

## Assessment of Reference Services at Carnegie Mellon University (DRAFT – 12/14/2010)

This draft begins to put in place an overall plan for assessment of reference services at Carnegie Mellon University. The purpose of the assessment is to determine if the current service model for reference is meeting the needs of the university. By service model we mean the location/existence of service points, the skill levels of those providing the service, whether the service is tiered in any manner, and the hours of the service. At the current time, reference service at Carnegie Mellon provides traditional reference desk service where a librarian, library staff member or graduate student in library science is stationed at a reference desk where persons visiting the library can locate them. This is sometimes referred to as a "just in case" approach to reference service because the service point is manned "just in case" the reference service provider's help is needed.

Carnegie Mellon provides a reference desk at the Engineering & Science Library, a reference desk for humanities, social sciences, business and economics at the entry level of the Hunt Library and a reference desk for arts on the fourth floor of the Hunt Library. Reference service also is provided at an archives office on the second floor of the Hunt Library. There is no reference desk at the Mellon Institute Library, but the users approach the library staff and the librarian in the library offices. The reference desks provide email and telephone reference in addition to any walk-in traffic. Since 2000, Carnegie Mellon has provided chat (IM) reference - sometimes this is done in the librarian's office and sometimes it is done while at the reference desk. Usually evening chat reference service from 5 PM to 8 PM on Monday through Thursday is done at the traditional reference desk.

**For the purposes of the assessment a local definition of reference service, which includes information literacy and outreach efforts to the departments, will be included in the scope of the benchmarking, questionnaire, focus group, and survey efforts mentioned below.**

Questions that we'd like to have answered with this assessment:

- Is having a service desk (traditional reference desk) making a difference at Carnegie Mellon University anymore?
- Should we continue traditional reference desk service? Why or why not?
- Where should we provide service and what hours should be provided?
- What is the appropriate level of staffing of a reference service point (student/paraprofessional/professional librarian)?
- What do our students think about "just in case" reference service (our current model)?
- What do the staff and faculty think about "just in case" reference service (our current model)?
- Who do students and faculty seek help from with regard to information or research needs?
- What is the perception of "just in case" reference service amongst Carnegie Mellon library faculty?
- Who is currently using which medium? By medium we mean in-person at the desk, reference consultation by appointment, phone reference, e-mail to the libraries, IM, or e-mail to individual librarians.

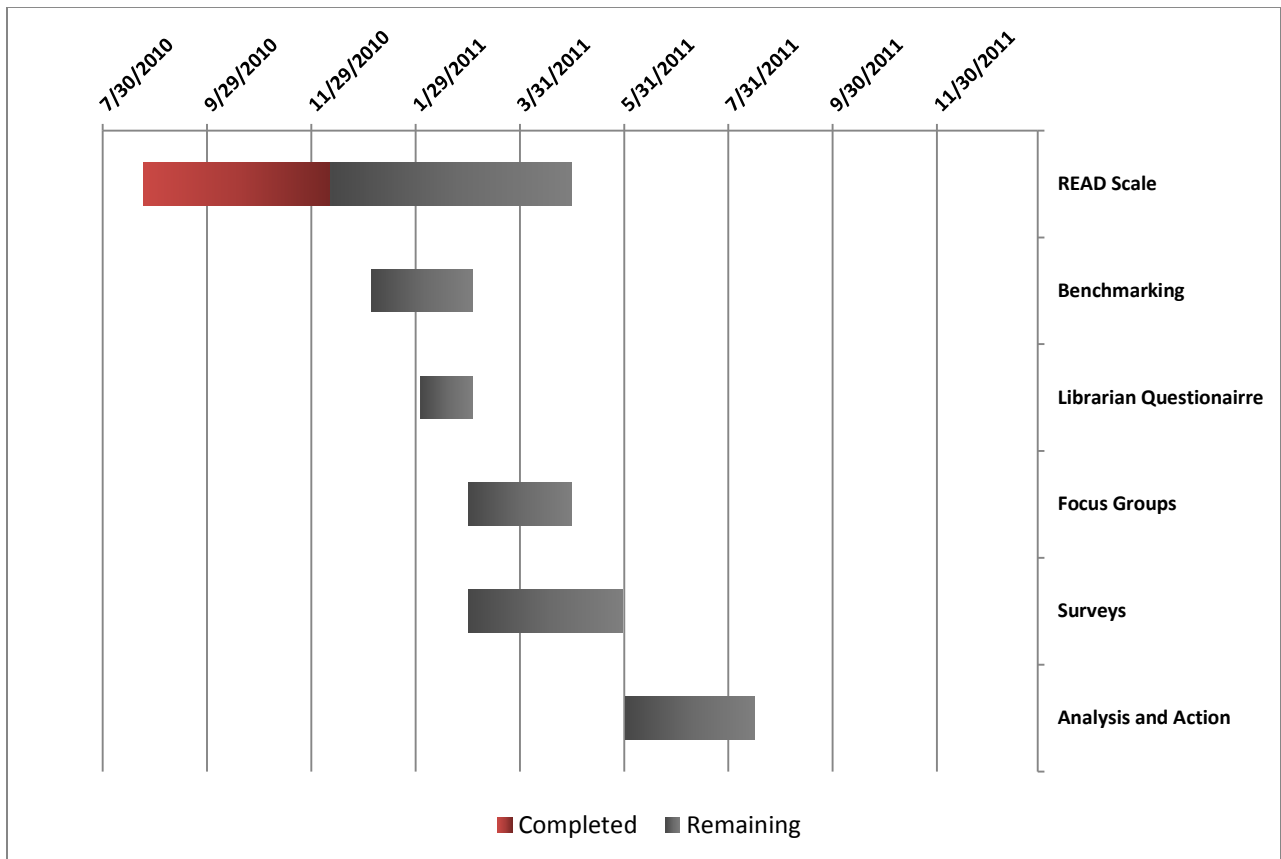
- Should different service models be used to meet the needs of different constituencies and disciplines?
- According to the students and faculty, should we assess the communication about or marketing of reference service?
- When posed to faculty and students, what is the reaction of the students and faculty to a proposal for direct approach to librarians in their offices (actually happens at Arts, Mellon and to some extent at E&S)? Note our current floor plan would not allow Hunt Reference to provide a direct approach to the librarians.
- Are there any current barriers to the reference service that we currently provide?
- What reference service models are in use at our peer institutions?
- **[if we include information literacy and other outreach roles, we ought to generate some questions to answer]**

