a librarian must sign off on a preliminary bibliography—an opportunity to discuss where else the student might find good material, or why some sources may not be particularly good ones. Other professors ask students to come up with three questions arising from their work and to note down what they learn about those questions from a librarian. The questions are often a bit forced, but the conversations they start are always opportunities for learning. Somehow, being required to use the reference desk absolves the student of that strange burden of shame.

They have no reason to be ashamed. Libraries are complicated places. Digital access has made research appear to be easier and faster, but it has also given rise to a confusing array of choices. Experienced researchers constantly use filters that they aren't even aware of. In my own field, I know enough context that I can reject inappropriate sources almost instantly and seize a promising lead when I see it. But if I had to find information in an unfamiliar discipline, I wouldn't know a core journal from a marginal one, a tantalizing clue from a dead end. We ask our students to make such choices all the time, without realizing how much being able to choose wisely depends on a knowledge base they lack and experiences they haven't had.

Students arrive at college with very different exposure to libraries, computers, and the written word than their counterparts did a decade ago. Then, a librarian might have introduced an electronic database by saying, "It's like the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature." Show students a copy of the Readers' Guide today, and they're baffled. What are all those

little numbers about? How are you supposed to get an article from that? They are so attuned to searching full-text databases and printing articles one at a time that they have little sense of an article's having been written for a specific publication that comes out in a chronological sequence. They are often unfamiliar with the way books work. I was taken aback the first time I had to explain to a student how to use an index in a book. He allowed it was a great concept—he just hadn't run into it before.

We renamed the Web link to our library catalog so that it said bluntly "search for books." The only catalog most students are familiar with is the one that lists courses. Quite logically, they were clicking on the link to Books in Print in our library catalog. Others just went straight to Amazon.com, printed up a list of titles, and asked which ones we had. Our students aren't stupid, they simply make logical choices based on previous experience.

David Bartholomae, head of the English department at the University of Pittsburgh, has said that students have to "invent the university" when we ask them to write competently in different discourses, each with their own rules of evidence, argument, and expression, none of them familiar. I would argue that students sent into the library to work on a paper or presentation must invent themselves as scholars—but we often neglect to explain what that really means, other than giving them a byzantine set of rules on how to cite sources and dire warnings about plagiarism. It's not surprising that they think research is a process of finding answers, transcribing them, and documenting where they came from. Research papers become a synthesis of quotes with a moral tacked on at the end.

I've had students come to the library with a truly exciting research topic—one they could explore intelligently and support with evidence—only to drop it because they couldn't find a source that had already said exactly what they wanted to say. Originality is perceived as a violation of the rules. That is obviously a misunderstanding. But how can undergraduates invent themselves as scholars? The reference desk is one place a novice can learn the ropes.

Unfortunately, many librarians find the reference desk unexciting and passé. A movement is afoot to digitize the process—after all, if we don't get with the program, people might Ask Jeeves instead. The Library of Congress and the Online Computer Library Center, a global library cooperative, have developed a service called QuestionPoint, which will route questions to libraries around the world (see an article from *The Chronicle*). A sleepless student in Wyoming can e-

(Continued on page 4)



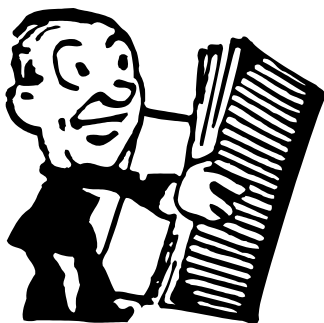
Fear of Reference (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

mail a question to his or her library at 3 a.m. and get a quick answer from a librarian in Wollongong, on the other side of the world. An improvement on Jeeves, perhaps—but it still won't provide what our students need.

First, most information cannot be digitally delivered to anyone, anywhere. As Thomas J. Mann, a reference librarian at the Library of Congress, has pointed out, not only does copyright law protect intellectual-property owners from such profligate reproduction, but much information is not digitized and never will be. Second, the plan presumes that information exists in some vast, neutral space without reference to context. The hidden assumption is that "global" means in English, and relevant to American cultural norms.

But most important, the idea is flawed because it supposes that students approach the refer-



ence desk knowing what their question is. A librarian who is face to face with a nervous student can read all the subtle cues that he or she sends out in the struggle to articulate a question. The local librarian knows the context of the student's curriculum and the collection that was created to support it.

With that information, the librarian can model some basics of scholarly inquiry: how to translate a vague idea into terms that can guide a search, how to probe in various directions, how to recognize different forms of discourse, how to learn from mistakes.

