

Where are the Librarians?: The Roving Reference Experience of DLSU Libraries

Kütüphaneciler Nerede?: DLSÜ Kütüphanelerinin Gezici Danışma Deneyimleri

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Abstract

The roving reference concept is relatively new in the Philippines. In 2012, the De La Salle University (DLSU) Libraries shared in its OCLC report entitled "Reference and Information Services in Selected Philippine Academic Libraries: Trends and Future Prospects" that DLSU will be introducing roving reference as part of the services of the DLSU Libraries. RIA or the Roving Information Assistant was finally launched in November 2013 and was pilot tested in July 2014. RIA allows the library staff to engage further with patrons, to expand information assistance, and to create a higher level of customer service in reference transactions. The presence of the librarians is more visible as they roam throughout the spheres of the library. This evaluative research seeks to determine if the objectives of RIA was fulfilled. Online evaluation forms were used to solicit feedback from both the users and the librarians. This paper shares the reference transaction experiences and results of the roving reference service of the De La Salle University Libraries.

Keywords: Roving information assistant, reference services, roving reference, customer satisfaction, service evaluation, Philippines

Öz

Gezici danışma kavramı Filipinler'de oldukça yenidir. 2012 yılında, De La Salle Üniversitesi (DLSÜ) Kütüphaneleri, "Seçilmiş Filipin Akademik Kütüphanelerinde Danışma ve Bilgi Hizmetleri: Eğilimler ve Geleceğe Bakış" başlıklı OCLC raporunda, gezici danışma hizmetini DLSÜ Kütüphanelerinin hizmetlerinin bir bölümü olarak başlatacaklarını paylaşmıştır. GBD ya da diğer adıyla Gezici Bilgi Danışma 2013 yılında başlatılmış ve 2014 Temmuz ayında pilot olarak denenmiştir. GBD hizmeti kütüphane personeline kullanıcılarla daha yakından ilgilenme, bilgi hizmetini genişletme ve bilgi alışverişinde daha yüksek seviyede müşteri hizmeti oluşturma imkânı sağlamaktadır. Kütüphanecilerin varlığı kütüphanenin bölümlerinde gezinirken daha da görülebilir olmaktadır. Bu değerlendirme araştırması GBD hizmetinin amacına ulaşım sağladığını belirlemeye çalışmaktadır. Hem kullanıcılardan hem de kütüphanecilerden geri dönüş almak için çevrimiçi değerlendirme formları kullanılmıştır. Bu makale De La Salle Üniversitesi Kütüphanelerinin gezici danışma hizmetinin bilgi alışveriş deneyimlerini ve sonuçlarını aktarmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Gezici bilgi danışma, danışma hizmetleri, gezici danışma, müşteri memnuniyeti, hizmet değerlendirme, Filipinler

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Introduction

Reference service is a library work which involves transactions or activities that delivers assistance to a patron by recommending, interpreting, evaluating, and/or using information resources to provide a particular information need (Reference and User Services Association [RUSA], 2008). A reference librarian records the transactions to quantify them for statistical purposes. In 2016, Houston suggests to consider revising a revitalized definition of reference service. Houston (2016) stressed the evolving changes of user interaction in the mobile sphere and the way they access information. The traditional way of reference work must be supplied with updated skills that are relevant for today's new breed of users.

There were a lot of revolutionary changes in the reference services for the past decade. The traditional reference desk was transformed in such a way that patrons can get easy access to the librarian (i.e., desk is relocated near the door with computer terminals beside to teach patrons on how to use a specific database) (Lee, Sivigny, & Ritterbush, 2010). Furthermore, academic libraries including the Philippines have launched various services such as text, chat, and other digital reference services (Ramos-Eclevia & Maestro, 2016). Fast track to today's contemporary scenario, digital or virtual reference service should be equipped with a quality program (Kawakami & Swartz, 2003). Powerful software is a requirement for such a noble service. A competent and well-trained reference staff is needed not just to answer queries, but should also know how to handle and operate an advanced technological program. Another approach to augment the digital reference service is to provide a roving reference service. This service is a face-to-face transaction and "allows librarians to observe users' queries and offer suggestions for better search results" (Reynolds, 2005).

