Notes from Discussion Group #1 *What are the basic competencies we are expecting from new reference staff and what are our expectations for ongoing professional development for existing staff?* Sonya Kirkwood and Robin Sinn discussion leaders and note takers.

These are Robin’s notes.

The discussion group was made up of approximately 14 librarians, besides the discussion leaders. Discussion was animated and didn’t take much prodding. Sonya and I ended up chiming in when we had something to share, but the group did most of the movement from topic to topic. This is just a list of the questions and comments that came up in chronological order.

How do we enforce whatever minimum competencies are agreed upon? How do we ask someone who is not performing well to ‘leave’ (not work as a chat librarian anymore)? Most participants thought this would be the local supervisor. Questions about the use of evaluations at the state and local levels were raised.

Will feedback from the librarians be accepted for training purposes?

Expectation that service quality would still vary – held up examples in other cooperative library ventures: interlibrary loan and cataloging.

How do I know I’m giving the same service/answers as other librarians would? Several participants reassured this questioner that checking with the patron and your already developed reference skills would help you with that. That we don’t expect identical answers, just a certain level of service. Trust yourself.

Is typing quickly and correctly a minimum reference competency?

What about productivity software questions (i.e. Word, Excel, Access)? Some libraries have these software products on their computers, some do not. Some will answer questions, some institutions refer users to IT or to cheat sheets. Much discussion on this. Are these ‘library’ questions? Should a modern reference librarian be familiar with this anyway? Will we really get many of these questions? Will we need a scripted response so that all can answer the same way and refer to the local institution? What if a group of librarians don’t agree with referring these questions to the local institution?

That was followed up with trouble-shooting printers, plug-ins, downloads, etc? If students are doing these things in a library, they may use chat reference to ask about these things.

How much knowledge of the print collection is needed?

New librarians today seem to have less discipline knowledge and more tech know-how. How quickly should they be allowed onto chat reference? When asked if there should be a state-wide minimum time to work in an OhioLINK library before being a chat librarian, the group was in agreement that this should be a local decision and not a state-wide decision.
Could chat give us the ability to refer users to a true expert? Referral cheat sheet – even those who aren’t on chat reference?

Could we have a shared area on the OhioLINK website for a chat reference wish list?

Tutorial development – both for typical answers and for training on chat reference mentioned.

Ability to share the questions that are asked during the pilot program. A question-log available to OhioLINK librarians?

Set up a knowledge base?

How much training from vendors? Sonya answered that there would be training from vendors and OhioLINK librarians and practice time.

How overcome discomfort with the new technology?

Are there role models for chat reference that we could emulate? Are there role models outside our profession? How do we find them?

What about communications skills in this environment? Tone, attitude, etc.?

It takes longer to communicate and answer a question this way – can’t write a complete essay because you’ll lose the patron.

Should we have another conference after the pilot program?

More on technological skills: Is downloading Adobe Acrobat a competency? What about users with different software than you have (Word vs. WordPerfect, for instance).

Philosophical differences: one institution won’t just give an answer, they refer students to the source. Differences in the degree to which instruction is done during a reference interaction.

Suggestion: Look at the behavioral standards on the ALA website. Used in this person’s library for self-analysis (http://www.ala.org/rusa/stnd_behavior.html). There are standards for information services also (http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html). I also found a guideline for cooperative reference service (http://www.ala.org/rusa/stnd_coop.html).