

Reference Desk Renaissance: Connecting with Users in the Digital Age

Sara Tompson and Catherine Quinlan

University of Southern California

A Context for a Renaissance

University of Southern California

The University of Southern California (USC) was established in 1880 with the library as one of its first academic enterprises. With the particular support of President Von KleinSmid (1921–1947), the Libraries experienced significant growth and development during the first 100 years of USC—including the establishment of a branch library system, the acquisition of many rare and special materials and the dedication in 1932 of Doheny Memorial Library.¹

In the late 1980's USC—like many other universities at the time—decided to merge its information technology and library services organizations into one enterprise—the Information Services Division (ISD). As a result of this structure the emphasis for library growth and development was focused on technology and establishing the digital library at USC. While this approach benefited many disciplines, others whose information resources were not made or born digital were not so well supported.

New Administration

With the growing dependence on information technology by almost all university operations, ISD's focus was increasingly consumed by the technological side of its operations. With the appointment of Dr. C.L. Max Nikias as Provost in 2006, ISD was reorganized

into two separate units—Information Technology Services (ITS) and USC Libraries. A CIO was hired to manage ITS and the position of Dean of Libraries established to manage USC's library system.

In order to provide operational focus for the Libraries, the Dean announced shortly after her arrival in August 2007 that the Libraries would develop a strategic plan. Throughout her discussions in groups and individually with the Libraries' almost 220 faculty and staff, a number of outstanding issues that needed to be addressed were identified. As the list of these issues grew it became clear to the Dean that a planning process would help bring focus to the new entity of USC Libraries as well as provide an opportunity for the faculty and staff to work together as a new unit.

Doheny Library Reference

From 2004–2009, Reference service in USC's Doheny Memorial Library (DML) was delivered from a small office (the consultation room) off the Circulation desk near the main entrance to the library. Reference was moved to this location as part of an effort to create a one-stop service point. For the previous 70 years, reference service had been delivered from a large desk in the Los Angeles Times Reading Room (LATRR) in Doheny, down the hall and around the corner from the front hall circulation desk. The large reference desk structure in that room has been considered historical by the University's facilities department and therefore

Sara Tompson is Associate Dean for Public Service at USC Libraries at the University of Southern California, e-mail: sarat@usc.edu; Catherine Quinlan is Dean of the USC Libraries at the University of Southern California, e-mail: cquinlan@usc.edu

remained in place even when it was not being used.

Interlibrary loan pick-up was also moved to the front desk in 2004, as part of the one-stop approach, and because that department had to move to accommodate the integration of the East Asian Library into Doheny from a separate site. The interlibrary loan and document delivery employees were moved from Doheny to the Grand depository library building just east of the main campus, but are still required to help staff the Doheny main desk.

While this setup worked well for interlibrary loan, and enhanced cooperation between those staff and Doheny circulation staff, it did not work as well for reference. Despite various attempts at signage, the consultation room was not very visible. The location of the office and the fact that the door was often closed to protect against the noise from general circulation encouraged a culture of seclusion among reference providers. This move also separated librarians from the print reference collection, about a third of which is not available in electronic format.

The Strategic Planning Process

The Dean convened a strategic planning committee of eight people, attempting to ensure a representative sample of the Libraries' faculty and staff. The committee met weekly and undertook a variety of tasks including an environmental analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats of the internal and external environments in which the Libraries operated), blue-sky scenario development, and identifying goals and objectives that would help the Libraries regain its place in the academic and research environment of USC.

Crucial to the development of this plan was bringing the committee's work to the Libraries faculty and staff for review and comment. A series of library forums was held over the four-month planning process and included reports from the planning committee as well as exercises that engaged library faculty and staff by encouraging them to express their priorities among the hundreds of objectives that were identified through the committee's work (they did not prioritize all the objectives). Attendance at the forums averaged over 50% of Libraries faculty and staff. Since it was impossible for all employees to attend every forum, an on-line version was established and those not able to physically attend a forum were encouraged to make their views known via the online version.

The Essential Library—2008–2009

One of the biggest challenges in the development of any plan is deciding what to do. The prioritization exercises were helpful in understanding what the faculty and staff thought was crucial to achieve. The results also helped the Dean better understand the current shape of the libraries. One surprise was the disarray of the Libraries' collections. While some of the 22 libraries had been shelf-read and inventoried within the last five years, others had not. Location codes in the online catalogue were inconsistent and in many cases wrong. While the Dean had thought that migrating to a new integrated library system would be of paramount importance, it became clear as a result of the planning process that it was more important to get the content of the current online catalogue in good order.