Roving Reference has two common types according to Mirtz (2013), first, moving in the library but away from the static reference desk and second, offering reference in another building or campus. Dennis (n.d.) added that roving reference is person-centered, provides an opportunity to teach patrons at the point of need, and shows librarians as available and helpful. Roving allows for more in-depth assistance for individual students, researchers and faculty (Gadsby & Qian, 2012; Smith & Pietraszewski, 2004). The librarians are mobile and the service tries to remove the barriers between the staff and the patrons, thus, making the service more approachable and user-friendly. Moreover, the patrons save time by not going to the reference desk.

Roving Reference has two approaches (Hubbard, 2014):

- ◇ It is supplemental to a reference desk and desk schedule. In this model there would still be a manned information desk, but there would also be roving librarians addressing the patron's needs on the floor.

- ◇ As a replacement for, or a partial replacement for, a reference desk and desk schedule. In this model, the majority of reference is carried out by roving staff, with the reference desk either being replaced entirely or having its role minimized.

Sharman and Walsh (2012) pointed out that roving reference provide an “inquiry support in social environments such as halls of residences, student unions, or cafés; a library presence in more academic-related places such as departmental offices, classrooms, or study spaces; and roaming within the actual library building.” Huwe (2003) even stressed that librarians should be going where the users are by actually bringing with them useful mobile technologies that are wireless and can go beyond stacks. Roving librarians are equipped with tablets and similar devices that are linked to a strong and reliable Wi-Fi connection.

Objectives and Statement of the Problem

This study would like to counter check if the roving reference librarians were able to initiate proper contact with the user as well as properly ending the transaction before leaving the user. Actual monitoring will tell us if the transaction was delivered very well.

This research study specifically would like to:

1. Share the reference transaction experiences of roving reference librarians. What kinds of reference transactions were they getting? Were they being snubbed by the patrons?
2. Acknowledge the kind of reference transaction experiences of the users based on their evaluation. Were the librarians helpful? Is RIA approachable, friendly and accommodating?
3. Determine if the objectives of the service, which is RIA, was fulfilled.

Background

While digital reference service continues to be an effective way in providing fast delivery of information, new approaches in reference service continue to emerge. One way of underlining social interaction, is to provide a roving reference experience. The roving reference service builds a special connection between the patron and the librarian especially when a patron needs an actual demonstration. This is what library professionals should be doing, to teach and reach to the patrons using mobile and wireless technologies (Huwe, 2003).

The introduction of digital or virtual reference service is somehow the alter ego of the roving reference. Digital reference connects to the users in a new fashion where the librarians are not known. Librarians are capable to talk to their online users without sharing their real identities. Several digital reference services include: text messaging

reference, chat reference service, video chat, instant messaging and email. Yang and Dalal (2015) found that 74% of their surveyed libraries used at least one of the following technologies for virtual reference: email, phone, chat, IM, text, and video chat. Some are still comfortable using email as their tool for communication. Greenberg and Bar-Ilan (2015) noted that 27% of their sample requested for bibliographical lists of items on a specific subject and 21% requires instructional and tutorial answers. However, having virtual reference service poses a staffing concern. The library has to create various technological tools that could reach as many patrons as possible. For instance, the existence of all of these tools: email, phone, chat, IM, text, and video chat, that the staff needs to handle is really an issue. More so, academic libraries employ and maintain social media sites in their services to increase their virtual presence. Popular sites include Facebook and/or Twitter accounts (Arya & Mishra, 2011; Molina, Narvaez, & Eclevia, 2013).

In a study by Desai and Graves (2008), almost all of the patrons are willing to return to a face-to-face reference desk. This indicates a human interest in having physical presence of teaching at the desk rather than doing everything virtually. Face-to-face interaction gives you a feeling of content where you see the actual reaction and satisfaction of the patron. As mentioned by Nilsen (2004), face-to-face interaction leads to a more personal touch with direct help provided. The reference librarian can still conduct a thorough reference interview. This factor gave rise to the arrival of the roving reference.

Roving Reference as a Practice

Roving reference may be an old practice but was never formalized. Literature would tell that it may have begun since the origination of the reference service (Robinson, Triplett, & Lambert, 2011). The concept is similar to a business notion of Management by Wandering Around (MBWA), where you get in touch with your territory all the time. According to Sharman (2014), roving reference may be traced from the last 30 years. Keywords related to this are: roaming, outpost, offsite, mobile and point of need reference. Basically, it is performed outside the confines of the traditional reference desk. Roving reference clears out the stereotypical aura of a librarian. It is a way to reach out and connect, thus, making them more approachable (Gadsby & Qian, 2012).

