Do academic reference services scare students?

Introduction

This article uses the results taken from 12 qualitative interviews with undergraduate students to examine these students' help seeking methods and their use of academic library reference services. The research showed that students did not ask for help for a variety of reasons. It is the reasons of embarrassment, shyness and anxiety caused by mechanical barriers that will be the main focus of this article. This article examines the effect this has on the use of academic library reference and enquiry services, and suggests methods of removing or coping with these barriers. The issue of whether anonymity offered by digital reference services is likely to make more students ask for help, is also touched upon. Using an inductive approach, the set of observations gained during the research, is used to build the theory that current academic reference services are not suitable for many students, and this is why they are not well used. This leads to increased levels of "Library Anxiety", which might be partially relieved by implementing new improved digital reference services.

This article focuses on students' thoughts and opinions, and it this student-centred approach which gives particular insight into the reasons students do not seek help. A major aim of this study is to find ways to encourage those students who need help, to seek it. This article aims to clarify the ways students seek help in libraries, and their feelings about using library enquiry services. In this way, it should bring practical benefits to academic libraries seeking to design and introduce new forms of reference service. This research is timely, because students see themselves as paying customers of the library and are increasingly demanding better services. If there are barriers to some students seeking help when they need it, libraries must address these.

Background

The broader context of this article is research conducted for a MSc Dissertation carried out during September 2005-May 2006. The main aim of this research was to investigate undergraduates' use of library enquiry services and to assess the possible impact of digital

reference on library anxiety. In my work in the Faculty Teams of Leeds University Library (LUL), I observed that some students seem scared of asking for help. A sign on the office door invites users in to ask questions but many students seem reluctant to do this. When confused looking students are approached, it often transpires that they have been searching unsuccessfully for some time, without asking for help. I wondered if the same students who were reluctant to ask for assistance face to face would make use of digital reference services, due to the anonymity afforded by these, or whether there were other reasons why students did not seek assistance.

The literature shows that there is a lack of qualitative research on the provision and evaluation of reference and enquiry services. The research sought to gain an understanding of how students use and feel about enquiry services, therefore a qualitative, grounded theory approach was chosen, as best suited to the research questions and overall aim. The research methods used were questionnaires, interviews and an examination of websites. This article focuses on the results from 12 qualitative interviews conducted with undergraduate students, and specifically examines the feelings of shyness and anxiety that some students expressed when in a library and seeking help.

All interviews took place at the Brotherton Library of LUL. The University has 7,450 staff and 31,500 students (with an additional 52,108 on short courses). LUL is spread over six locations and holds approximately 2.7 million books and over 9,400 printed and online periodicals. Two of the main Library sites are the Brotherton Library, which is the main research library and has collections in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Edward Boyle Library, which in addition to holding Science and Engineering material, is the main undergraduate library, holding multiple copies of text books. The IT services and Library are not a converged service, although the libraries do contain computer clusters. LUL no longer has subject librarians sitting on the enquiry desk, and has introduced an enquiry "call-centre", where all telephone calls and email enquiries are handled by clerical staff. Subject librarians are still available for enquiries, either from referral from the enquiry desk, or by a library user approaching them directly.

<u>Literature Review</u>

<u>Library reference services and users</u>

Hernon and Pastine, in their research on student perceptions of academic librarians (1977), found that only 16% of students frequently or always sought help immediately when searching. Reasons given by students for this included, "unwillingness to disturb or bother a busy librarian" and the fact they, "did not want to appear 'stupid' or 'dumb'." Many students who use a college library are inexperienced in using libraries and uncomfortable with seeking assistance (Jiao et al, 1996). Reasons for users not asking for help include feeling their questions are too simple, previous unsatisfactory encounters with staff, or shyness. In Ruppel and Fagan's study (2002), the reasons given by students for not asking for help mostly echo those already shown in Hernon and Pastine's study. However, there are some interesting additions, such as 23% of respondents who stated not wanting to get up from their computer as a reason for not asking for help.

<u>Shyness</u>

Depaulo et al (1989) found "there is ample evidence that people in need of help are often reluctant to seek it, even when their request would be a fairly trivial one." (Depaulo et al, 1989, p.834.) By asking for help, shy people face the dual problem of drawing attention to their own "deficiencies", whilst also having to initiate a social interaction. Shyness or embarrassment is not always the reason for students not asking for help. In Bailey's (1997) survey of undergraduates, findings showed that many students are very willing to seek help from librarians, and rarely mentioned embarrassment or fear of being considered a failure as reasons for not seeking help.

