What are Virtual Reference Services?

Virtual Reference Services (VRS) includes all reference or information services provided with online tools. This includes synchronous interaction (chat) and asynchronous interaction (email, text).

Why Grow Virtual Reference Services Now?

- More users want online help:
  - The generation of students we are serving are more comfortable online.
  - More people, across generations, expect online services.
- More library staff are comfortable with online tools.
- We have new technical solutions to help us reach more library users.

How Does your VRS Grow?

Email: Contact us any time!
Chat: Live Help!
SMS/Text: We can send help to your phone!
Knowledge base: It's easy to find your own answer!
Referrals: We're making use of all our expertise!

Fruits of our Efforts

- WSU Reference Services reach more – and different – students, staff, and faculty
- Increased inter-unit collaboration has brought increased respect and collegiality, higher morale

Assessment

Quotes from Student Library Users:

"...I used the online chat with a Washington State University librarian. I needed help in finding primary sources so I talked to a lady on the chat. I found it really helpful! She pointed me in the direction of websites I could use. I ended up using one of the websites she showed me and was able to find everything I needed. So thank you to her!"

"...I referenced staff at the library for some help when I was trying to find primary sources. I found it difficult to find these sources because they had to be [from] over 50 years ago, so I went online to the chat room with the library staff and got help from there. I found this tool very useful!"

Virtual Reference Services at WSU: The History


2007-2011: Instant Messaging for reference was piloted at Holland/Terrell and Owen Libraries. The service received fairly low use and was hard to monitor consistently while also answering face-to-face questions.

2011: VRS was separated from face-to-face reference and staffed separately. Higher priority and more attention to VRS helped improve service which increased usage.