Librarians provide an equal amount of roving service (Robinson et al., 2011). They take turns during the library's busiest hours (The University of Mississippi Libraries, 2014). The schedule and place of roving is arranged at the start of the project (Sharman & Walsh, 2012). Roving librarians are trained to possess welcoming qualities in approaching the patrons. One way to create a comfortable feeling with your target patron is to use a positive body language, be friendly, and always start with a smile (Penner, 2011; Robinson et al., 2011). Subsequently, in providing a professional delivery of information, librarians also bring with them mobile devices such as tablets or iPads (Brown, Sulz, & Pow, 2011).

The Philippine Experience

In 2012, Fresnido (n. d.) shared in her OCLC report entitled “Reference and Information Services in Selected Philippine Academic Libraries: Trends and Future Prospects” that DLSU will be introducing roving reference as part of the services of the DLSU Libraries. DLSU Libraries has already institutionalized its digital reference services such as Chat with LORA, Text LORA, Email LORA, Skype with LORA, Facebook with LORA, Tweet LORA and augmented reality using Android tablet. The librarians of the University are continuously reaching out to engage with students and faculty to help them in the development of their information literacy and lifelong learning skills.

In 2013, the *Roving Information Assistant* (RIA) was launched.

The objectives of RIA are the following:

- ◇ Increase the frequency of face-to-face or in-person reference transactions,
- ◇ Create a higher level of customer service in reference transactions,
- ◇ Encourage higher level of interaction between librarians and patrons.

RIA was launched to reinvigorate the Libraries in-person reference transaction. It is one of the activities of the lamInfoSMART campaign of DLSU Libraries (Del Mundo, Narvaez, & Yap, 2014). The term roving refers to the “act of a library employee circulating within the reference area or other parts of the library to offer assistance to users” (Courtois & Liriano, 1999). This roving reference service gives the librarians a more visible presence in the library to provide reference and information assistance to students and faculty who may be reluctant to ask for help at the Information Desk or Information-Reference counter.

Methodology

Winsett (n.d.) used Weiss’ definition of evaluation as the “systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy.” This study used the evaluative research method to assess our new reference service called the roving reference. After every roving session of the librarians, they ask the patrons to answer an online survey form. During a slow internet connection, librarians bring a print version of the online survey form. Librarians also accomplish their self-evaluation of the roving experience. Therefore, two sets of data were used. The first one is the evaluation of the librarians who are acting as RIA and the second was the evaluation coming from the patrons. The evaluation period happened since July 2014 to February 2015. There were 118 responses coming from 8 RIAs. Three additional RIAs were added in the Learning Commons making it a total of 13 (see Table I). Librarians rotate in roaming the libraries.

The first survey is the evaluation of the librarians who are acting as RIA. It contains the following areas: the type of questions they received from patrons (quick, directional or research questions), their impression on how helpful they were during their shift, the use of mobile device during their shift, ways on how they initiated contact with the patron, ways on how they were able to close the transaction and their possible enjoyment of the roving experience.

The second is the online evaluation form of the patrons. The first survey contains the following areas: the kind of assistance RIA provided, the behavior of the patron if RIA did not come along, profile of the patron, and the quality of service RIA provided (approachability, professionalism, accuracy, completeness of the answer and clarity). 65 patrons were served and they were asked to do an evaluation.

Aside from this, the researchers monitored and observed the actual roving of the librarians. The subjects were aware that researchers were behind them, but they were not conscious of the researchers' purpose. The researchers explained the reason behind this after the research was completed.

The Roving Reference of DLSU

Guidelines

Before RIA was implemented, guidelines were prepared by a committee to ensure that the service will run smoothly. Furthermore, the guidelines will serve as a security blanket for librarians who are part of the roving reference service of the Libraries. The guidelines consist of principles, responsibilities, guidelines on RIA, how to conduct the reference interviews and procedures.

Implementation

The first phase of Roving Information Assistant (RIA) was conducted over the period of Term 1 AY 2014-2015. The launching of RIA began last July 1, 2014. The RIA is composed of librarians who were trained and considered experts on the use of various information sources. These librarians are responsible in undertaking major duties that will reinforce the in-person experience of reference service through the creation of a Roving Information Assistant (RIA). Both the librarians who do the roaming and the service are called RIA.

Roaming schedule of RIA is made available from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, four hours per day (see Table I, Roaming Schedule of RIA, Learning Commons). Each RIA is given one hour each to roam The Learning Commons. Occasionally, and if Wi-Fi is favorable, the librarians roam with an iPad or tablet.