<u>Library anxiety</u>

Library anxiety differs from shyness, as it can affect students who are normally confident. Mellon (1986) conducted a qualitative study of 6,000 undergraduates and proposed the first widely accepted theory of library anxiety. Library anxiety has been described as "an uncomfortable feeling or emotional disposition, experienced in a library setting, which has

cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural ramifications" (Jiao et al, 1996, p.152). The classic symptoms of library anxiety include feelings of being lost or fearful and can be caused by the size of the library or not knowing where things are located Mellon (1986). This can cause students to lack confidence in their ability to use the library effectively, and prevent them from asking for help.

Bostick (1992) produced the first measure of library anxiety, which enabled empirical studies to be undertaken in this area. The five components of Bostick's Library Anxiety Scale are:

- Barriers with the staff (the idea that library staff are intimidating and unapproachable).

- Affective barriers (a student's feeling that they are alone in not possessing adequate library skills).

- Comfort with the library (a student's feeling about how safe and welcoming the library is).

- Knowledge of the library (how unfamiliar students feel they are with the library).

- Mechanical barriers (anxiety caused by being unable to operate library equipment).

Possible issues with using digital enquiry services

Academic libraries in the UK have started to introduce more digital reference services, such as Edinburgh University's Information and Electronic Reference Services (Edinburgh University Library, 2005). It is expected that the use of digital reference services will grow over the next few years. Digital reference services might seem to be the answer for students who are scared to ask for help. However such services have some drawbacks. Bromme et al (2005) state that the use of asynchronous and text-based communication makes it more difficult to establish the "common ground" that aids comprehension. There is no immediate feedback and what they describe as the "paralinguistic information of face to face communication", such as tone of voice and gestures are missing. Carducci and Zimbardo (1995) describe technology as "the perfect medium for the shy", due to the Internet removing many of the barriers that inhibit the shy, and helping them prepare what they want to say. However, the point is made that technology might become a hiding place for those avoiding social interaction. In Pomerantz and Luo's study (2006) , which examined students' motivation for using a chat service, rather than a traditional reference service, 47% of respondents stated

convenience as the main factor. 15% said other services were not helpful, and only 7% said they used the service because of their own personality, (e.g. because they were shy, liked using computers, or did not speak English as their first language). Horowitz et al. (2005) also showed convenience as being the main factor for people using digital reference services.

Various case studies have been conducted in US academic libraries that have introduced digital reference services. Those looking at user satisfaction are of particular interest. Morris University has produced much on this topic (Ruppel and Fagan, 2002, Desai, 2003). Stoffel and Tucker (2004) surveyed their e-mail and chat reference patrons and found that there was a high level of satisfaction with electronic reference. Some US libraries have discontinued chat services, for reasons including a lack of staff and low volume of use (Radford and Kern, 2006), however, some of these institutions say that as current high school students who are heavy users of chat and instant messaging become university students, then these services might be tried again.

Methodology

A qualitative, grounded theory approach was selected because the focus of the research was on students' opinions, not the mechanics of digital reference. It was also deemed the best methodology, due to the lack of previous qualitative research in this area and the fact that Mellon (1986) successfully used the qualitative approach, in her work on library anxiety. A variety of techniques were used for the dissertation research, to enhance the validity of the research. Data was obtained from a review of the literature, documentation (analysis of LUL email enquiries, and university library websites), a questionnaire and interviews. The interviews and the results gained from these were of particular interest, as they highlighted issues of shyness and anxiety, and it is the interview findings that this article focuses on.

Qualitative interviewing was chosen as a research technique as it allows for things that cannot be observed, such as students' thoughts and feelings, to be discovered and for misunderstandings to be clarified. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 undergraduates, in which I was still free to probe responses and ask for clarification or further

elaboration. These ranged in length from 21 to 35 minutes. The precise wording of the questions was amended slightly in each interview, allowing more natural and conversational rapport to be established, which lead to interviewees being more open than perhaps they would have otherwise. Interview schedules were used to make sure key topics were covered and provided a rough format for the interview (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

Undergraduate students were interviewed, from a variety of years, ages and departments, but there were no distance learners or overseas students available for interview. Attempts to rectify this were made by emailing groups of overseas students, but this did not generate a response. Undergraduates were selected as they are often unfamiliar with large academic libraries, and due to time constraints it was necessary to concentrate on one group of library users. Interviewees came from questionnaire returns, (the questionnaire asked for volunteers to be interviewed) fliers displayed around campus and approaching students directly. The mix of students gave a wide range of views, which although not generalisable to the general population, gave useful insights.