Over 300 objectives were identified through the planning process. With the help of the faculty and staff the strategic planning committee distilled these into 14 key objectives. These objectives, prefaced by our mission, vision and values, form the basis of *The Essential Library*, the USC Libraries' 2008–2009 strategic plan.² Many planning processes stop at the completion of the planning document. The Dean felt strongly that the development of the implementation plan and the achievement of the objectives were just as important as the development of the plan itself.

Implementation task forces of 5–6 people were convened for each of the fourteen objectives. In the instances where the outcome of one objective influenced another, the groups were asked to consult and work together as they developed their implementation plans, a crucial aspect in helping the Libraries to develop as a unified organization. The Dean allocated funds to support the achievement of the objectives and each implementation task force was asked to submit a budget as part of their implementation plan. After eighteen months, the accuracy of the records in the online catalogue increased to over 98 percent, 40% of one of the Libraries' major storage areas had been inventoried resulting in the discovery of 162 new collections, and, more public services faculty and staff had been hired to provide increased support for teaching, learning and research.

While these activities and others contributed to the renaissance of the USC Libraries overall, the focus of this paper is the re-establishment of reference desk service in Doheny Memorial Library, one of the flagship libraries of USC. The directive for the Cus-

tomers Service implementation task force (CSTF) included visibility, service—encompassing instruction, outreach and reference—and culture-change issues in Doheny Memorial Library. CSTF was a key driver of the re-establishment of the Doheny reference desk. The new desk location, and some additional factors, have led to an increase in face-to-face reference, going against the trend in academic research libraries.

Changing Paradigms and Practices

National

Reference Desks Relevant?

The concept of the physical reference desk as a service point has been heavily scrutinized in the past two decades, often with the intent to eliminate the location altogether. Two issues in particular have driven these intense examinations: a consistent decline in the number of queries received at the desks (typically with concomitant increases in virtual reference queries); and exhortations in the literature regarding the obsolescence of reference. Nolen's "Reforming or Rejecting the Reference Desk" article provides an overview of these issues.³

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) 2009 statistical report of service trends showed a drop of 34% in reference transactions from 1991 to 2004, with an average decrease of 3.2% per year.⁴ The Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) noted that this trend continued in 2010 with the observation that: "in-person reference desk statistics are declining at many academic libraries."⁵

ACRL's 2010 review of top trends in academic libraries also noted that virtual reference continues to increase, as it has done almost since its beginning in the mid- to late-1990s. Diane Kresh and Linda Arret, organizers of the 1998 Library of Congress Institute "Reference Service in a Digital Age," noted that: "While walk-in readership in the reading rooms at the LC is declining, electronic transactions are booming."⁶ In 2001, *Information Technology and Libraries* published an issue devoted to virtual reference. Karen Ciccone, guest editor, introduced the issue by noting that virtual reference was a hot topic in libraries with "everyone" moving their reference services online.⁷

The library literature has extensively discussed and debated the impact of the Internet and the World Wide on librarianship. The Internet's capability to give users direct access to a huge array of information resources online has allowed individuals to do much

more research unmediated by librarians, and has therefore changed the nature of reference queries. Indeed, as Chris Ferguson and Charles Bunge noted in 1997, reference service was a focal point for library responses to the changes wrought by the Web and digitization.⁸ Scott Carlson succinctly summarized the change in a 2007 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article:

"Questions that were the stock in trade of reference librarians decades ago—like, 'How can I find information about the population and GDP of Uzbekistan?'—can now be answered through a simple Google search."⁹

With the amount of information available online expanding quickly and dramatically, the user's ability to assess information, consider it critically, and evaluate the credibility of information sources increases in importance. However, as reference moved online, there appeared to be a concomitant acceptance on the part of some librarians that users could not only find information easily, but they also would know whether the information they were finding was valid and correct. Some of this attitude may have contributed to librarians' isolating themselves in USC's Doheny Library consultation room. All reference providers would be wise to note as articulated by O'Gorman and Trott:

"The focus of reference work in an electronic, self-service environment continues to be on the reader. If anything, in this complex information environment, students and public library users require even more assistance."¹⁰

