Reference Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting of June 8, 2005
Alice Moulton Room, Gerstein Science Information Centre, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Present: Alastair Boyd (Cataloguing), Gail Nichol (Engineering, Chair), Len Ferstman (Innis), Shauna Dorskind (Media Commons), Alison Girling (Victoria), Barbara Geiger (Regis), Stephanie Swift (OISE/UT), Hana Kim (East Asian), Elsie Del Bianco (Trinity), Margaret Fulford (Dentistry, minutes), Sandra Langlands (Gerstein), Renata Holder (Gerstein, Circ. Services), Warren Holder (ITS).

Regrets: Gabbi Zaldin (Victoria), Nalini Singh (FIS), Sara McDowell (Robarts), Patricia Bellamy (Robarts), Vicki Skelton (Industrial Relations).

1. Minutes of last meeting (May 22, 2005):

Approved.

2. Business arising:
   a) Thesis records in the catalogue: The question had been asked, Which of the U of T Proquest Thesis records are going into the U of T OPAC? Gail Nichol reported that she had asked Elizabeth Black about this. Elizabeth had asked Proquest and received the reply that U of T (SGS), Nursing, and Emmanuel records were being sent by Proquest for loading into the OPAC; the other federated colleges’ records were not. Elizabeth had suggested that colleges which would like their records sent by Proquest for the OPAC should contact Karen Turko.
   b) Topics for discussion at upcoming meetings: Gail reported that she talked to Debbie Green about the copyright idea and it turns out it is already scheduled for discussion by Staff Development, so we'll leave it in her hands. Gail submitted the idea for instruction at the reference desk, Cris Sewerin of the Instruction in Library Use committee said that the ILU and Reference Services committees could collaborate on this; Solange Silverberg said she would present this as an idea for a possible December workshop.
   c) Credit course at UTM ("Introduction to Scholarly Research"): Gail reported she had heard from Ian Whyte at UTM that he and Sheril Hook (who now teaches the course) will do a presentation about it at a Reference Services meeting in the Fall (date to be determined).

3. Presentation on federated searching - Peter Clinton

The presentation by Peter Clinton (Director, Information Technology Services) was titled "The Transition from Distributed to Unified, Federated and Combined Searching". His PowerPoint slides are available on the ITS website at:
Here is a summary of the questions and answers following the presentation:

Question (Debbie Green): Will vendors feel pressured to package content in ways that make it easier to use in a combined search engine?

Answer (P. Clinton): Many vendors are operating on a shoestring and are thus unlikely to change in this way. Large vendors like Scopus will likely facilitate such searching, and smaller ones likely won't.

Question (Alison Girling): Will good searches require more complexity on the user's part because the terminology, structure, presence of abstracts, etc. vary so much among databases?

Answer (P. Clinton): What is "good searching"? Our expectations are different from our users' expectations. We have flexibility on how we guide users into databases -- we don't want every user to search every database for every search. E.g., CSA Illumina is divided into categories such as Humanities. At some point in the future universities will be able to customize this. With Multi-Search, targets could be grouped by discipline or even by course.

Question (Len Ferstman): Can users still select each individual database?

Answer (P. Clinton): At most 250 of our approximately 500 databases will be in there. Yes, for these 250, you can select a particular index. (Now there are more limited options, but the capabilities for creating categories will grow over the summer.)

Question (Sandra Langlands): What about things like StatRef? (which are not databases in the usual sense).

Answer (P. Clinton): We could contract with CSA to create a connector (which simulates a user searching in their interface); this is possible in theory. Many monographs are hidden in collections. Federated searching may have potential for finding these. Sirsi is on the federated search target list now, but why not consider it for unified searching?

Comment (Sian Meikle): During the recent user testing to gather data for the library web site redesign, users did not look at the subject guides or try to determine the best index for their topic. They went to whatever database they knew about.

Comment (P. Clinton): If we don't provide such search tools, users will go to Google. We need to give them guided search results. We recognize that their search results will include lots of crap and they'll be happy with that. We need to do queries against our pathfinders, our subject lists of databases, and give them links to the best databases (suggest a database based on their search term). Now only 2% of searching is done anywhere near a reference librarian. We're never going to teach them in the classroom because of the number of students.
Question (Margaret Fulford): Where do subject headings fit in? Does either unified or federated searching have any capacity to search subject headings?

Answer (P. Clinton): Unified searching: yes, somewhat; it can tag fields. Federated searching: no. not really. It has clear limitations; it's not an optimal tool.

4A. Sian Meikle's report

Sian reported on the U of T Libraries website redesign: In the last month, they've identified vocabulary that needs to be adjusted based on what terms users use, and what they do and don't understand. People liked the words "services", "resources and research", "general information", and "help". People didn't use the term "short term loan"; they preferred "course reserves". They didn't use "circulation"; they used "loans". So "Circulation Services" will be renamed "Loan Services" on the website. People didn't use "reference", but they did use "research".

Sian asked for input on using the term "Research Services" or "Research Help" rather than "Reference Services". This will be tested. Under "Research Help", a subcategory could be "Research Help in the Libraries", with links to various reference departments. Possibly this could include a brief text to explain what reference librarians do.

Ian Whyte mentioned that while he was at Western he renamed the Reference department "Research and Instructional Services".

Sian asked if the committee would like to write some content of what reference services are available at U of T. Gail Nichol asked who would like to work on this; Ian Whyte and Sandra Langlands volunteered, and it was suggested that Patricia Bellamy or Jenny Mendelssohn (both of whom were away) might be interested in working on this. Gail said she would organize this, speak to Patricia and perhaps meet with the Web Advisory Group (WAG), and get back to Sian.

Sian reported that the recent user testing found that people don't understand the terms "my.library", "Scholars Portal", etc. The link to "my.account" will be labelled something like "Renew books". There will be a "How do I?" page which pulls together all the personalization services like my.library.

In the list of libraries, the large libraries will be separated out to make it clearer to people which are the large ones. Libraries may be listed by subject; help with this will be sought from WAG (Web Advisory Group).

4B. Warren Holder's report

Warren reported that we have access to / have paid for an incredible number of e-books, which are buried in packages. We need to get them listed in the OPAC. If people know of databases that contain hidden gems that should be added to the OPAC, Warren asked that
they let him know. The vast majority of such databases will give us MARC records. Before
the records are loaded into the catalogue, they are run by Elizabeth Black to make sure they
are appropriate for the U of T catalogue.

5. E-mail reference form - Debbie Green

(Debbie Green explained she was reporting for WAG on behalf of Patricia Bellamy, who
was away.)

Debbie reported on the reference web form ("Ask Us") and efforts to improve the
"reference interview within the form". Debbie reported on user feedback (from user testing
and a focus group) and showed the committee the new draft form. Discussion ensued, and
various suggestions were offered to Debbie by committee members.

6. Other business

None.

7. Announcements -- Gail Nichol

In the OPAC, the AV Library's name has now been changed to "Media Commons".

Items in cold storage must be requested from Media Commons. Later the cold storage
location will be called "Media Archives".

The Instruction in Library Use committee will have an open meeting on Wed. June 22 from
9:30 to 11:30 on teaching methods that promote critical thinking skills.