It was emphasised to interviewees that the research was being carried out in my capacity as a student, anonymity would be preserved, and there was no obligation to participate. All interviewees were asked the same questions, probing was done in an indirect manner, and approval or disapproval was not shown to any answer. Interviews were long enough to gain enough data, but kept shorter than 40 minutes, so students did not become bored. All interviewees were given a small gift for taking part. Brief notes were taken during interviews, however for accuracy; interviews were partially transcribed the same day they took place. The recordings were played back on home computer, a brief summary was typed out in Word, and areas of particular interest were highlighted and any reoccurring themes were noted against the transcription.

The questions were broadly based around the draft developed at the proposal stage of the research but were also informed by the findings from the earlier stages of research. The preliminary analysis of questionnaire results, the literature review, and the website and email

analysis gave partial clues and answers that were further clarified and enhanced by the ability to probe for further information during interviews. Interviewees were asked about what things they need help with in the library, and how they preferred to ask for help. Interviewees were asked how they felt about using computers for studying, about their use of databases and about their knowledge and use of digital reference services.

Results/Discussion

The discussion will concentrate on the following issues, with specific reference to the interview findings. What do undergraduates ask for help with, and what is important to them when asking for help? What barriers do they see to asking for help, and are they more likely to ask for help with certain things, or in a particular way (i.e. telephone, in person, by email etc?) Also, do students show any feelings of anxiety when using libraries?

What do undergraduates ask for help with?

It is beneficial, when examining students' help-seeking to consider the types of things they need help with. Interviewees were asked what they needed help with when they first started using the Library. It seems that when students first use the library, their main information needs are directional, e.g. finding books and places. Student 4 needed to be shown where books for his subject were kept, particularly where all the different types of loan were kept. Student 6 a 2nd year student, reflected other interviewees opinions when she said, "I ask for it, [help] very once in a while if I can't find a book, or if, I need to, I don't know, find a certain area of the library. Student 10 mirrored this confusion over locations in the Library, stating, "first of all it was locating the books, finding the shelf was a bit of a problem to start with, particularly in Edward Boyle, I was on the wrong floor half of the time!" Student 2 commented "With it being my first attempt at study for a long time, I have needed quite a bit of help". She mentioned needing help on how to look things up on the computers, needing help with the layout of library, and finding journals and pamphlets. It is often when a student has no other choice that they ask for help. Student 12 seemed very practical and she realised after several weeks at university that there were things she did not know about the library. She explained, "but I was like well, I'm gonna have to ask, or else I'm not gonna get anywhere."

What is important to students when asking for help?

It became apparent during the interviews that are many different reasons for students not asking for help. A recurring theme emerged of students "saving time" (their own and staff time). Student 3, when asked if she would ask for help immediately if she could not find a book, cheerfully said, "I tend to try and do it myself, but only because I don't really want to waste anyone's time." Interviewees were asked if they would be more likely to use email to ask the library for help, if the turnaround time was 24 hours (it was 5 days maximum when the research was conducted). Student 1 said he would if the turn around time was within the hour, but added, "I feel also that, in a way it's extra work if I email and they have to reply to me within an hour, and if I call them on enquiries, they can tell me on the phone -like that." Student 2, a mature nursing student, commented, "I prefer not to use the telephone, if possible, as I know the people on the other end of the telephone have other things to be

doing, whereas if I use email, and things like that, they're doing it at a more convenient time for them." It is important to note that this attitude might not solely arise from the students wanting to save library staff time, it could stem from them needing to feel that they have the library staffs' full attention. This is suggested by students' preference for face to face help and is discussed later in this article. Asking for help by telephone was seen as a 'last resort', either through a personal dislike of the telephone as a form of communication, or seeing it as outdated, or costly. This is surprising, perhaps, considering Livingstone and Bober's (2005) findings that in a social situation, mobile phone calls and text are preferred methods of communicating for teenagers and children.

As mentioned under the "saving time" discussion, one reason for not using the telephone to ask for help might be because students feel they would be interrupting the library staff, however there are other reasons.