Librarians have a vital role to play in aiding that critical thinking, and instruction has seen an increase in importance since the 1990's. Some who have advocated for closing reference desks also advocated for expansion of librarian's instruction role, particularly in academic libraries; for instance, Robert Burkhardt in his 1996 article.¹¹ Others have advocated for instruction **and** reference, with an emphasis on reference. Richard Biddiscombe, for example, argued thusly in his article in the 1996 text he edited on the changing role of information professionals.¹²

The increased ease of access to information resources in the 1990's led some librarians and other professionals to pronounce or advocate for the demise

of the reference desk. Only a few such exhortations will be cited here for the sake of brevity. Rieh's 1999 review article on reference services perspectives can be consulted for a comprehensive overview.¹³

One of the earliest articles pronouncing the demise of reference desks was Barbara Ford's frequently-cited 1986 "Reference Beyond (and without) the Reference Desk," which she wrote well before the rise of the World Wide Web.¹⁴ In 1995, Keith Ewing and Robert Hauptman sought revolutionary changes in reference, based on the assumption that users no longer ask in-depth reference questions: "[The traditional academic reference service] does not need to be rethought and reconfigured, it needs to be eliminated."¹⁵

Reference desk discussions and pronouncements were made, debated, defended and refuted in the literature, via discussion lists and at meetings well into this century. For example, the 2007 ACRL Conference in Baltimore included a panel, "The Reference Question—Where Has Reference Been? Where is Reference Going?" that debated various reference models, including doing away with reference desks completely. Audience participation was lively, as was the panel itself, with conclusions trending towards the de-emphasis of reference, as reported by Carlson and others.¹⁶

Revalidation of Face-to-Face

An inkling of the sort of reference desk renaissance we have seen recently at USC did emerge at that 2007 ACRL panel, however, as noted by Carlson:

"During the session's question-and-answer portion, Kathy DeMey, a reference librarian from Calvin College, stood up and described a poll that her library had done with some 350 English 101 students. The library asked the students what method they preferred when seeking help from a reference librarian—e-mail reference, telephone, online chat or instant messaging, or face-to-face? Almost 85 percent of the students said they preferred face-to-face interactions with librarians."¹⁷

While ARL and ACRL continued to report declines in reference desk services, there were some trend "outliers." Brian Mathews, "The Ubiquitous Librarian" blogger, discussed this phenomenon in his December 18, 2008 post:

"Reference Questions—Overall the trend is downward. Nothing new here, we've all been hearing that for years. When you look at 1995 to 2005 the ARL average drops about 47%. . . . There were a total of 12 libraries that saw an increase during this period, the other 83 saw a decline."¹⁸

The resurgence of face-to-face reference at a desk, as a component of hybrid reference services including email, chat and other virtual modes, was one of the themes at the August 2008 Denver conference "Reference Renaissance: Current and Future Trends" sponsored by the American Library Association's Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and the Bibliographic Research Center.¹⁹

USC

Reference Overall

All of the following statistics cited below are by USC's fiscal year (July–June). From 1995 to 2005, all USC reference queries declined about 62%, with the sharpest drop between 1999 and 2000 (101,396 to 50,749). This is greater than the average ARL decline of 47% for that same ten-year span, as cited by Mathews (above). This drop was likely influenced by the Information Services Division's increased focus on IT issues, and de-emphasis of reference and library instruction services.

From 2006 to 2008, the number of total reference queries fluctuated: 2006 queries totaled 64,582, up about 7% from 2005; 2007 queries totaled 61,358, down about 4% from the previous year, and 2008 queries totaled 50,653, down again. This variation can be attributed in part to users' struggles to make sense of the large expansion of USC Libraries' electronic journals and books during this time frame.

Total reference queries started to rise again in 2009, in part because of the increase in chat reference, as well as the increase in face-to-face reference, most notably at Doheny Library (as discussed below), but also at the Science & Engineering Library. 2008 total queries were 77,317. 2009 reference queries were 106,169, more than double the 2008 total. The University's support of and publicity surrounding the new Dean of Libraries and the Libraries' strategic plan made library services more visible than in prior years, and likely contributed to the increase in reference traffic.

Virtual Reference

Virtual reference at USC has steadily increased since 2004, again aligning with North American trends. USC Libraries began providing email reference service via OCLC QuestionPoint (QP) in 2004. During 2005, the first full year of the service, email queries totaled 5,802. That total increased to 6,658 in 2006, about 14%. In 2007 email queries declined to 5,822. This decrease of about 12% was likely due to the introduction of our participation in QP Chat reference, which began in late 2006.

