Reference Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting of Wednesday, March 8, 2006, Alice Moulton Room, Gerstein Science Information Centre, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Present: Gail Nichol (Engineering), Shauna Dorskind (Media Commons), Sam-Chin Li (DMGIS), Marian Press (OISE/UT), Barbara Geiger (Regis), Noel McFerran (St. Michael’s), Elaine Tamura (UTSC), Patricia Bellamy (Robarts Ref), Elsie Del Bianco (Trinity), Elena Prigoda (Gerstein), Richard Carter (St. Michael’s), Susanne Tabur (Gerstein), Alastair Boyd (Robarts/CAUG), Hana Kim (East Asian), Marc Lalonde (ITS), Sara McDowell (Robarts), Gabbi Zaldin (Victoria), Ian Whyte (UTM), Margaret Fulford (Dentistry), Vicki Skelton (CIRHR), Sandra Langlands (Gerstein), Renata Holder (Gerstein Circ), Jenny Mendelsohn (Robarts Ref), and Nalini Singh (FIS Inforum).

Regrets: Laura Anderson (Rotman) and Irene Puchalski (Architecture).

Minutes of previous meeting
No amendments needed.

Business arising

- Google Scholar

Gail Nichol, crediting Rita Vine for giving her the know-how, explained and demonstrated how to link to the UofT catalogue when finding records on Google Scholar. The process is: (1) click on Scholar Preferences; (2) Type toronto into the Library Links search box; (3) add a checkmark to Worldcat and UofT Libraries; (4) click Save Preferences on the bottom right. Susanne Tabur said she’d have a handout on this process ready by Thursday afternoon (March 9th). Gail asked Marc Lalonde whether it was possible to have these Google Scholar Preferences set automatically for UofT patrons. Marc said probably not.

Conversation then turned to the merits of Google Scholar. Susanne and Marian Press both praised GS, as it gives users different results from Scholars Portal. Sara McDowell asked whether the results from Google Scholar were in fact a mere subset of a basic Google web search. Marian said no: GS leafed through a different batch of material.

- Resource-Sharing report

Gail said the RSSC would like someone from Reference Services to sit on their committee, and after asking if there were any volunteers—that there were not—she went on to say she’d be happy to go as in fact she sits on the committee already. She said she’d be reporting to us at another meeting about the RSSC.

- Proquest Subject Groupings

Right now, thanks largely to the work of Patricia Bellamy, UofT Library users can search individual Proquest subject groupings—such as Proquest Education—in Scholars Portal. One kink in
this double-listing, however, is users have access to fewer Proquest records and articles in SP than when searching Proquest databases individually.

A further problem is how individual SP databases are listed in e-resources. Marian pointed out that when users look up ERIC in e-resources, the brief record indicates you’re about to access ERIC through Cambridge Scientific Abstracts. Many students, she said, wouldn’t realize that CSA and SP were the same. Marc replied ITS was already working on clarifying these listings.

Noel McFerran remarked that at times the descriptions of databases in e-resources verged on advertisement. Perhaps, he said, it just takes too much time to rewrite all the blurbs that companies such as Proquest send our way. Jenny Mendelsohn agreed that rewriting all the blurbs was an enormous job, but said she and other librarians were working on the problem. Suggestions are welcome, she said, adding — in response to a query by Barbara Geiger — that there was a template for these database write-ups that would help other librarians to contribute more easily. Sandra Langlands wondered whether it would be possible to use sentence fragments in the write-ups. These, being brief, would allow librarians to cram more information that users need into the small space available. Jenny agreed that using fragments would be a good idea.

Future Meetings
Gail suggested, as a topic for future meetings, that librarians give presentations about work they’re doing at their home libraries. This way, we could all be up-to-date on one another’s activities, as well as learn from one another. She said she’d appreciate an e-mail response to this suggestion. Jenny said that at the next meeting she would talk about work going on at Robarts. After applauding Gail’s idea, Noel went on to say that he suspected we had become an “electronic reference tools” committee rather than a reference services group, and added that talking about projects and interests at the various libraries would allow us to focus more on traditional reference work.

The discussion then veered towards how these presentations would work. Jenny suggested librarians who are presenting each talk for about 15 minutes, and Sara and Noel said they recommended we have 2 presentations per meeting. Jenny then wondered whether our committee was sharing enough new information (such as improvements to SP) with other librarians on campus. To fix this problem, she suggested having workshops aimed at sharing what we learn with others. When Gail recommended we set up a workshop for May or June, Elena, Jenny and Sandra volunteered to co-teach a session on SP, and Gail said we should speak to the Staff Development Committee about getting this workshop going.

Reports
➢ OPAC Display Subgroup

In the past, the Reference Services Committee objected to the display of book covers in the catalogue. Susanne reported that although her subgroup had not had time yet to study this flaw, the display had in fact changed. Now, you can get a book cover image in the brief hit list. This face-lift seemed much better, and the Committee approved it. Susanne also said there was a cataloguing hitch related to uniform titles in music materials, but added she’d report on this problem at the next meeting.
Warren Holder

No report.