"I much prefer asking in person; I don't particularly like ringing on the phone." (Student 5)

"I'm not a telephone fan really; I think the world's moved on." (Student 9)

"I don't know about phoning, I would, erm cos I've go no problems with talking   to people, but there's a couple of things involved with that, one's cost, and the   other one is timing really." (Student 10)

Student 9, another mature student, admitted why she would not use the telephone, "Probably a problem with me, I never think my enquiry is that important, really." This echoes the comment made by student 2, noted earlier, saying library staff "have other things to be doing". It would seem the library could do more to reassure students that answering questions is an important part of their role. This idea of showing that libraries are "in the business of answering questions" (Durrance, 1989) is picked up again later. However some students did

still see the telephone as a useful option, student 11 stating, "if I was in an absolute panic, telephone, it's direct, I'd want a response straight away."

Anxiety as a reason for choosing not to use the enquiry service.

Depaulo et al, (1989) state that people in need of help are often reluctant to seek it, even for fairly trivial questions. This can be because they are too shy to ask, but other reasons, such as library anxiety, can cause students to lack confidence in their ability to use the library, and prevent them from seeking help. One of the questionnaire respondents[1], who claimed to feel anxious when in the library, gave a vivid picture of someone who feels like an "outsider" when entering the library. "I generally find libraries and librarians intimidating. Everyone seems to be a regular and knows what they're doing (it seems), and I feel like an outsider who as a third year should know everything there is to know, only, I only used the library to study, not really to get books out!" I believe this type of student stands to benefit from the wider implementation and promotion of digital reference services. Unfortunately, this student was not willing to be interviewed. When asked if she always felt confident when using the library, student 2 answered, "I used to be quite nervous and I found that I didn't find things, so that made it even worse". It is common for new students to feel worried; unfortunately this feeling can stay with some students throughout their time at university. I examined the interview results, for examples of students' levels of anxiety, and the discussion below is set around the framework of Bostick's Library Anxiety Scale (1992) and how it impacts on students' help-seeking.

Affective barriers

Interviewees were asked if they ever felt that everyone but them seems to know what to do in the library. Student 12, said, "Sometimes yeah, because I'll come down and I'll be like…there'll be people sat studying, and I'll walk past them and I'll be like 'I'm lost' and walk back again and you can see them thinking, like, you just walked this way before." Feeling lost is a classic symptom of library anxiety, (Mellon, 1986). Student 11 said, "yeah I do see loads

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[1] A questionnaire was also used for the MSc research. A free web survey from www.surveymonkey.com was used. The URL for the questionnaire was displayed on posters and fliers in all campus libraries, computer clusters, and the student union. The questionnaire was advertised from the 14th November 2005 until the 5th December 2005. After 4 weeks, 100 responses were received.

of people like using the photocopiers, or up in the big circle bit, with all the big reference maps and stuff and I'm like erm!" (At this point she pulled a worried expression).

Barriers with the staff

Student 12 reported a negative experience with a member of staff, when she asked for help, "When I first started looking for books, I had to like, just get a member of staff, and he was obviously quite taken aback that I didn't know the basics." This obviously made an impact on her, as she still remembers it. Student 10, when asked how asking for help made him feel, answered, "it's just lack of experience, I'm sure there are thousands of people asking on a regular basis." He commented that he had found staff helpful, yet added, "I have heard of them not being too helpful sometimes, and that would put me off!"

It is off putting to students if a librarian seems preoccupied with other work. Interviewees were asked if there had ever been situations when they wanted to ask for help and the librarian was busy, or seemed to ignore them.

"Yes, this has happened. They do seem busy behind the desk fairly often, its down to confidence. If you shout out and say, 'excuse me', then they would   stop and come and see you, but sometimes I think I'll hang on a few minutes."   (Student 10).

It requires a certain amount of confidence to interrupt a member of staff, but some students do not let this prevent them from asking for help. Student 11 explained, "I'm quite a confident person though, so even if they were a bit busy, I'd be just like 'excuse me'. I wait 'til they'd look up then I'd ask them." (Shy students might experience a lack of confidence in interrupting staff and shyness as a barrier against asking for help is discussed later on.)

Durrance conducted a study measuring if a person who asks a question would ask the same member of staff another question at a later time. Measures included "model of practice", the

extent to which librarians seemed to be "in the business of answering questions" (Durrance, 1989). This is measured by the way in which a librarian acts when presented with a question. Durrance showed that librarians often give short answers, and don't follow these up, and students are often confused about whether it is acceptable to ask librarians for help, and how much assistance they should expect. The study focused on face to face transactions, however it is likely that some of these findings can be carried over to digital reference. Indeed, Nilsen (2004) found that the "virtual reference desk" suffers from the same problems as the physical reference desk (i.e. inadequate reference interviewing, and not checking user satisfaction).