Rather than creating a global, virtual reference desk, let's improve the local collaboration between professors and librarians to help students overcome their embarrassment. The reference desk, analog and unglamorous as it may be, is the perfect place to ask dumb questions—dumb only in the sense of being unvoiced. The student won't leave with an answer, but with something far more important—a better idea of how to ask a good question.

New Students and Faculty!

Building for Tomorrow

Coates Library public services librarians are involved in a yearlong institute funded by a national leadership grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Over the course of 2002, the "Building for Tomorrow" program is conducting three workshops at Texas Women's University in Denton. These workshops focus on user education, digital reference, and community information needs analysis. Representatives from Coates Library are attending each workshop and translating what they have learned into specific projects designed to directly improve the services and resources provided by the library to the Trinity University community.

Digitization has made access more convenient. It has also greatly increased the amount of information that is accessible and the complexity of the pathways to this information. Debye Nicholl has created an online pathfinder specifically designed to help first-year students in the First Year Seminar (FYS) program to navigate through the

myriad of sources and resources that the library has to offer. It also helps them to understand the concept of "information literacy," which is crucial to becoming a life-long learner.

Coates Library subscribes to nearly 200 databases on behalf of its patrons. Barbara MacAlpine and Donna Butler are working on a digital project designed to educate and advise patrons on the use of these "electronic indexes." What is the relationship between databases and journal articles? Which database should I consult for my particular project? These are just some of the questions patrons will be able to find answers to online.

Later this year, Michael Kaminski will participate in a workshop and project which will use statistical analysis, surveys and interviews to identify and better understand user needs. The goal is to provide the basis for a more informed resource selection process.

Announcements

Wireless Laptops

Starting this fall, Trinity students will be able to use laptop computers on a wireless network in the library. The library has 15 new Dell laptop computers with Cisco Aeronet cards to enable wireless access. Students may check out these computers in the Instructional Media Services (IMS) department on the first floor. The wireless network covers the entire building, so students with laptops can choose to sit in any location they like, including the new, comfy chairs in the front lobby! Students who already own laptops should check with Information Technology Services for information on what wireless cards and drivers are compatible with the library system.

Printing Upgrades

We have significantly upgraded our networked printing system. This semester, we have added four new HP high-capacity printers to the library printing service, including one color and three black-and-white printers that perform duplex (two-sided) printing. Similar upgrades are expected in the campus computing labs. With those upgrades, we have installed a printing cost-recovery system to offset the cost of the new equipment and encourage conservation of printing resources. Students can pay for printing with Tiger Bucks on their ID cards, much as they use the card to purchase bookstore items or Java City beverages. Each student will receive 125 free prints per semester, and duplex printing is offered at a discount over one-sided printing.

New Librarian

Trinity graduate Clint Chamberlain has joined the library faculty as Serials and Electronic Access Librarian. Clint will also be serving as liaison to the Classics and Sociology/Anthropology Departments. He received his BA here in 1992 with a major in anthropology and a minor in classical archaeology, art history, history and literature. He studied archaeology at Boston University, receiving his MA in 1999, and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a Master of Science in Library Science (MLS) in 2001. Please join us in welcoming Clint back to Trinity.

Art in the Library

Last spring, the Trinity Activities Council (TAC) approached the library about the possibility of displaying student art in the Java City coffee bar. We were delighted by the idea, and by the end of spring semester, TAC had mounted a terrific display of student work in the library. We are looking forward to similar events in the coming academic year.

