

**Meeting Notes
Advisory Committee Meeting
Ask a Librarian
November 28, 2007
Sarasota, Florida**

Present:

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| Judy Born | Manatee Community College |
| Andrew Breidenbaugh | Hillsborough County Public Library System |
| Geraldine Collins | Florida Gulf Coast University |
| Andrea Ginsky | Sarasota County Library System |
| John D Hales | Florida Library Network Council Representative |
| Caryl Harris | Lake County Library System |
| Dan Lhotka | State Library Liaison |
| Dani Lichtenberg | Palm Beach County Library System |
| Chad Mairn | St. Petersburg College |
| Lucy Harrison | College Center for Library Automation |
| Diana Sachs-Silveira | Tampa Bay Library Consortium |
| Jennifer Sullivan | Tampa Bay Library Consortium |

Annual Report: (Diana)

Annual Reports were distributed to committee members. The service has grown 94% from the previous year. Ask a Librarian answered 43,844 questions (31,359 chat; 12,485 email). New Libraries this year included: Bartow Public, Clearwater Public, Florida International University, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, and Parkland Public Library. Two new libraries have already signed this year: Warner Southern College and Fort Walton Beach Public Library.

New this year: Academic Desk and Associate Partnership. School District of Palm Beach County is currently the only Associate Partner. This relationship is working very well.

Quality Assurance also took the forefront this year. A new banner ad in the toolbox and a change of philosophy tried to shift the focus from the committee nominating transcripts to the individual librarians and site coordinators nominating. This change has been slow to happen but it's moving in the right direction. We expanded the Workgroup to 9 members to help with their workload. In the coming year, Amazon Gift cards instead of Borders will be awarded.

We installed Google Analytics on Ask a Librarian, it is probably very good information on our users and their habits with Ask a Librarian.

Financially, Ask a Librarian is right on target. We were awarded \$341,805 for the 2007-2008 year. Different from last year, we have \$16,500 budgeted in marketing. This gives us the ability to plan better. The only obstacle is the state is holding 4% of funding as they are doing with all federal funds. We anticipate this money being released in early '08, but it's hazy.

Update on Marketing: (Diana)

Last year:

Ask a Librarian placed ads in all the community college papers where ads and papers were available. The ads varied greatly in frequency and size depending on the cost at the individual schools. Schools with ads saw a 29.4% increase in use, 11.5% higher than the average growth in community colleges at the same time.

We also created a business flyer and made it available to libraries and sent it to SCORE locations through out the state.

We also created a large social networking presence. MySpace has been very successful. We have over 1000 friends, and a 1-4% referral rate from the site. We are introducing customizable widgets for libraries with MySpace pages. Facebook has been harder to work with. We were banned, failed at reaching an agreement with flyer ads and have little interaction with end-users on the site. We are focusing our energies on a customizable widgets for libraries. CCLA has a Second Life presence that includes an Ask a Librarian billboard. A bot is on location and refers users to Ask a Librarian if they have a reference question.

Ongoing:

Educate libraries that link placement matters. We are calling individual libraries to work with them. The link in OPACs, and on the front page is the largest correlation to use. Word of mouth and our link on library websites are our biggest referrers. (Able to track better with Google Analytics)

This year:

Back2School: Created new posters and bookmarks to target to the 15-24 age demographic. These were sent to every high school in Florida. We will also be posting customizable versions for our libraries.

The Directors Chair: We are having a contest for high school students to create our next commercial. The contest www.askalibrarian.org/thedirectorschair helps raise awareness of the service in this demographic area.

Still in the planning stages: Google Ads, next years back to school campaign.

Update on Academic Desk: (Jennifer)

The Academic desk kicked off on September 4th and it is going strong. We are staffing from 10-4 Monday to Friday. One librarian called it "a monumental improvement". We hope to expand as more academic libraries come on board. Queue log outs remain low as traffic volume seems to match coverage. The academic desk handled 509 questions in September and 526 in October. This has been a successful soft launch and we anticipate growth this year.

Update on Scheduling: (Jennifer)

Since the academic desk splits available staff in half, scheduling is very tight. Where before there might have been 5 people on the desk, now there are only 2 or 3. Some libraries have also cut back hours due to staff shortages, but we maintain our 84 hour a week schedule. 3 library school student interns help with the late night coverage and work a combined estimate of 47 hours a week. The schedule is produced quarterly now throughout the year so libraries can make long range plans for coverage.

Update on Training: (Jennifer)

Last year 169 librarians were trained in 16 training sessions held throughout the state. There is now an annual training schedule set up so libraries will know when training will be available in advance. The schedule is available here <http://www.tbhc.org/aaltraining>. There is a unique opportunity scheduled for April 15th and 22nd for a refresher course at TBLC. We have also implemented monthly practice sessions for anyone in the state who would like to log in on the second Tuesday of every month.

11:15 Discussion: Patron Behavior Policy: (Judy Born)

The committee consisted of Judy Born, Caryl Harris and Susan Szymula. Judy Born presented the subcommittee's discussion and the proposed policy. The board's feedback suggested modifications. The modifications were implemented and the policy was approved by e-mail communication the following week.

New Policy:

Patron Behavior Policy

Statement of mutual respect:

Our librarians will treat each patron with courtesy and respect. We expect the same respect in return from our patrons. All patrons will be treated equally and held to the same behavior standards.

Unacceptable behavior includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Using offensive or obscene language or language of a racist/sexist nature.
- Browsing to websites that are pornographic or obscene.
- Transmitting messages that harass or threaten the librarians.
- Deliberately wasting librarian effort or time in a way that denies service to other legitimate users of the service.