Mechanical barriers

Interviewees were asked whether there were certain items of library equipment, or resources that they would like to use, or thought they should use, but had not yet used. 4 interviewees mentioned at least one item, (even those students who claimed to be confident library users) and 3 of them mentioned the microfilm readers. Student 12 revealed, "erm yes, I don't know how to use like the microfilm things." When asked if she thought she needed to know how to use it, she answered, "I haven't needed to yet, but I have like, this sinking feeling, that at some point I'm gonna need to use it, and its looks like really difficult." She added, "I'm like not very confident about my ability to use technology really." When asked what she would do if she needed to use this equipment, she said she would go and ask for help. It was pointed out that that this differed from her earlier answers, where she said she preferred to work things out for herself. She clarified, "its going to be obvious to everyone else that you don't know what you're doing and even like damage it or something stupid like that." The fact she mentions it being "obvious to everyone else" suggests anonymity might be helpful in aiding some students to seek help. It also suggests that if the potential embarrassment caused by *not* seeking help outweighs that of asking for help, then a student is more likely to seek assistance.

Mobile shelving was mentioned by 3 interviewees. Student 12, admitted, "Actually, in my first year as well, I was quite nervous about the - you know, like the mobile shelves that you like,

move." She explained, "I'd never seen them until I came to university" and mentioned when she asked for help from a staff member re-shelving books, "I felt really stupid, because he obviously didn't think I needed to be explained that I had to like, twist the thing." She concluded that she had not found this person helpful, mainly because, "it just literally hadn't occurred to him that I wouldn't know." (This echoes barriers with staff, mentioned previously.) For student 9, this equipment was not a source of worry, as she did not think she would ever to need to use them. The fact the microfilm readers and mobile shelves were mentioned by several interviewees, might be because they are very visible pieces of equipment. The same student confessed, "In the first year, and maybe, I didn't know, and this is going to sound incredibly naïve, but as a first year I didn't know whether I could twiddle those stack things! I didn't know whether, that was for library staff to do, or whether that was something I could go and twiddle, and I actually kind of hung around and watched for a while, and guessed, are they library, are they students, oh they're obviously students, so maybe you can just go and wind them yourself really." This reveals the method of "watching and learning" as being an alternative to seeking assistance immediately-some students being more comfortable with this method. An online equivalent of "watching and learning" can be seen in the banks of FAQs offered by some digital reference services, where students can wait and see what other students ask.

Student 11, a first year student who earlier said she felt comfortable in the library said she would not really know how to use the photocopiers. "I wouldn't know how you pay for it or anything, and the same with your printer", she explained. When asked what she would do if she needed more printer credits urgently, she laughed, "I'd ring my friend; yeah I would, which is a bit silly really." This concept of asking friends rather than staff for help is explored in more detail later.

Embarrassment or shyness

Embarrassment has been shown to be as one factor in choosing not to ask for help (Ruppel and Fagan, 2002). This is an area ripe for investigation, as the lack of literature on this topic would suggest it is underestimated or ignored by most libraries. DePaulo et al (1989) refer to

Jones & Carpenter, (1986) in stating, "one of the specific complaints that shy people sometimes register about their social networks is that they do not have very many people in their lives to whom they can turn for help." Therefore some students might not be able to turn to friends for advice. It is Zimbardo's (1977) view that shy people are not very skilled at seeking help, and he sees this as "one of the most serious by-products of shyness." Embarrassment does not always mean the student fails to ask for help, but it can make it more uncomfortable.

> "This is quite embarrassing for me but I require some basic introduction to the computer network and how the system works here." (Email enquiry, February 2005).[2]

By asking for help, students are drawing attention to their own problems, or deficiencies, which may be particularly painful for shy people, as they care about what other people think about them (DePaulo et al 1989). DePaulo et al explain that help seeking often requires a person to initiate a social interaction, which might be more difficult for a shy person. Unfortunately, those students who need help the most are the least likely to seek it (Karabenick and Knapp, 1988, Ryan e al. 1998). A student's comfort in asking for help can be affected by previous experiences. When asked if she felt comfortable asking for help, student 9 said, "I don't have a problem but having said that I've always had a good response, so, if I hadn't had a good response, then probably I would feel uncomfortable."