Project Timeline with the Following Five Outcomes:

- 1) READ Scale tracking of service provided at the traditional reference desk and off-desk reference service will be done beginning in the fall semester of 2010 and continuing through the spring of 2011. This data can be analyzed for: distribution according to READ scale, READ scale distribution by service point, READ scale distribution by time of day (and/or day of week), and READ scale distribution by time of day (and/or day of week) AND service point.
- 2) Benchmarking with our established peer group (see CMU Factbook) with regard to extent of reference services and adoption of new outreach roles for liaison librarians. [This might inform the focus groups].
  - a) Will begin with an unobtrusive survey: hours, service points, staffing, roles.
  - b) Remaining questions/gaps in knowledge will be filled in by phone contact.
  - c) Scheduled to take place in January and February of 2011.
- 3) A questionnaire will be completed by Carnegie Mellon University reference (liaison) librarians.
  - a) Developed and distributed by the end of the spring 2011 semester.
  - b) Currently scheduled to take place in February of 2011.
- 4) Focus groups will be held with students and faculty to gather in-depth feedback from our user base. This is intended to complement the surveys of the students and faculty of number 5 below.
  - a) Focus groups will be conducted by Institutional Research and Analysis or by consultants from outside of the university.
  - b) Heads of departments for the service points (or a designated representative) will convey desired scope of the focus group to the focus group facilitators.
  - c) Benchmarking results will be used to inform the scope of the focus groups.
  - d) Scheduled to take place in March and April of 2011.
- 5) A survey of students and faculty will gather information from a larger representation of the campus population. This is intended to complement the focus groups of the students and faculty of number 4 above.

- a) Surveys will be conducted by Institutional Research and Analysis or by consultants from outside of the university.
- b) Heads of departments for the service points (or a designated representative) will convey desired scope of the survey and highly desired questions to the focus group facilitators.
- c) Benchmarking results will be used to inform the scope of the survey.
- d) Scheduled to take place in March, April and May of 2011

Analysis of the results of the five outcomes and any action taken on them will be undertaken during the summer of 2011 and will be intended to be in place for the fall semester of 2011. Arts Reference, Hunt Reference, the Science Libraries [and the University Archives] may take divergent paths at this point. The needs of the university will be the overriding factor of any action that is taken.



**Chart 1: Gantt Chart for a 2011 Assessment of Reference Services at Carnegie Mellon University**