Table I: Roaming Schedule of RIA at the Learning Commons

Libraries	10:00AM-11:00AM	11:00AM-12:00NN	12:00NN – 1:00PM	1:00PM-2:00PM
Learning Commons	Librarian 1	Librarian 2	Librarian 3	Librarian 4

Satellite libraries (i.e. Br. Andrew Gonzales Hall Law Library (AGH Law Library), Br. Benedict Learning Resource Center (BBLRC), Science and Technology Complex College Library (STC Library), and Science and Technology Integrated School (STC Integrated School) with only one librarian will have two hours per day to do RIA (see Table II, Roaming Schedule of RIA, Satellite Libraries).

Table II: Roaming Schedule of RIA at the Satellite Libraries

Libraries	Librarian	Hours
AGH Law Library	Librarian 5	10:00AM-12:00NN
BBLRC	Librarian 6	4:00PM-6:00PM
STC College Library	Librarian 7	12:00NN-2:00PM
STC Integrated School	Librarian 8	3:00PM-5:00PM

Survey

In order to document transactions and obtain feedback of RIA, the committee provided online evaluation forms. Feedback from the evaluation will help the committee to identify areas that need improvement.

There are two kinds of online evaluation forms used for assessment of the service. The first one, "Roaming RIA Service Evaluation Form" which is intended for the library users and second is the "Roaming RIA Staff Survey" which is intended for librarians of RIA.

Originally, the idea of documenting RIA transactions is through online evaluation form using a tablet or any web-enabled mobile device. However, it was raised that due to the limited number of tablets that the library owns and due to intermittent Wi-Fi connection in some areas in the library, RIA librarians were advised to carry with them printed evaluation forms ready to be given to library users after each transaction.

Staff Responses

On the Roaming RIA Staff Survey there are seven major areas that a librarian needs to fill-out, namely:

1. *How many transactions have you dealt with on this shift?*
2. *Rate your impression of how helpful are you on this shift?*
3. *Do you use mobile devices while roving in this shift?*

4. How do you initiate contact with patrons on this shift?
5. How do you close transaction on this shift?
6. Do you enjoy roving reference on this shift?, and
7. Comments and suggestions about your experience on this shift.

Each librarian can have more than one transaction or no transaction at all. No transaction happens when the user does not want to be bothered by RIA. This is a behavior that needs to be studied as well in the future.

Directional questions (31.55%) were the main transactions answered by RIA. It was followed by *ready/quick reference questions* (20.39%), third was *technical assistance/pin/password reset* (17.48%), fourth was *ready reference (instructional-type of answers) which obtained* 16.02%, fifth was *research questions* (14.08%), lastly, *referrals* which gain 4.85%.

The librarians were asked on how they think they were able to help their patrons. Here are their personal ratings: 40.54% thought that they were helpful, 31.08% believed that they were very helpful, 16.22% assumed that they were not at all helpful and 12.16% agreed that they are somewhat helpful.

Only a few of them uses a mobile device when roving. Most of them (94.59%) do not use any mobile device due to intermittent Wi-Fi connection.

Contact actions are important to initiate rapport with the user. A librarian may start with any of the following opening behavior:

1. *Smile*
2. *Say "hello"*
3. *Saying: "Are you finding what you need?"*
4. *Saying: "How is your search going?"*
5. *Saying: "How may I help you?"*
6. *Saying: "Can I help you with anything?"*

In the six categories of contact actions, *Smiling* obtained the highest responses for the frequently used contact action which is 27.91%, second is *Saying "hello"* (24.36%), third is *Can I help you with anything* (18.27%), fourth is *How may I help you* (11.67%), fifth is *Are you finding what you need* (10.15%), and sixth is *How is your searching going* (17.61%).

Before leaving the patron, the roving librarian should also end their transaction in a polite manner. The roving librarian may do or say any of these closing actions namely:

1. *Is this what you were looking for?*
2. *Did you find what you need?*
3. *Is there anything else I can help you?*
4. *Thank you.*

In the four categories of closing actions, *Thank you* obtained the highest responses for the frequently used closing action which is 49.14%, second is *Is there anything else I can help you* (18.96%), third is *Is this what you were looking for* (18.10%), and fourth is *Did you find what you need* (13.79%).

When asked about their personal satisfaction of helping others, the roving librarians were a bit unhappy. Only 25.68% were always enjoying what they do. 10.8% of them are not happy at all when doing their shift as roving reference librarian.