Many students have a preference for asking for help in person, even if there have been occasions where they have not asked for help when they wanted to.

> "Rather ask person to person, because, I think its obviously a lot quicker and   it's a lot easier to make yourself understood, its can be hard to explain your confusion, in written or sometime over the phone." (Student 12.)

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[2] 867 email enquiries sent to LUL during 2004 and 2005 were also examined for the MSc research.

"I think even though it can be explained in writing, nothing can beat it being shown in front of you, and I think I'd prefer that." (Student 5.)

"I think you're more likely to get a response if you go in person, a bit of an urgency about it, someone's got to help you there and then." (Student 5.)

This preference for asking for help in person could be due to various reasons, including the assumption that enquiries and answers cannot be explained properly any other way, the need to have the persons' full attention, the dislike of using the telephone, and convenience and speed.

Bailey (1997) found in his survey that many students were willing to ask for help, and seldom cited embarrassment as a factor in not asking for assistance. The interviews conducted showed a distinction between shyness and embarrassment. Student 5, who claimed to be confident, when asked if they sometimes felt wary of asking for help in certain situations, said, "Sometimes yeah, if I think its perhaps a silly question, if there's a big queue, I don't really want to go into that queue to ask that question." He went on to say, "whereas if they were sitting on their own and weren't busy I would definitely go ahead and ask them." This student, when asked if he minded asking for help, said, "Not at all, but to begin with, as I said before I'd look for it myself, cos I don't want to appear an idiot! To ask a really obvious question."

The fact that this student now does not feel as wary when asking for help might be because he has been pleased with the service he has already had, "I have asked obvious questions before and had perfectly good answers." He has the "willingness to return", mentioned by Turner and Durrance (2005) as a new and user-focused indicator of reference success.

Embarrassment effected students regardless of their age and experience. Student 9 was asked if she sometimes felt wary of asking for help in certain situations. Her immediate response was "no". However, a few seconds later, as if it had just occurred to her, she said, "There was one occasion, quite early on when my phone vibrated, there was a lady and she

told me off, and it was the most humiliating thing in my whole life." She went on, "I know her, and I avoid her like anything!" She went on to say she would not approach this member of staff if she was on duty at the enquiry desk.

Preferring to ask other people

It became apparent that some students preferred to ask tutors or friends for help with library matters. Of those students who have never used the LUL enquiry service one wonders whether these students are scared to ask for help, do not realise they need help, or rely on help available from friends and online? Chiu (2000) states that if people need help, they are likely to ask those who they assume are likely to help them. To reduce the chances of being refused help, Shapiro (1984) found that more people turned to friends for help, than to strangers. Student 11 explained that she asked her friends about books they have used, and described the first couple of times she used the Library. "The first time I came, I came on my own, and didn't take anything out, I just sat and read, but the second time, my friend came with me, and she showed me how to use the machines."

"The first book I ever got out, I didn't know you could check, at home, I came   all the way here and checked, and then my flatmate was like, 'you know, you   can   just check on the [library catalogue]', and so."

Some students however, do not feel the need to ask for help from anyone.
Student 9 said,

"I'm pretty independent really, I mean, if somebody offered some   information, that's useful, that's fine. But I wouldn't probably ask."

Student 12 said,

"I think people, even if they don't know how to use the library, they'd   rather   just like, try and figure it out by themselves."

She continued,

> "I don't think you want to waste resources and stuff, like forcing help onto people who aren't going to ask for it."

This could be a problem for libraries, as there are difficulties in knowing which students need help, if they do not request it.

Students sometimes prefer to ask their tutors for help, even with library relating enquiries. Student 8 said,

> "If there was, if I was looking for a specific book, I would normally ask my dissertation supervisor. He uses the library quite a lot, and has books in his office, so I'd normally ask him or one of the people on my course who are researching things similar to me."

Conclusions

How do undergraduate students use enquiry services?

Above all, it appeared students need to know their question is important and will be dealt with. They fit in asking for help around all their other activities, often waiting until the next time they are in the library. They like to save time. They also like to have the member of staff's full attention. The same students who feel anxious and irritable at waiting in a queue for a physical enquiry desk might also have these feelings when sending an email. How do they know someone is going to deal with it in time? The reasons for not using enquiry services were various and complex and included the following factors:-

- Lack of awareness of services
- Embarrassment or shyness
- Anxiety caused by mechanical barriers

- Affective barriers

It has been highlighted that library staff must promote the fact that they are "in the business of answering questions." Many students do not know they need help, however interviews showed students were aware they might need help with things they saw every day, like microfilm readers.