From 2007 to date, QuestionPoint statistics have been kept separately from overall reference statistics. QP **email** decreased by almost 3 percent from 2007 to 2008. It increased by almost 6% from 2008 to 2009, likely due in part to increased links from the Libraries' website, including research guides (in Springshare's LibGuide format) in many disciplines. QP **chat** increased 24% from 2007 to 2008, and increased again by 23% from 2008 to 2009.

Face-to-Face Reference Desk Service

In-person reference statistics for USC's libraries have been only recently kept as a separate component of overall reference interactions. In 2005, in-person reference at all locations totaled 35,123. In 2006 this number rose to 37,692, an increase of about 7%. In 2007, in-person queries dropped about 14% to 32,108, and in 2008 they dropped a bit further (about 4%) to 30,711. Both of these drops were due in part to organizational transitions following the ISD division into IT services and the USC Libraries, and prior to the arrival of the new Dean of Libraries.

2009 saw a large increase, about 62%, in in-person reference over 2008, with queries totaling 49,798. Better record keeping under the new administration has contributed somewhat to the increase, but more significantly, since 2008 librarians have delivered instruction sessions to every section (over 100) of the undergraduate composition course Writing 140.

At USC the number of reference queries always rise following the rise of instruction sessions. Total bibliographic instruction sessions were up over 19 percent in 2009 over 2010. Reference help is mentioned in every instruction session, those for 140 and those for class sessions across the disciplines. Several factors contributed to the latter increase: more participation of librarians and staff in instruction delivery—an outcome of strategic planning implementa-

tion—and, more publicity regarding the availability of instruction sessions.

Doheny Library Reference*Initial Pilot*

In Fall 2008, encouraged by the CSTF, Public Services leaders launched a one-month pilot to move reference librarians out of the isolated Doheny consultation room and place them at a dedicated workstation at the circulation desk. The goal of the pilot was to increase the visibility of Doheny Library reference. Eleven librarians participated. Others were concerned about responding to circulation questions and opted out, even though basic circulation training was provided, and, librarians were only expected to assist with circulation if the patron queues were long. The consultation room was still available if needed.

The average number of reference queries received per week during the two weeks prior and two weeks following the pilot was 49. The average number of questions received during the pilot month was 69. It should be noted, however, that midterms fell during one of the pilot weeks; factoring out midterms the weekly pilot average number of queries was still about 58.

This reference pilot was assessed via two surveys: one of student patrons in Doheny Library, and one of the eleven pilot participants; key points follow. 62% of the 99 student respondents did **not** know where to “get research help in Doheny.” A strong majority of the reference providers said the experience went smoothly. Two thirds of the providers did use the consultation room for more detailed reference questions, though it is not clear if the separate space was really needed, or whether this was a retreat to a comfort zone. Concerns expressed by reference providers included fear of missing reference questions while helping with circulation, and lack of a private space. Concerns about the private space virtually disappeared when Doheny Library reference was moved back to the large reference desk in a nearby room of the library, as discussed below.

Return to the Reference Desk*Planning*

The Customer Service implementation task force, as noted earlier, examined reference services practices and made recommendations for improvement. The task force discovered that USC reference hours overall

were less than at most peer institutions; and, that Public Service librarians' reference participation, especially those with selector responsibilities for sections of Doheny's collection, was uneven. The task force recommended to the Dean's Cabinet that reference hours be increased and that the number of Doheny reference providers be increased.

The CSTF determined that even though signs were changed at the consultation room and at the circulation desk, the one-month reference pilot was not long enough to increase visibility and thus knowledge about the location for in-person reference assistance. The task force recommended that the reference desk and service be moved back to the LATRR with increased hours of reference and more providers allocated to providing this service. The Dean's Cabinet accepted these recommendations on a 6-month pilot basis.

The goals of this move included:

- Making Doheny reference more visible and thus better serving those in the USC community seeking it
- Responding to the requests and complaints received, since the 2004 move to the consultation room, from humanities, social sciences and education faculty that reference librarians were difficult to find
- Utilizing the large, then empty desk structure once again for its intended purpose, and,
- Bringing back a library presence to the LATRR, which was deemed useful to monitor and control the sometimes-problematic use of the public computer workstations in that room by non-USC users.

The task force, as well as librarians who had provided reference in Doheny for a number of years, postulated that reference queries would increase with the staffing of the original desk.