Various comments were also received from the librarians themselves. One positive feedback was that students and faculty members were happy about this service. They also felt the importance of RIA if they are being approached by the patrons. Negative comments like they cannot do the RIA since they are alone in their sections, therefore, they can't leave their posts to do the RIA. One librarian suggested making less complicated evaluation form. The comments of the librarians were taken into consideration and were brought to a meeting.

Service Evaluation

This section presents the service evaluation of patrons toward the assistance provided by RIA.

Majority of the respondents were undergraduate students (60%), followed by Non-DLSU patrons or visitors (20%), graduate students (12%), and the least are faculty members (8%).

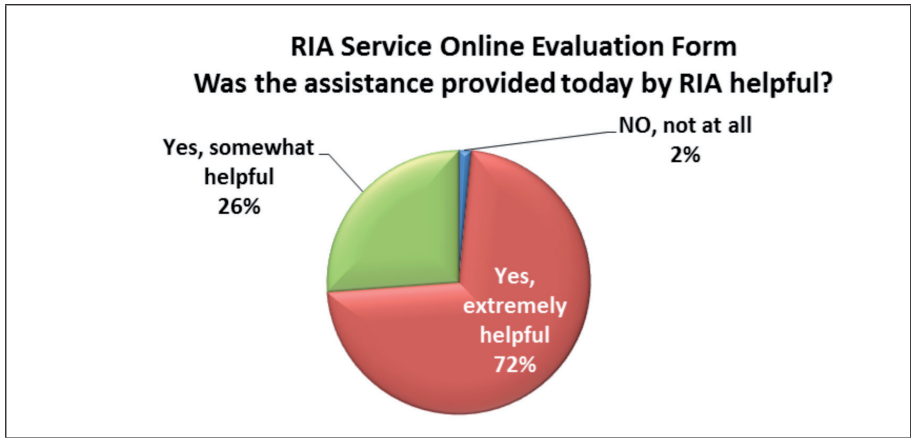


Figure 1. Was the Assistance Provided Today by RIA Helpful?

Based from the figure above, 72.31% said that RIA is *extremely helpful*, 26.15% agreed that RIA is *somewhat helpful* and only 1.54% believed that RIA is *not at all* helpful.

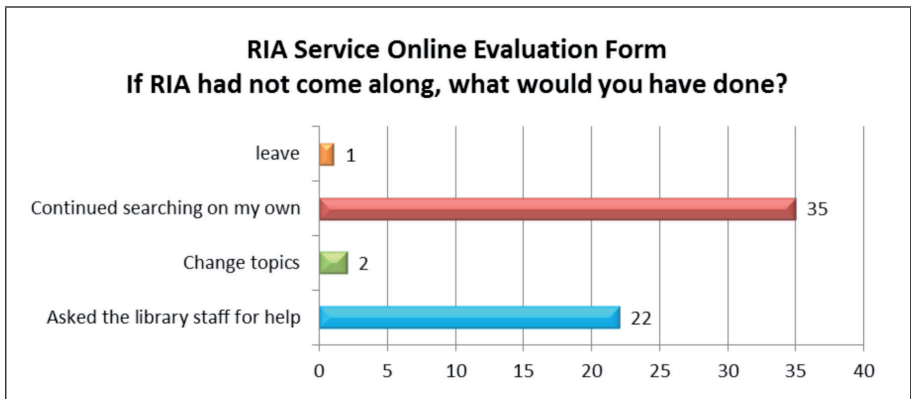


Figure 2. If RIA Had Not Come Along, what Would You Have Done?

Based from figure 2, if RIA was not available, 58.33% of them would just continue to search what they need on their own. 36.66% of them will ask the library staff for help and 3.33% would change their topic is they can't find what they need.