Embarrassment has been shown to be a significant factor in choosing not to ask for help and a cause of discomfort for some who choose to ask for help. Students have shown they often ask friends for help, as this is less embarrassing for them. The interviews revealed that shyness is more wide spread than libraries might imagine and seemingly confident students can prove to find asking for help embarrassing in some circumstances. There are several components of library anxiety, yet mechanical barriers appeared to greatly affect interviewees, even seemingly confident students. There are various reasons for this. One is the potential risk of damaging mechanical equipment, (you can play around on a database and usually nothing will get broken). The visibility of the equipment, which as well as highlighting to students that such equipment exists, also has the effect of causing students to worry that other library users will be watching them when use the equipment. The phrases "sinking feeling" and "really difficult" were used, and libraries must remember, as pointed out earlier in this article, many students have not come across this equipment before coming to university. This highlights the importance of making it easy and comfortable for students to ask library staff for assistance with such equipment, to supplement techniques already used, such as asking friends, and "watching and learning", which might be inaccurate and not quick enough.

Students are not always comfortable asking for help if staff seem busy. This shows that academic libraries need to actively encourage students to ask questions, in a comfortable environment. In a digital environment, it is not enough to simply provide an email address. This might cause a prospective enquirer to feel the same as they would in a face to face

transaction and feel like they might be interrupting a busy librarian, or worse, that their enquiry might be ignored.

Could digital reference services help students who do not currently use standard enquiry services?

Although it has been shown that students prefer to ask for help face to face, their only other current alternatives are to email for help, or use the telephone, and interviews have shown the reasons why these 2 options are unpopular (mainly the cost of the telephone, and the need for an urgent response puts them off email). Although digital reference services such as chat still involve needing to type the question, it is a speedier service than email, and lacks the costs associated with the telephone. It would also help those students who are in a library but do not wish to leave their computer to ask for help. This research has shown that even apparently confident students have had occasions where they did not know they could ask for help, or chose not to ask for help, because they did not want to seem stupid. A digital reference service if properly promoted could serve multiple purposes. It has the potential to: -

- Highlight library enquiry services.
- Make it clear to students that other students are asking for help (maybe via a FAQ service).
- Make it obvious to students that they can ask for help, (every interviewee used the library webpages, and presumably would then notice a well-placed online enquiry service).
- Make it clearer what type of things library staff can help with.
- Make it easier for those off campus, or those who do not wish to look silly in front of others, to ask for help.

What impact could digital reference have on library anxiety?

Because services such as chat are not seen as being helpful for in-depth subject enquiries, some staff have doubts about their use. However such services provide a quick, prominent enquiry service, useful for some enquiries and can be seen as an initial way in for students. Students buoyed in confidence perhaps, by a successful online transaction, and with their

knowledge of the enquiry service heightened by the promotion of the service online, might be more confident in seeking help face to face as well as online. Onwuegbuzie et al, (2004, p.49) suggest that library-anxious students are more likely to ensure they are connected to the Internet to minimise using the library. This could suggest that a way to target these students is via the Internet, by allowing them to ask for help online.

Livingstone and Bober (2005) showed that 15% of children and young people cite privacy, confidence and intimacy as advantages of communicating online. A well-promoted digital reference service could be the ideal place to clear up misconceptions and confusion. Some characteristics of digital reference, like anonymity will help some students, and others, such as convenience and visibility, will help others. An introduction and promotion of digital reference services, could boost the recognition of what librarians do, whilst reducing anxiety, and giving students more confidence in asking for help. Librarians creating and promoting digital reference need to make it obvious to students that they are "in the business of answering questions", even in the digital environment, the service must be welcoming.

Carducci and Zimbardo (1995) make the point that technology could become a hiding place for "those avoiding social interaction." When considering whether digital reference services can aid anxious students, one must remember that these services may have the opposite effect, by making it easier for students to avoid coming in to the library, and therefore not becoming fully accustomed to the library environment and range of services available. Also, some undergraduates might find using computers a source of anxiety in itself (Thompson et al. 1996).If students rely on chat services, they might never actually see a librarian face to face. However, it could be argued that these students might not have seen a librarian face to face anyway, and at least they have a way in to seek help, that might not otherwise have been sought. Users of digital reference are of course still communicating with librarians but in a way that may afford them more comfort and anonymity, and in a way that sees differences between librarians and users becoming less apparent (Ellis, 2004).