Successful Move

Doheny reference was moved to the LATRR just prior to the beginning of the 2009 fall semester, a visible time to launch a new service. At the same time, closing time for reference was delayed from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The expanded hours were based in part on the CSTF analysis that showed a weekday's final peak in basic reference queries to the circulation desk (because reference was closed) occurred about 7:30 p.m. More librarians, and several staff members in the

midst of pursuing library Master's degrees, were included in staffing the re-opened desk. In addition, the Libraries' Communications department created large colorful signs pointing towards the new reference desk, and publicized it in the online newsletter, via a virtual tour²⁰ and other articles. Circulation desk staff members, including student assistants, were trained to refer all but straightforward and directional questions to the new reference desk during its open hours.

Librarians who have worked in Doheny for more than ten years were excited about the move. Anecdotal evidence and informal interviews by the Associate Dean pointed to their renewed engagement with reference services in the new-old location.

As noted earlier, USC Libraries' statistical reporting is based on fiscal year; Public Services has been tracking reference and instruction by semester as well. This approach allows a direct comparison between Fall 2008 and Fall 2009 Doheny reference services. The Fall 2008 semester total was 8,220. The Fall 2009 total, after the move to the LATRR room, was 14,160, a 72% increase. The greatest differences between years were in August (110%) and September (126%)—likely due in part to the publicity, but also to the increased proactive approach of reference providers. The smallest difference between months was in November, just 15%, which indicates that the 2008 one-month pilot, which included November, did have some impact.

One of the Libraries' most consistent statistics has been headcount—on the half hour, the number of users in each library (or in multiple rooms of larger libraries like Doheny) are counted. Doheny's headcount increased dramatically in the fall 2009 semester over fall 2008: 19,578 in 2009, 39% greater than 2008's 14,039 headcount.

The headcount increases in the spring 2010 semester were not quite as dramatic, but still showed a significant increase over the previous year. The January–May 2009 headcount was 9,108, while the 2010 headcount for the same period, after the LATRR desk was operational, was 11,075, an increase of about 22%.

The spring 2010 data are still under review. However, an analysis done by Doheny circulation staff of a different time period indicates reference query increases into the first half of the last spring semester. From July 2008 to March 2009, an average of 50 reference questions were answered per day. From July 2009 to March 2010, the average number of questions answered in Doheny was 92 per day, a 38% increase. It is

clear from the data discussed above that the postulated increase in reference queries with the move to the new-old location did occur. This renaissance shows all signs of continuing.

In May 2010, users in the reference room were asked to complete a survey similar to the one conducted in fall 2008. 124 valid responses were received. 44 percent of the respondents discovered the reference desk service simply by coming upon it. The task force took this as one validation of the move. 38% of respondents learned about the reference desk location from the circulation desk staff—the referral training had been effective. Several results were a bit surprising: undergraduates were discovered to be the majority of users, despite Doheny’s traditional (and inaccurate) reputation as solely a graduate library; and, more professors recommended students use the Doheny reference desk than was expected—11%.

An unexpected information benefit of the re-staffing of Doheny’s LATRR desk was that infrastructure needs have become more apparent. In the past, users were less likely to walk all the way to the circulation desk to complain or inquire about something in the *LA Times* room. From users’ queries or complaints, and by observation, reference providers discovered and reported that:

- The wireless signal was less than desirable in that location, and
- There was a critical need for electrical outlets for laptop users in that room.

The USC Libraries was able to arrange to have the wireless signal increased in the LATRR, and is in the midst of identifying funds that will support an electrical upgrade. In addition, the need for a finding aid for the print reference shelves became apparent to many providers; one was created in fall 2009 and revised in fall 2010.

Based on the results of the six-month pilot, the Dean’s Cabinet agreed to fully re-establish reference service in the *Times* reference room. All subject selectors were required to participate in supporting reference and instruction services. Previously these services were supported only by those who volunteered. As O’Gorman and Trott state:

“...all librarians can resolve to work more closely with their users as they set new directions for reference services. Coupled with a user-centered focus, reference librarians

should also reaffirm their commitment to the essential foundations of our profession: service to users, intellectual freedom, and an openness to change. By doing so, we will ensure that reference librarianship continues to thrive in the 21st century.”²¹

We expect to operate a hybrid—reference-desk and virtual reference—service at the USC Libraries for the foreseeable future. The resulting increase in reference queries, especially from undergraduates, following the move of the Doheny reference service to a more visible location, indicates to us the need for both modalities. This could be in part because of the traits of current undergraduates, as Radford and Vine note in their chapter of the new text *Reference Reborn*:

“[There is] a generational preference for live chat among young members of the millennial cohort, who also enjoy FtF [face-to-face] encounters with friendly librarians. These different modes can be combined to complement each other.”²²

Summary and Next Steps

Re-establishing a physical reference desk may seem counter-intuitive in an environment that at times seems focused on offering only digital services. However, as social networking flourishes in the digital world, so too are libraries seeing it flourish in the physical world. As USC’s students use Twitter and other digital means such as QR codes to discover and use library services, they are also learning that these services—and their use and understanding of them—can be greatly enhanced by a face-to-face encounter with a reference librarian.

As USC’s students become more engaged with the Libraries’ reference staff and the services they provide, so too are the library faculty and staff becoming more engaged with the teaching and research activities at USC. First-year students in the USC School of Architecture complete an exercise called “Imagined Spaces.” For the past two years, the USC Libraries has been providing the inspirational material for this class, drawing from our collections. The students have used these texts as the inspiration for their work and the results are displayed in the Libraries’ exhibition spaces.

Professional artists have also been inspired by the Libraries’ collections, using materials from rare books

and special collections to inspire new works of art in physical and digital media, which the Libraries then, in turn, have exhibited to demonstrate the creative and scholarly value of personal engagement with the libraries and librarians. Subject selectors have begun creating multimedia research guides to support the reflective component of USC's arts and humanities programming series, *Visions and Voices*. The Libraries' own programming unit has expanded partnerships across campus to reveal collections to students in new and surprising ways, such as an automobile show based on a collection of historical, space-age car photographs and the revival of a 1973 Latino literary festival that introduced current students—through multimedia and three days of live readings—to a previous generation of Latino literary figures.

During the past two years the Libraries have addressed a number of foundational issues: cleaning up records; correcting location codes; addressing cataloguing backlogs; shelf-reading collections; reorganizing collections and weeding collections in storage; and increasing reference and instruction participation. This groundwork prepared the Libraries to develop its first **three**-year strategic plan, *The Essential Library 2011–2013*.²³

Preparation for the development of the new plan began in 2009 as the implementation of the 2008–09 plan was well underway. Library faculty and staff wondered about the effect of the new plan on the implementation of the 2008–09 plan but soon realized that many of the projects were ongoing and had to be incorporated into the daily work of the Libraries rather than treated as strategic plan objectives.

Cognizant of the growth and development of the Libraries as a whole, the Dean decided that a specialized planning committee would not be established to guide the development of the three-year plan. Rather, all library faculty and staff would constitute a committee-of-the-whole and all would be responsible for the intellectual and practical work necessary to develop the plan.

The entire USC Libraries community took this charge seriously, and participation increased as planning progressed throughout 2010. Tactics similar to those used in 2008 were used to identify the objectives for the three-year plan (e.g. library forums, dotting exercises to prioritize objectives, SWOT analysis). The vision, mission and values developed for the 2008–09 plan were reviewed and reaffirmed for inclusion in

the three-year plan. However, it was agreed that the three-year plan should be more aspirational in nature, building on the foundational work that had been completed since 2007. Objectives that were operational in nature (e.g. resolving cataloguing backlogs) were assigned to the relevant senior administrator who was made responsible for investigating the issue, determining whether the work should be undertaken, and if so, presenting a budget and work plan to the Dean's Cabinet for review and decision.

Although the vision, mission and values from the 2008–09 document were carried forward, little else of the structure of the 2008–09 plan was incorporated in the new plan. The new plan was developed along three themes—discoverability, integration with the community, physical and intellectual space—rather than specific library operations such as collections, access and technology and customer service. As well, senior, highly respected faculty from across USC were invited to meet with the library committee-of-the-whole to discuss their vision for the essential library.

As a renaissance was experienced in the Libraries reference operations with the re-introduction of the reference desk in the *L.A. Times* Reference Room, so has a revitalization emerged across the Libraries' service operations. More library faculty and staff are involved in instruction, reference and collections work, and Public Services job posting now explicitly require reference and instruction work.