Users who violate these behavior guidelines may be subject to one or more of the following consequences:

- A warning. The librarian may ask the user to change their behavior.
- A disconnect. Our librarians may disconnect from a user at any time at their discretion. They may also ignore subsequent questions from that user.
- Being reported. We may contact schools and Internet service providers to report egregious or threatening violations. Threats are taken seriously.
- Loss of Access. Continued violations may result in loss of access. Unlawful activities will be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

A decision to deny access to the service will be made by the Ask a Librarian managerial staff and will be based upon the severity of the offence and/or the repeated nature of the behavior.

Loss of access will continue for a period determined by the staff based on the severity of the offense and will range from 6 months to indefinitely.

Anyone whose access is blocked may appeal and request to have access restored by phoning 813-622-8252 ex. 234 to appeal the decision. Their request will be considered in a timely manner and they will be informed of the decision.

11: 40 Update/ Discussion: Docutek Software (Lucy)

Recent Enhancements: Lucy talked about the most recent software upgrade, in late August 2007, which had mostly behind-the-scenes fixes and little visible impact to librarians or users. There is also a text chat feature that we have not yet turned on.

Continuing Issues: Lucy talked about the changes Docutek has gone through since they were acquired by SirsiDynix. For example, none of the programmers that created the VRLplus software are still with the company. We are still establishing our relationship with SirsiDynix, but while their programming staff seem like smart people, they don't yet know the software as well as they could.

There are a couple of outstanding issues that are being worked on (like the statistics error message) but for the most part, our concerns are about the long-term strategy the company has for the VRLplus software.

Desired Enhancements: No specific desired enhancements were identified, other than those that are already well known (text chat, better cobrowsing, one-to-many service). The group discussed co-browsing and agreed that it does not work well now and is not often used.

Long-term plans: Lucy said that she has asked Karen Schneider (new CCLA employee) to work with Jennifer to do a marketplace scan of what the VR software options are. Regardless of our relationship with Docutek / SirsiDynix, this is an appropriate step to take at this time, now that we are several years into the service. While we will not be migrating off of VRLplus in the immediate future, it would be a good idea to be aware of all options as we move forward.

Lunch

1:00 Update/ Discussion: Software innovations (Lucy)

Mobile: Doug has been working with TBLC to develop special web pages for mobile devices to use Ask a Librarian. The new pages were demonstrated, both on the laptop and on a PDA that Lucy had brought with her. Right now the pages only link to e-mail, but we are hopeful that we will soon be able to integrate live chat. The group was very interested in the mobile pages and liked the new mobile AaL logo that TBLC created. They were happy to see that their local AaL pages had also been converted to work on mobile devices. There was also some discussion of other ways that local desks have already begun integrating mobile services, such as putting icons for IM on their local AaL page, or including the Meebo chat box. Diana stressed that we are interested in making the local AaL pages a "reference portal" for the local institutions, so whatever they want added there, we are happy to help.

New info pages: Lucy and Jennifer quickly ran through the changes to the info pages and the toolbox. The group liked the changes.

Test environment: Lucy informed the group that we are working to create a true test environment for Ask a Librarian, so that we (and the SirsiDynix staff) can more easily load and test new software, and troubleshoot existing problems. Right now, we have only a production environment (live service) and a pre-production (for training, testing, practice, etc). This makes it hard to do proper testing without taking away functionality from our users. For example, the latest version of VRLplus came with a "text only" feature, but we have been reluctant to turn it on since it is a system-wide setting that can only be changed by SirsiDynix. We already have servers that could be used for a test environment at no additional charge, since we upgraded our live servers in summer 2006. We are in negotiations with SirsiDynix to waive their usual set up fee and build a test environment for us on those servers, since that would benefit all parties involved.

1:30 Discussion: Privacy Policy Subcommittee (Chad Mairn)

We revisited the Privacy Policy for Ask a Librarian. Geraldine Collins, Andrea Ginsky, Chad Mairn and Diana Sachs-Silveira worked on this subcommittee.

A new policy was discussed and approved. It is:

Ask a Librarian is committed to keeping your personal information private. In order to provide effective assistance to you, we do ask for name and e-mail address, however you do not have to provide this

information to receive services from AAL. Additional information, such as: your status – middle school student, college student, etc. and library of access - may be gathered to more efficiently analyze your question, direct our responses and recommend appropriate reference or research resources. Personal information gathered before and during your session is considered confidential and will only be used to respond to your question and obtain statistical data.

The majority of AAL session transcripts will be held on our servers for a maximum of 45 days, at which point they will be deleted. A sampling of transcripts, with all personal identifiable information removed, will be kept for research purposes. These transcripts provide statistical information and quality control that assists us in serving you more effectively. For further information about how we protect your information, please [contact our Statewide Coordinator](#).

1:50 Update: Statewide Tutoring

Infinity Software partnering with SmarThinking (we believe) was awarded the pilot project for the statewide tutoring system. We are hoping to work with them to have the services compliment each other.

2:15 Discussion: Future Direction of Ask a Librarian.

The committee discussed new specialized desks in the near future. While the idea of a genealogy desk, was not enthusiastically supported. The committee recommended Ask a Librarian begin to work on a Spanish Desk. The desk will start as an email only service, and we will then evaluate user and librarian demand for live chat.

2:30 Renewal of Terms

Committee Terms are up for renewal. Advisory Committee Members will be asked if they want to resign, renew for 1 year or 2 years. After the members answer, new members will be solicited. We anticipate the Advisory Committee made have a prominent role in analyzing software in the future.

Adjourn.