It was surprising how many students felt confusion over something as seemingly simple and obvious (to library staff at least) as being able to move mobile shelving themselves. This researcher believes this hesitance to use Library equipment, illustrates a wider ranging anxiety and lack of confidence about the library.

To emphasise the benefits of improving enquiry services, and encouraging students to use them, we must bear in mind that once a student has asked for help, and been given it, it has the potential to improve the way they use and view the library. Student 9 saw the abundance of information not as a threat, but more of an opportunity. When discussing sometimes not being able to access some articles online, she stated, "there's so much stuff out there, there'll always be something else." She later went on to say, "It was the 2nd year before I knew how to find papers, the whole of the first year was book based enquiry. Once I knew it opened up a whole new world really." Libraries must ensure all students have equal access to this world.

Recommendations

Firstly libraries need to improve and promote reference services so more students use them- and secondly, libraries need to reduce the number of situations where students need to ask. Above all libraries need to do more to encourage those students who are not asking for help. To really improve the service then would be to promote it more and encourage its use, making it more comfortable and convenient for those who have not used it before. Libraries must also ensure users are willing to return to the service. The following recommendations are made: -

Locations

Libraries should ensure enquiry desks are in a distinct separate area from the issue desk, or clearly marked as enquiry desks. Libraries should also consider implementing roving library staff, maybe concentrating on busy times such as lunch times, as students often do not wish to leave their comfort zone to seek help, or prefer to ask someone near-by.

Promotion of enquiry services

Library staff must promote the fact that they are "in the business of answering questions" otherwise they run the risk of users feeling that they would be wasting staff time by asking for help. This could be done by clear advertising and training staff not to show surprise if "easy" questions are asked. Libraries should advertise enquiry services in a way that shows it is not a failing to ask for help. LUL currently promotes its training courses with colourful posters and booklets; perhaps we should do the same for our enquiry services?. Student 8 suggested, "one thing they could do is put up a poster saying 'if you have any queries just ask'." "We don't bite!" was also suggested as a phrase that could be displayed on a poster in the library. As well as promoting the fact they can provide help, libraries need to give examples of the kind of things they can help with. If we emphasise the fact that enquiry and reference services are a service they have paid for, that is available, might students be more likely to ask for help? Libraries could even use the "scary" angle in their promotions of services, by acknowledging to students that other people find it frightening too, and making a joke about it, this could relieve some of the worry felt by students, especially those suffering from affective barriers, where they feel they are the only ones who doesn't know how things work.

Dealing with barriers

Signs should be placed next to technical equipment; either clearly advising how to use them or encouraging would be users to ask staff for help. The use of equipment should be emphasised more in inductions, with "hands-on" training offered.

Enquiry services, particularly digital forms of reference, can be promoted as being "time-saving", as it has been shown how important this concept is to students. A library could promote the idea of students sending an enquiry to the library, and instead of standing in a queue they can be getting on with something else, while library staff find out the answer.

Virtual reference services

Academic libraries should consider introducing a pilot chat service, as it has been shown these may have benefits for shy students and possibly for other students too, particularly as

many students prefer to work from home. If libraries do implement digital reference services, then it is vitally important that they are set up in a way that does not detract from their usefulness. They must be prominently positioned; it must be clear what they can help with, and state how long it will take to send a reply.

FAQS should be used wherever possible; where students can see what questions other students have asked could help students with affective barriers, as they can see that they are not the only ones who need help. As friends and other students are a key source of advice, it could be beneficial to allow students to have their own web-based help forum. It was also apparent that many students still prefer to ask for help face to face, so any digital reference service should be run alongside the more traditional , personal service.

Implications for future research

The primary solution to library anxiety is considered to be library or bibliographic instruction, (Mellon, 1986) yet it has been observed how some students slip through the net for a variety of reasons. It would be beneficial for future research to be carried out, that links students' satisfaction with the library, with their participation in library induction processes.

The research took place in a limited amount of time, with a small number of interviewees. A wider study, with more time in which to conduct it, could have chosen to also look at postgraduate users, for example, who have different needs to undergraduates, or a larger group of students.

It would be beneficial to seek the opinions of overseas students and distance learners. It is also acknowledged that the shyest students would probably not volunteer to be interviewed, it would be helpful to gain opinions from such students.

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