About the Project

The Penn State Virtual Reference Service (VRS) began as a pilot project to test the effectiveness of real-time chat and browser sharing software in providing online reference assistance. VRS is hosted by LSSI Virtual Reference Desk software, which features chat, collaborative browsing, stored scripts and URLs, session transcripts and archive, materials sharing, an exit survey, and management reports. No user download is required.

During Fall 2001, service links appeared on web pages at the Delaware County Campus, the Hazleton Campus, University Park's Gateway Library, and two World Campus courses. During Spring 2002, service links appeared on seven additional campus library websites (Abington, Beaver, Behrend, Dubois, Harrisburg, McKeesport, Worthington-Scranton) and one additional World Campus course.

Service hours during the pilot period were Sunday-Thursday, 9:00p.m.-12:00a.m. Penn State librarians staffing the Virtual Reference Service included Susan Ware & Sara Whildin [Delaware], Joseph Fennewald & Shannon Richie [Hazleton], Lesley Moyo, Gary White, Carol Wright, & Janet Hughes [University Park]. VRS librarians staffed the service from campus staff terminals and from home, through cable modems or a DSL phone line.

Funding & Technical Support

The University Libraries, CELT’s Fund for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (FELT), Commonwealth College Research Development Grants, the Delaware County Campus, and the Hazleton Campus provided funding. Matt Bodek, Coordinator of Instructional Design at Delaware County Campus, and Tim Arnold, I-Tech consultant, provided technical support.

Recommendations

Upon year-end review, the Virtual Reference Service librarians offer the following recommendations:

1) The Penn State Virtual Reference Service should be continued with the latest LSSI Virtual Reference Toolkit software.
2) Earlier service hours should be added, and additional VRS librarians should be recruited. An invitation to participate should be extended to all Penn State librarians through global e-mail postings and personal contacts.
3) The visibility of the service should be enhanced through wider marketing and service link placement in more prominent locations, including the LIAS FastTrack page and Reference Shelf page.

Assessment

The following service statistics were generated from the LSSI Virtual Reference Desk transcript archive. They include: Live Sessions by Campus, Week of Semester, and Day of Week; Live Session Questions; Live Session Exit Survey of user satisfaction; VRS E-Mail Questions by Status and by Location.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Mary Fran McLaughlin, Part-time Reference Librarian, Delaware County Campus, for the following statistical analysis and charts.
Live Session Questions

I'm doing a group presentation titled the age of majority. I have to talk about what the smoking laws in South America are. I was wondering where I should begin to look. Can you help me?

I was wondering where I can find a book on the killing agent "zyclon b" used in German extermination camps.

I was wondering how I could get information on the history of the drinking and voting age.

I was wondering how to look up information about history of the voting and driving age. It's for a SPCOMM 100b class.

I was wondering if you could help look for information on the skills of friendship, and how children make friends.

I am looking for a book about firewalls and their history.

I'm just seeing how this works.

I have found a number of journal articles from Distance Education, but don't know how to get the actual articles.

I have to do a research paper on the training and/or education of distance education teachers. Can you recommend a starting point i.e. books, journals, or a particularly good web site?

I need to know the date of an article from [my teacher’s] reserve list, from the Rolling stone’s Book. I need to know the date of the Jonny Depp article on page 410.

I am looking for info on septa’s most recent rate-hike and how the quality of service was supposed to improve, I was checking on the online library at abi inform but came up with nothing. can you help.

Where can I find information for my extended definition essay about u.s. unemployment.

I'm writing for the lions eye and would appreciate a quote from a librarian explaining the greatest benefit of this nifty online service. Thank You.

I'm trying to find out if there is any research comparing class size in a traditional classroom to class size in an online course.

I would like to know a good way to find information on student support services offered specifically to distance education students at institutions other than penn state. Thanks.

I am looking for information on transfer credits in the distance education realm.

what is my professor's final exam websight?

What is the website for the final review for my professor’s Final for Microeconomics 2?