Marc Lalonde

Marc explained that the New Titles link from the UTL home page lets users see only titles that are new to the UofT library system—not those that are new to individual libraries (such as Regis or Emmanuel) but already held elsewhere (at Robarts, for example). So while this search does a good job of listing new books by subject, it does a poor job of listing them by library. A discussion followed. Alastair Boyd said it’s misleading to say a new copy of a book already held by one of the UofT libraries is really new. Just as listing only new UofT titles leaves the impression most small libraries haven’t been buying much, listing all the added copies would inflate the true number of materials that are really new to the university. Alastair added that if we knew of any recently-arrived titles that remained unlisted, we should send them on to Sian.

Marc explained it would take “extensive programming” to list all the new copies as well as fresh titles, and besides, it wasn’t clear that such a big list would be sensible. Noel pointed out, however, that it might be worth changing the wording on the search page so users knew, when they got there, that they wouldn’t be able to get lists of all the new books a library had catalogued. The new titles list gets updated weekly; items on display stay up for 30 days.

One problem with the New Titles list that provoked further talk was the one-week gap between the day a new item gets catalogued and the day it’s displayed on the list. Barbara Geiger wondered why this delay was necessary. Alastair explained that the one-week hold-up was unfortunate but essential. At many libraries, Robarts especially, it takes time for a catalogued book to get placed on the shelf.

Marc also reported that the Request Item page had been revamped—fewer words, and greater clarity. Ian Whyte wondered whether this improvement would puzzle students, who might not realize if a book is unavailable for intercampus delivery. After testing the online service, though, we generally agreed the page was straightforward: by only listing locations the service would deliver an item to, the page seemed unlikely to confuse patrons.

Next, the issue of secret recall policies arose. In general, these policies are unadvertised. But Barbara Geiger argued such secrecy is unfair to patrons who have no idea there’s a way to get checked-out books quickly. Each library, she said, should decide on its policy and make that decision public. Noel said St. Mike’s has a policy of recalling books that are on hold after patrons have had them for 2 weeks.

Web Advisory Group (WAG)

Heather Cunningham said WAG was responsible for a couple of recent changes to the database listings you get when you click on Let us recommend the best databases for your topic on the home page. Selecting a topic—art, for example—gives you several tabs. The Article Search tab at the top of the screen, which uses Scholars Portal, now has a link beside it called What am I searching? When patrons open the link, a small window appears listing the indexes they’re using.
(e.g. ARTbibliographies Modern); the window also provides search tips. The other change WAG had initiated was the link, right below the Article Search box, to a SP Advanced Search.

Scholars Portal Search Group

Elena Prigoda, reporting for this group, said there had been several important changes to SP. The default search is now Advanced Search (not Quick Search); also, the searchable fields have been set to keyword. Both improvements, she said, were thanks to Marc’s hard work. Noel asked how one could search all the SP databases at once. It seems that, in addition to simply starting the search from the UTL home page search box, you can also search them all in SP itself. Marian explained how. When you click specific databases on the search page, a list of databases appears. On the top right, it says Mark or Clear All on Page. Selecting mark followed by continue to Search, Marian said, allows you to search all the SP databases simultaneously.

Elena said she had tried searching with other, lesser-known, Boolean terms such as NEAR and ADJ. But she said she still found AND the most efficient operator; she retrieved more results when putting combined terms on separate lines instead of in the same box. Using separate lines, you get more hits because the computer looks for those words in any keyword field; using just one line, the computer assumes you’re looking for both terms only in the same field. The SP article search box on the home page, like the Google search box, allows you to search keywords without putting AND between them. At the meeting, however, this automatic AND didn’t work when you combined keywords with phrases.

Citation Searching

Gail, who had gone to this year’s OLA Conference, reported on a session she’d presented about citation searching. Several databases, besides Web of Science, allow citation searches. Google Scholar provides “cited by” links [e.g. Cited by 48] that give you a sense, just from the brief hit list, of an article’s influence. Scholars Portal users can get some “cited by” links, depending on the indexes they’ve added to the search. Sandra praised the detailed list of databases Gail had prepared for us, and asked whether it could be made available online. Gail said she would probably put the list online and send the URL to the reference list. While we were testing the “cited by” link in Google Scholar, Marian noted that GS sometimes provided the GET IT! link for UofT full-text articles.

Other Business

Marc said the My.Library accounts would be updated so their design matched the new look of the library website.

Nalini reminded everyone that Sheril Hook was scheduled to speak the following week about instruction and assessment. She also reminded everyone that Friday March 10th would be the FIS research day, and encouraged us to come.

Gail announced there would be a Health Fair at Gerstein and Robarts on March 16th, and that, if we were interested, we should be able to take paid time from work to go. She said the schedule for this event would be e-mailed to us. In addition, Gail reminded us to consider going to the OCULA spring workshop—there would be a different topic per day.

Meeting adjourned.