While the change in emphasis from the solely digital to the format-agnostic approach to reference service required a culture shift, it has been well received overall by the Libraries' faculty and staff and the Libraries' users. Librarians and staff are engaged in the research and teaching activities across USC like never before and are experiencing the great dichotomy of libraries: libraries provide services because they want people to use them and when they do, they find themselves stretched to continue to provide these services. Being stretched, asked to provide service, being sought out as partners in the academic and research enterprise—in our opinion, the work of an academic library professional cannot get more rewarding than this.

Notes

1. "Doheny Memorial Library: History," <http://www.usc.edu/libraries/locations/doheny/history/>.
2. *The Essential Library*. The USC Libraries' Strategic Plan 2008–2009 (Los Angeles, University of Southern Cali-

fornia, USC Libraries, 2008), <http://www.usc.edu/libraries/essential/plan.pdf>.

3. David S. Nolen, "Reforming or Rejecting the Reference Desk: Conflict and Continuity in the Concept of Reference," *Library Philosophy and Practice* (2010): 1–9.

4. Martha Kyrillidou and Les Bland, eds. *ARL Statistics, 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 2009): 8, <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/arlstat08.pdf>.

5. ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee. 2010. "2010 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries: A Review of the Current Literature," *College and Research Library News* 71, no. 6 (June 2010): 290, <http://crln.acrl.org/content/71/6/286.short>.

6. Diane Kresh and Linda Arret. "Do Birds Fly?" *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 18.

7. Karen Ciccone, Guest editorial: "Virtual Reference, Today and Tomorrow." *Information Technology and Libraries* 20, no. 3 (September 2001): 120.

8. Chris D. Ferguson and Charles A. Bunge, "The Shape of Services To Come: Values-Based Reference Service for the Largely Digital Library," *College & Research Libraries* 58, no. 3 (May 1997): 254.

9. Scott Carlson, "Are Reference Desks Dying Out?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 53, no. 33 (April 20, 2007): A37–A39, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.usc.edu>.

10. Jack O'Gorman and Barry Trott, "What Will Become of Reference in Academic and Public Libraries?" *Journal of Library Administration* 49, no. 4 (2009): 329.

11. Robert R. Burkhardt, "A Role Transformed: Technology's Challenge for Job Responsibilities of the Reference Librarian," *Advances in Library Administration and Organization* 14 (1996): 125–190.

12. Richard Biddiscombe, "The Changing Role of the Reference Librarian" IN *The End-User Revolution: CD-ROM, Internet and the Changing Role of the Information Professional*. London: Library Association, 1996, pp. 79–95.

13. Soo Young Rieh, "Changing Reference Service Environment: A Review of Perspectives from Managers, Librarians, and Users," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 25, no. 3 (May 1999): 178–186.

14. Barbara Ford, "Reference Beyond (and without) the Reference Desk," *College & Research Libraries* 47, no.5 (September 1986): 491–494.

15. Keith Ewing and Robert Hauptman, "Is Traditional Reference Service Obsolete?" *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 21, no. 1 (January 1995): 3.

16. Carlson, "Are Reference Desks Dying Out?" A37.

17. Carlson, "Are Reference Desks Dying Out?" A38.

18. Brian Mathews, "While Reference Stats Decline, Oregon surges +51%. A Glimpse at Some ARL Outliers," *The Ubiquitous Librarian* (blog), http://theubiquitouslibrarian.typepad.com/the_ubiquitous_librarian/2008/12/while-reference-stats-decline-oregon-surges-51-a-glimpse-at-some-arl-outliers.html.

19. Dave Lankes, "Reference Renaissance: The VRD Successor," *Virtual Dave...Real Blog* (March 1, 2008), <http://quartz.syr.edu/rdlankes/blog/?p=474>. [Note the conference site has been taken down as it was on the Bibliographical Center for Research site, and the Center closed December 31, 2010.]

20. Jon Vidar, "Virtual Tour of the New Reference Desk in Doheny Library," *LibWire* (August 27, 2009), http://dotsx.usc.edu/newsblog/index.php/main/comments/dml_reference_desk_virtual_tour/.

21. Jack O'Gorman and Barry Trott, "What Will Become of Reference in Academic and Public Libraries?" 338.

22. Marie L. Radford and Scott Vine, "An Exploration of the Hybrid Reference Service Model: Keeping What Works" in *Reference Reborn: Breathing New Life into Public Services Librarianship*, ed. Diane Zabel (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited/ABC Clio, 2011), 79.

23. *The Essential Library: 2011–2013* (Los Angeles, University of Southern California, USC Libraries, 2010), <https://www.usc.edu/libraries/essential/>.