Reshaping Spaces and Rethinking Roles:
Reference as Place
Susan M. Frey, Indiana State University
Margit Codispoti, Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne

Eighth Brick & Click Academic Library Symposium, November 7, 2008
Challenges of digital age to traditional library as a physical space

• everything’s on the internet
• libraries have made databases, catalogs and other aids accessible remotely
• libraries provide e-mail and chat reference
• interlibrary loan articles sent electronically
• administrators want space for other purposes
One way to approach the library as place

Ray Oldenburg
*The Great Good Place*

third place is the place after home and work that provides for community interaction and socialization
Oldenburg’s characteristics of the third place

- **neutral ground** – individuals can come and go as they please
- **leveler** – no distinction between class, rank, and social position
- **communication** – conversation is the main activity
- **accessibility** – close proximity to home
- **regulars** – full of familiar faces
- **membership** – where new comers are welcome
- **mood** – where acceptance reigns over alienation
Traditional libraries have some third place characteristics

• open long hours
• easily accessible to the university community
• multi-purpose facility where every member of the community is welcome
• frequented by regulars
• can come and go as one pleases
• no one, central figure plays host
What’s space got to do with reference?

- more students come to the library
- more inclusive, open environment encourages questions
- library staff become part of the community
- library services integrated into the space
- mode of reference service delivery becomes less important than the open, friendly atmosphere
Cunningham Memorial Library  
Indiana State University
Cunningham Library, Indiana State University
The first floor also houses

- the campus *Writing Center*
- computer labs
- current periodicals & reference collection
- event & lecture areas
- popular books, computer games, CDs and DVDs
- TV/gaming room
- circulation counter
- AND the reference desk
Reference in a Social Hub

first floor reconfigured with movable walls and screens

• for lectures
• gaming tournaments
• film series
• poetry readings
• impromptu group study
• casual gatherings
New Reference Desk
Annual Library Extravaganza
Community Engagement
Changing Roles

• research consultant
• reference adviser
• computer technician
• receptionist

Reactions

• curiosity
• pioneering
• resentment
• confusion
Future plans

• hire a full-time events coordinator to work with our full-time PR department
• provide docking station tables for mobile technologies
• having reference staff wear beepers for on-call service
• consider offering different levels of reference service
• merging Library Services with the Student Academic Services Center
Helmke Library in the 1980s
Traditional Reference Desk staffed by librarians
Circulation Desk staffed by paraprofessionals
Reference Model

• Service Desk staff field all questions, answer questions about catalog and general databases
• referrals to librarians when search strategy and multiple sources are needed
• librarians do reference by appointment---half hour blocks
• librarians make appointments with students directly due to class instruction and professors’ referrals in subject specialties
• IT Help desk staff also on duty in library for computer question referrals
Tier I - Service Desk
Tier II - Reference by appointment
21st Century trends at Helmke: Changing use patterns

• group study popular
• increase in group projects assigned-place to prepare
• commuter campus students need place to study, relax and meet
• athletic department uses library for monitored study
• wireless access brings students to library
Future Plans

- observed the use for social contact
- relaxing
- group study
- student desire for all services in one place
- heavy use of computers
- more and more laptop use throughout building due to wireless
Learning Commons
The ISU and IPFW reference experiences have changed the roles librarians play in the library as place environment.
Conclusions

• no one approach is best
• libraries need to redefine their function as needed
• challenge traditional models
• evaluate their unique characteristics and their users’ needs
• with combination of the right environment and user-centered services any library can become the third place for its campus community