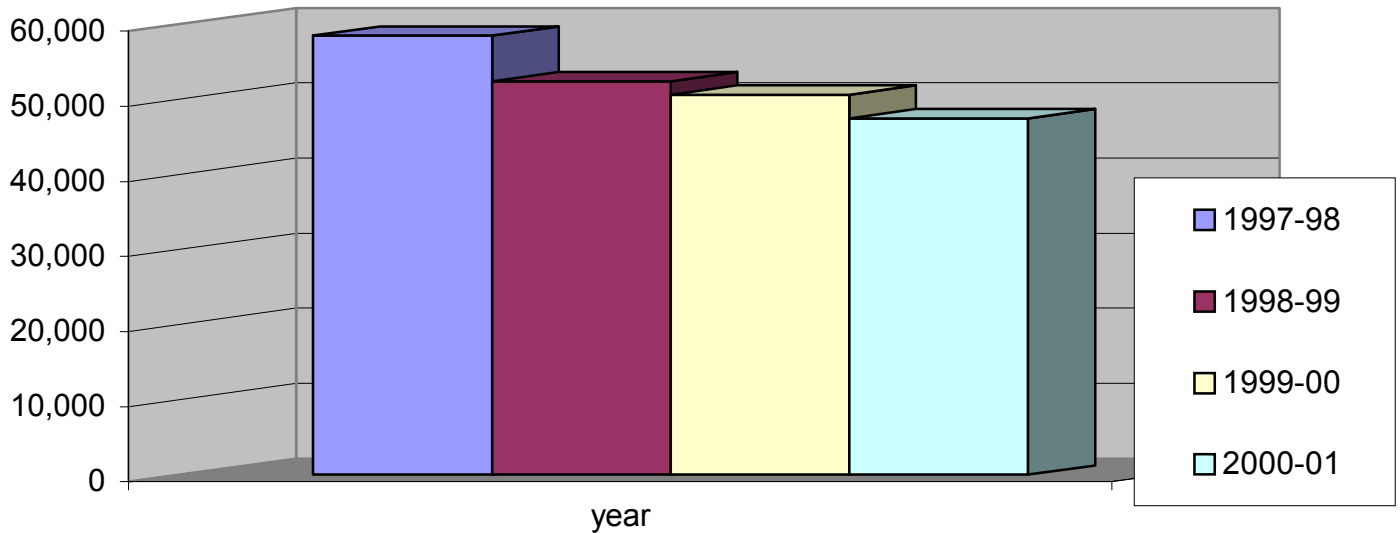
Know Your Liaison?

The eight Trinity librarians serve as liaisons to academic departments, providing easy access to library resources and ensuring high quality service for faculty and students. Liaisons coordinate book purchase requests, address any concerns faculty members may have, organize library instruction for classes, and provide one-on-one consultations for students. Now, they can help you develop a library module for your classes in Blackboard. Visit the library homepage <http://lib.trinity.edu>, look under "library information" for contact information as well as for fast and efficient online forms.

Here are the liaisons matched with the departments they serve:

- Diane Graves - Art, Art History, Mathematics, Psychology, Computer Science
- Chris Nolan - Business Administration, Economics, Philosophy, Religion,
- Beatrice Caraway - Modern Languages
- Barbara MacAlpine - Biology, Chemistry, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Geosciences, Physics
- Deborah Nicholl - English, History, Health Care Administration, Speech & Drama, Physical Education/Athletics, Education, Women's Studies, Medieval Studies, Browsing Collection
- Jane Costanza - Music
- Michael Kaminski - Communication, Political Science, Urban Studies, International Studies, Government Documents
- Clint Chamberlain - Sociology, Anthropology, Classics

Total Student Circulations

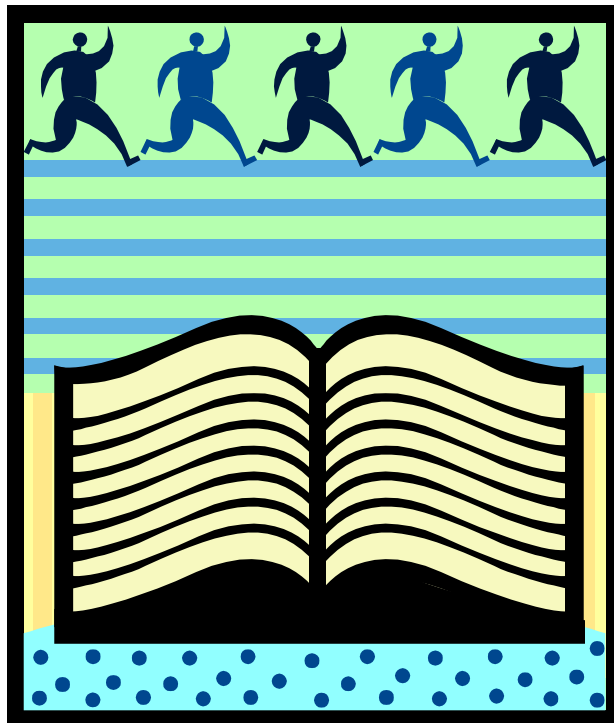


New Circulation Exit

The security gates at the third floor entrance of the library have been upgraded. The new system now lets us desensitize materials. As a result, you no longer need to pass your library books to the person in the security circle. An alarm will sound if you have **not** checked out the book items.

The horizontal bar/turnstile at the exit has also been eliminated. You will still need to pass any Instructional Media Services (IMS) material to the security clerk, however.

As an additional benefit, you may now feel free to enter and exit on the either side of the circulation security circle.



Paperback Book Exchange

Highlights

A publication for Trinity library users published every semester

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