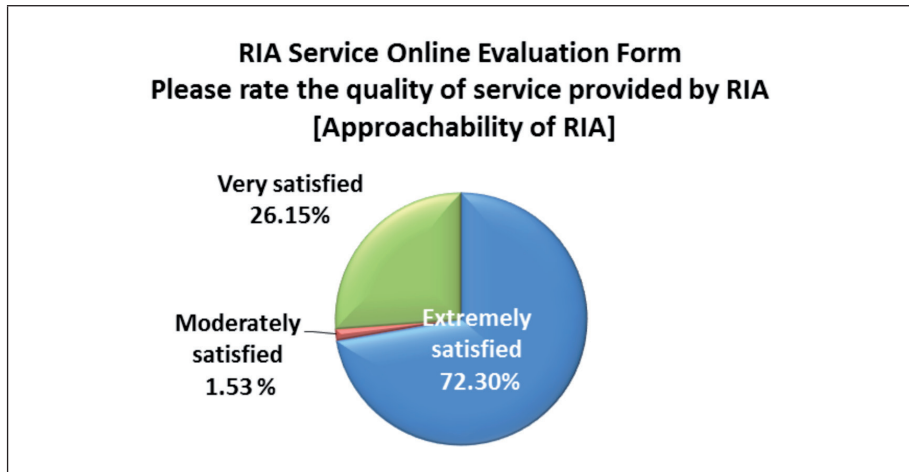


Figure 3. Please Rate the Quality of Service Provided by RIA (Approachability of RIA)

Most of the users are *extremely satisfied* with RIAs approachability (72.30%). 26.15% are *Very satisfied* and 1.53% are *moderately satisfied*.

Just like RIAs approachability, many of the users believe that RIA provides complete answers. 65% are extremely satisfied while 77% agreed that RIA's answers are clear and sufficient.

According to our users, RIA is somehow *exceptional, approachable and nice even to visitors. Definitely, RIA did a good job!*

Based from the responses and overall rating of RIA, the library users were satisfied with the service provided by the roving reference librarians.

Monitoring of Roving Librarians

To make sure that contact actions were properly handled by the roving librarians, the researchers asked the users if the roving librarians were able to deliver the transaction from the start to the end.

Most of the users conveyed that roving librarians initiated the contact by using opening remarks such as saying 'hello', 'are you finding what you need?', among other statements. The users also shared that roving librarians closed their transactions by asking if they were able to find what they need and if there is anything else that they would like to find.

Discussion of Results

It is fairly evident that most of the transactions serviced by RIA are directional type of questions. Strategically, putting in place appropriate and uniform directional signage in the Learning Commons should be considered. Using directional signage which is visible to the eye will serve as a guide to specific locations in the library. Furthermore, this will greatly help to avoid confusions among library users, especially first time visitor who will do their research in the Learning Commons.

Ready/quick reference question obtained the second highest transactions serviced by RIA. Currently the library is maintaining Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) through LORA, but it is still better to have a separate compilation of FAQs for RIA. Identification of and creation of separate ready FAQs for RIA will help librarian volunteers to provide prompt and accurate response among library users.

Technical assistance /pin/password obtained the third highest transactions serviced by RIA. The library should reinforce advertisement of the existing video "Tutorial on how to create MyLibrary pin/password account" of the library. It is better if the library will have a designated TVs that will play instructional tutorials like "Tutorial on how to create MyLibrary pin/password account" looping on a TV bulletin boards situated at all counter areas. Or creation of printed step by step guide on "How to create MyLibrary pin/password account" situated beside library OPACs will also help. The library should also consider of providing fliers of information literacy guide ready to be given after each transactions that is comprehensive and easy to understand by library users.

Overall, RIA phase 1 was a success due to both staff and user satisfaction it gets. However, it is also a fact that there are several issues facing RIA like staffing and workload. It is also evident that based on the feedbacks, library users are capable so far on doing independent research inside the library. It may be disappointing to librarian volunteers that most of the service of Roaming RIA will serve only as a directional guidance or supplementary as a help for library users. But this does not mean that the library should stop RIA service automatically.

The future of RIA is evident that it is far from significant. However, it is the responsibility of the library to be always visible with researchers and to continuously reach out with library users in the development of their information literacy skills. Creation of RIA has its potential promise to in-person reference service, which will give librarians a more visible presence in the library to provide reference and information assistance to library users.

Conclusion

RIA has been a service of the library for almost a year. The transactions have gradually decreased overtime due to staff workload. The shifting of the academic year (e.g., opening of classes moved from June to August) saw a decline in the number of patrons to be assisted. It was really another factor to consider.

However, we can say that RIA was able to fulfill its objectives. There was an increase in the face-to-face or in-person reference transactions since two reference librarians are working together to capture the needs of the users. One is still at the counter while the other one roams. Undeniably, RIA still needs to prove that it is really a convenient service being offered by the university.

Future Directions

Conduct a focus group discussion involving similar academic universities with roving reference as their service. Create guidelines or document best practices that will enhance roving reference. Identify academic libraries that perform roving reference services. Initially, there are three academic libraries which include Lyceum of the Philippines, Far Eastern University and Southville International School and Colleges.

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