I am desperately trying not to panic but I had to change from my previously approved topic for my final paper very recently. Please help.

Will summer courses credits transfer to Albright college?

I need to read the following article - is it available online? American Journal of Distance Education (AJDA), Vol 15 no 2 (2001) "Writing Web Based Distance Education Courses for Adult Learners." Thanks!
I need background information on Jennifer Zane, who wrote Family Pride.

Who is the biggest manufacturer of Vitamins E, B, & C. Any idea where I should look?

I'm trying to find weekly journals from various nations that have been published since 1952

I need basic info on 17th century art

I need to find articles about 17th Century art.

My student I.D. number does not seem to be working for ProQuest. Need help so I can access for journal searches.

I am not in the library, and I am unable to connect to lias.

Can you help me find articles/references pertaining to "resources for online-distance learning" or "implementing on-line learning programs"? thanks :)

I am a grad. student and I need to consult a reference work held at University Park. How (short of going to UP) can I do this? Thanks for your help.

I am looking for scholarly journal articles on fraternity and sorority hazing, what is the best database to look in

I need information on how to find journal articles

Where can I find books in the library related to jazz?

Hi! I'm trying to find information about after school programs and the positive influences

I am in a computer lab on campus and I cannot access LIAS, I typed in the web address and it says the web page is unavailable.

I am having trouble finding statistics on Fraternity and Sorority hazing. Can you help me? Thanks.

I need the book called Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do

I need to find information on the cultural difference rather the problem with members of the deaf community choosing to leave the deaf community to enter the hearing world but choosing to use the Cochlear Implants.

my topic is the art of war and nature of strategy and its future impact. i can't find any resources

What is the web site to check my psu webmail?

I need to find more information on johnson and johnson corporation. I need to know more about the human resource department.

articles relating to the 4th amendment

For citing purposes, is Lexis-Nexis considered a reference database?

citing sources

how to cite a thesis

Need final exam schedule for my campus
When are you most often online doing your research?

- 8am-5pm: 4%
- 5pm-9pm: 19%
- 9pm-12am: 54%
- 12am-6am: 8%
- no answer: 15%

Please indicate your status.

- PSU Undergraduate: 49%
- PSU Graduate Student: 23%
- PSU Faculty/Staff: 8%
- Non-PSU: 12%
- no answer: 8%

How did you hear about the Penn State Virtual Reference Service?

- Penn State Web link: 27%
- Advertisement: 12%
- Workshop: 15%
- Friend, Colleague: 19%
- Other: 19%
- no answer: 8%
The librarian helped me search for the book I needed. Thank you that was very helpful.

This is a great idea, and was very helpful.

I thought the librarian was excellent. She was very helpful and gave me several options for searches for my research paper and also offered to send more through the week. She definitely exceeded my expectations.

This rocks.

Even though I was aware of Penn State online library resources, I was spending too much time trying to figure out how to get to journals and how to search information. This evening was my first experience with the service and the librarian was very helpful and I was very pleased with this service. Please continue to offer it in the future. I think it will be a great asset to us Adult DE learners. Thanks again!

This is a great service. Thanks for providing it.

The librarian was extremely helpful.

The librarian was simply great. She assisted me when I thought I was lost completely.

I was using this service to test the use of certain online databases with the LSSI software.

The librarian was as helpful as she could be, but I had what was essentially a policy question and she really couldn't answer that. I wouldn't have asked if I'd known that she wasn't located at my campus.

There was an error when loading the chat applet the first time, but when I tried a second time, my attempted conversation had reappeared in the new screen, which was great.

great tool for students who have questions.

The librarian was great!!!!!!
VRS E-Mail by Status - Fall 2001/Spring 2002

- Graduate: 39%
- Undergrad: 35%
- Staff: 2%
- Faculty: 4%
- Other: 20%

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VRS E-Mail by Location – Fall 2001/Spring 2002

- PSU: 48%
- PSU-WC: 33%
- non-PSU: 19%

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