Roving Reference: Getting out in the Wild

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Introduction

For four months I recorded and categorized my interactions with people during my 4 hours of weekly reference. Half of my time was spent roving while the other half I spent sitting at the reference desk. I assigned a READ scale value to each transaction. These interactions showed that the majority of questions asked during my time at the reference desk could be answered by circulation staff. The interactions I had with people while roving were very fruitful and I learned quite a bit about how people at Caltech interact with our collections.

How?

I used this sign when I roved
No other librarians participated
Roved with my laptop
Spent most roving time with physics collection

READ Scale

1 = directions, hours, printing
2 = item locations, library policies
3 = instructions on databases, use of reference resources, online searching, more complex technical issues
4 = more in depth questions requiring time
5 = requires reference and subject knowledge. Includes access issues and consultation may take considerable time

READ Scale Statistics

How Asked? Statistics

Conclusions

Roving reference is viable as long as referrals are made from the circ desk.
A combined service point makes a lot of sense for my library
Reference desk gets general questions. Move into a subject collection and you’ll get subject questions.
I initiated most of the interactions and transactions
I was able to register new library patrons in TIND, our circulation system, with my laptop
Most of the true reference questions I answer come from emails
When I was roving at the physics collection I answered a lot of questions from people in physics, especially students
Some people are not going to ask at the reference desk and are happier to be approached in the collection, away from the formality of the desk
Wearing ID and identifying yourself is a must